



## Lee Colan Wants You to Stick With It

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**Al Getler:** Hi, my name is Al Getler, and welcome to another episode of Lead or Be Led, where we're bringing some of the best guests for you to help you with your leadership challenges. Now, we don't know interview leaders, and from standpoint of executives and C-suite folks, interview people who are leaders in all types of ways.

People who are leaders of people, leaders in technology, leaders in social media, leaders in marketing, leaders who are bringing to you concepts to expand your mind, to expand your thinking, and to help you find your way in this leadership battle that we all face every single day in today's world.

We always try to find guests that bring us something to help us be motivated and teach us as well. I'm really happy to have a guest with us today that I actually saw at an Inc. magazine event in Boston.

It's called The Build, if you haven't checked out The Build Network by the way. I've had a day-long session in Boston and this speaker was there and he really caught my imagination, his book caught me, his book also caught one of my adult daughters who really enjoyed it a lot and so I'm happy to have on the show today Lee Colan.

Lee is an author of a book called Stick With It, and I think you're really going to enjoy the information he has for us today. Let's have Lee join us.

**Lee Colan:** Hey, Al. Thanks for having me today. I appreciate it.

**Al:** Well, it's a pleasure to have you here. You're talking to us from the great state of Texas, is that correct?

**Lee:** Dallas, Texas, Al. 100 degrees worth, that's absolutely.

**Al:** Wow. That sounds like a lot of fun, ruddy better you than me.

[laughter]

**Lee:** Yeah, I'll trade you anytime right now, thank you.

**Al:** There you go, good. Well, Lee, you spoke that day at Inc. magazine's The Build Networks event in Boston and that was a good crowd, but it was a pretty lofty crowd. There were some very high level people there and I thought you did an awesome job bringing your message home.

**Lee:** Thank you.

**Al:** First of all, let's introduce you to our audience, Lee. Tell us a bit about yourself and tell us about The L Group, which you are a principal of.

**Lee:** I started The L Group in 1999. It's all about leadership. That's with the L, it's not for Lee. It's leadership at every level. We help personal leadership, team leadership, and organizational leadership and we tend to focus on equipping and inspiring leaders to execute their plans and engage their teams.

Those are really our two niches -- strategy execution and team engagement. We've been doing that since 1999. Now, we're really enjoying it. We do a lot of consulting work. I've been fortunate enough to have quite a few books written and as a result of that, I've been fortunate enough that they've actually sold.

We got to come speak at places like Build where you saw us and lots of private events and organization.

**Al:** Super. Tell us about some of the organizations and companies you've worked with in the past.

**Lee:** We worked with all the Fortune 500, basically. Not all of them but many of them and a lot of mid-size and smaller companies, too, that are on their way to becoming Fortune 100s or Fortune 1000s, anywhere from the Hartford, or Fossil, the watch company. I'm very brand-lo. I have my watch on here to a firm and energy clients to Pier 1 Imports.

All those, whether retail, energy, services, the whole range. I enjoy working with all of them but really, like working with a lot of our smaller mid-size clients, too, that really...the owners are in the business trying to build it and create something great. That was a lot of fun, also.

**Al:** Lee, tell me. Why am I going to pick up the phone and call the L Group? What is it that I'm facing that's going to make me say, "We have to get Lee in here and the L Group in here"?

**Lee:** I'd say a couple of things. One is that what we want is to get better results by a more highly engaged workforce or we have a strategy but we haven't really been able to execute it very well. Or, we need a cleaner, more concise strategy that we can execute better. We don't want a three-ring binder. We want something clean that we could drive down to the organization, execute.

As you well know, I always tell people, "A good strategy gets you in the game but a good execution is what really puts you on the winner circle." Those are probably two reasons.

**Al:** It comes back to really getting those tactics executed and having people moving. You talked about engaging that team, too, which is really something that...It's great to call yourself an

executive but how do you get yourself to the point where the people that report to you are engaged?

**Lee:** We have a whole separate book on that called "Passionate Performance" that we talked about this whole model of emotional and intellectual engagement.

I won't get off on that now but our whole niche is really trying to take complex leadership challenges like engagement, accountability, execution, and turn them into concrete steps that leaders can take. Because I'm trying to seize it to get caught up and, "Oh my gosh, how do I build the culture? How do I execute? How do I get people engaged?"

There are kinds of stuff running around the industry, all kinds of articles and tools, and all that. We try to cut you all that clutter and say, "Here's a simple model that can help you move and get mobilized toward addressing that challenge." It's kind of our little niche.

**Al:** Got you. Great. Let's stick with the book we're talking about today. That is "Stick With It."

**Lee:** There you go.

**Al:** A pretty strong title, "Stick With It." Give us the thesis of the book and then, we'll get a little deeper into the book.

**Lee:** The book is really about...Again, plenty of research will support the fact that winning organizations set themselves apart by execution. We call it "adherence." The book is subtitled "Mastering the Art of Adherence."

It's based on a simple three-component multiplicative equation of your focus times your confidence times your passion equals your ability to stick with your plans. If you're smarter than a fifth grade like I hopefully we both are, we know that if any one of those components is zero, we get a big goose egg on the end.

By the same token, if we just modestly increase any one of those components, sharpen your focus, build your confidence, ignite your passion, we get these multiplier effect on our adherence or abilities to execute. It's founded on that.

It's based on a book I wrote 10 years ago, my very first book. We've been using that equation with organizations for 10 years. We're able to bring lots of their stories and voices and tools into this 10-year updated and enhanced version called, "Stick With It: Mastering the Art of Adherence."

**Al:** I have to say that the day I saw you speak, you did a paper folding exercise.

**Lee:** Yes.

**Al:** I really marveled at that because it's fun watching people fold paper and I think, correct me if I'm wrong, your lesson was the listening, the adherence, the sticking with it, and people unfolded their papers. I would say 90 percent of the room didn't come up with the correct end result.

I'll reveal mine in a second but if you can come up with the correct end result. Is that typically what happens when you do an exercise like that?

**Lee:** It's typically much better than that. We have a particularly pretty dense group that day. No, I'm just joking.

[laughter]

**Lee:** It was very typical and there is a lesson there. It was that we have to be more specific than we think we need to be. It was really a lesson about communication and expectations. Oftentimes, we say, "Hey, I'm paying these executives lots of money. They should just go do it." If you remember, the debrief point was that if we depend on others' perceptions of our own expectations, we'll be disappointed every time.

We have to be very specific about our expectations, clear about that, no matter what level we are on the organization. If we expect to get what we want, it streams of an outcome.

**Al:** I don't know why I did it but just last week, I found that piece of paper and I recycled it. But, Lee, I'm going to tell you something. It's on my Twitter page at Al Getler. I got it right. It was exactly the same as you did it.

**Lee:** You did?

**Al:** I did.

**Lee:** Good for you.

**Al:** I was so proud, I tweeted it. Yeah.

**Lee:** You're probably one in a crowd. We get one or two right each time even in audience of several hundred. You're a rarity so you've clearly set yourself apart, Al. Well done.

**Al:** Promise me you're going to go to my Twitter feed and you're going to find that photo and then, you give me accolade.

**Lee:** There you go, Al...

[crosstalk]

**Al:** I'm like a Little Champ, you feed me a little treat and I'm all good.

**Lee:** [laughs]

**Al:** That way, I'll stick with it.

The book, you're talking about basically laser focus. Once you figure out the strategy and once you need to move in that direction. You're saying that you have to be focus. Tell us a few of the stories that come out of writing this book.

**Lee:** Sure. Let's focus on focus right now. We always use this metaphor of a sun...If you think about a sun, it's an incredibly powerful source of energy.

It gives us billions and billions of kilowatts of power an hour. Yet, with some sunscreen and a baseball cap, we can deflect most of its ill effects. On the other hand, a laser is a relatively weak source of energy. Gives off just a few kilowatts of power an hour.

With that relatively weak source of energy, we can cut a diamond in half. We can even cure certain types of cancer. If you've had LASIK surgery, you've had your eyes, your vision corrected.

My point is we have to be laser-like as leaders in order to execute. We're like the sun and we're kind of all over the board. We're just wagging the tail of the organization. We have to be laser-like to say, "Here's exactly what we are going to do. Just as importantly, here's not what we are going to do." These are conscious decisions that we are not going to do those things.

We are not going to be everything to everyone if we are probably nothing to nobody. We are going to be very best at these few things and that clarity at the executive level gets trickled down to the organization. If we're like a sun at the executive level, we've got a whole organization running in a million different directions.

**Al:** That day, you told a story about a product that we all kind of take for granted but actually we didn't come online until, probably, you and I were kids. Could you tell the story of Velcro?

**Lee:** Yeah, it's really a guy name George de Mestral in 1947 was out in the Swiss Alps enjoying some time convening with nature. He looked over his dog and he noticed his dog was itchy and scratchy. He walked on over there, and started pulling these little things out of him called burdock burrs, I called them pricklers when I was a kid.

He looked at them, and they have these little hooks and loops in them, and it started a 10 year journey for George de Mestral. Sometimes, I call him "Curious George." 10 years he took this home and looked at it under a microscope, and he created what's known now to man as the stickiest man-made substance. He basically created a man-made burdock burr which we know as Velcro.

Velcro's all over the place. God forbid my kids now can't even tie their shoes, because they've got Velcro shoe laces. We use Velcro in the space shuttle. We use Velcro for heart surgery, to keep a heart together. If you're old enough like me, you remember David Letterman jumping up on a Velcro wall!

**Al:** Absolutely.

**Lee:** I love that story, because not only did George have to stick with it for over 10 years of adversity and a market of not being ready, a lack of funding to really bring this to market, but he was also bringing the market something that was very sticky also. We used that as the intro of the book to set up the story here.

**Al:** 10 years this gentleman studies this. That focus in today's world, obviously you probably slash it to 10 minutes where people really get to focus. Truly revolutionized the way we, as you say, we face apparel, attachments, and what not. Now it's a whole industry in of itself.

What are some other examples of contemporary focus that you're seeing now, here people are sticking with it and getting results?

**Lee:** Let me give you an illustration for a sense of specific examples. One great illustration of what the journey of adherence is like is a particular type of Indian Thorny Bamboo seed. Once that bamboo seed is planted, it takes about two years of the right environmental conditions before it even breaks ground. Watering, sunlight, nothing going on above ground, just a strong root structure.

Once it breaks ground, it can grow up to 100 feet in less than two weeks. I don't know about you, but in today's day and age, I could barely sit in front of my microwave, and wait for the popcorn to be done in 30 seconds!

**Al:** [laughs]

**Lee:** Let alone stick to a strategy. What happens is we have people saying, "Hey, I'm not getting the results, so I'm moving onto another strategy, another organization." They look back at the guy who's been sticking with that particular strategy for a while and cultivating it.

Even though visible, tangible results might not be clear. All of sudden, boom! It pops through the ground. Everyone's looking at that person again, "Hey, overnight results, that's not fair."

**Al:** We have a picture of you with one of these bamboo trees, am I not correct about that?

**Lee:** You might have it up on your screen.

**Al:** We'll put it up on the screen right now. Tell us about this photo.

**Lee:** It wasn't me, but I used to use just a generic photo of big bamboo. Until one of my readers said, "Hey Lee, that's real stuff. I was just in Asia. Here's a picture of my wife with the bamboo." As we pull up the photo, we might see that you can't even notice her. It's immense.

It was nearly a hundred feet high, and she's just like a spec. You wouldn't never even notice her unless you pointed her out. This really does happen, and not only does it grow fast, but bamboo is strong and it's flexible. In fact, in Asia, bamboo is used in place of steel in a lot of cases.

If you look at all their skyscrapers under construction, the scaffolding is bamboo. Just bamboo, not even steel and wood. Not only does bamboo grow quickly with the right nurturing, but also is very flexible and strong. A great metaphor for the results you get by throwing your shoulder in it day in and day out.

Sharpening your focus, building your confidence and igniting passion, which is the Adherence Equations, as we call it.

**Al:** Let me...

**Lee:** Go ahead.

**Al:** Does a modern worker have that type of patience these days? Do entrepreneurs have that focus and patience? Maybe I cut you off when you were about to say that.

**Lee:** That's OK. You're right. Entrepreneurs, we tend to much more like a sun than a laser. It's like walking my dog, every time he sees a new rabbit running across the street, he's running that direction. Entrepreneurs particularly have to focus on being, picking those one or two few things that are critical and focusing on them, and saying, "Yes" to those and saying, "No" to other things.

When we say, "Yes" to something, by default, we're saying, "No" to something else. We have to say, "We're going to be all about developing the best product in this particular niche." That means, we're going to say, "No" to something else that might appealing as another shiny object somewhere, but we have to say, "No" to that so we can say, "Yes" to the most important things.

To answer your question, the most successful organizations today are one's that know how to sharpen their focus, and do the other things also, but they're particularly focused. They know we're all about this. IBM says, "You know what? We're getting out the computer stuff. We're going to be all about services." Fossil, the watch company, I've talked about before.

They have a model that says, "We're going to be all about building this Fossil brand, and we're going to be all about creating this strong watch machine." All these other licenses they have with other watch companies. They're lots of examples out there that say, "Listen, we're going to be better than anybody else at this."

Southwest Airlines say, "We're going to be the best short hop provider in the airline industry." They've done it 39 years in a row, successfully. The best companies are very clear. If you dig behind it, get out from behind the consumer perspective of it to understand the business.

They're very focused about what they're going to do, and what they're not going to do. To your point, entrepreneurs, it's a real challenge.

**Al:** If I buy "Stick with it." If I buy this book, which I'm sure is available on Kindle, in print, anyplace that I'm going to miss, Amazon, Barnes & Noble. Where else can I get the book?

**Lee:** Everywhere books are sold, as they say.

**Al:** Everywhere books are sold. In the end, what am I going to pull from the book? You have something called "At a Glance" too. Where am I going to go with "Stick with It"? How's it going to help me in my work?

**Lee:** We try to write all my books very simply, and rapid read with quick summaries at the end of each chapter, the "At a Glances" you're referring to. At the end of each section, at the end of "Focus," "Competence," and "Passion," there's a whole chapter dedicated to your personal focus, your personal competence, your personal passion.

We try to write these business books that really have personal application to them. I would say at the end of this, people might say, "You know what? I'm going to be very clear with my team

about what's our one thing, what's most important to me. I'm going to be clear about saying 'No' to a few things that are not adding value."

"I'm going to be clear about how we communicate that one thing down through my organization, and down through my team." That's just within "Focus." Other areas, like about igniting your passion, we talk about how to bring your values to life so they're not just a poster on the wall. How to use rituals to bind your team together, and create this great sense of passion.

Under the "Competent" section, we talk about how to use accountable language so people are clear and specific. How to create scoreboards so people are at their best, and know that scores being kept and they want to win. In each of these sections, there are very specific actionable steps we offer.

Whether it's on a personal level or a team level that we hope that people can take back and apply immediately. Based on the feedback we got, those are the kinds of things that are happening, and we feel real fortunate about that.

**AI:** That's what makes the book great is that it is actionable. At the end, that focus is there. Like a lot of us, we take in a lot of information, but if an author takes the time to summarize it at the end of each chapter, then give us a plan to follow, it makes it that much more valuable. That's great.

Well Lee, I got to tell you, one of the things that I think I have a complaint about is you have...Your lack of energy.

**Lee:** Yes.

[laughs]

**AI:** You're a very energetic guy! You certainly believe in your message, and seeing you speak. I assume you're available for public speaking as well and talk to folks.

**Lee:** Very fortunate that we did quite a bit of that. Yes. That's absolutely.

**AI:** If I wanted to contact Lee, what are the best ways for me to do that?

**Lee:** You can do @LeeColan at Twitter. You could go to our website thelgroup.com, the, the word the, letter l, then the word group, thelgroup. Lots of free resources out there, just go to the leadership insights tab, hundreds of free resources with..certainly if you want to contact us.

We would love to talk to you, and then support your success anyway.

**AI:** There's a book at the website as well?

**Lee:** Yes, stickwithitbook.com. There's stuff out there is, "Stick with it" book. Lots of resources out there to go to, and are linked to our website also, but there's more specific stuff about the book right there.

**AI:** Outstanding. Lee, here it's been an absolute pleasure. Can we be back on the show sometime again in the future?

**Lee:** It would be my pleasure. Thanks so much. I appreciate the time.

**Al:** Well, I do appreciate that. Thank you Lee very, very much. We'll say good bye now. But we'll have you back here again soon.

**Lee:** Look forward to it.

**Al:** All right, good deal. Well folks, so that wraps up another episode of Lead or Be Led, and we are so proud to have guests on here like Lee who really, as you see, the energy level he has, the passion he has, for what he is bringing to us is leaders. It's just outstanding.

I recommend you going out and grab the book, "Stick with it." We want to hear from you. There are certainly plenty of places for you to comment, on YouTube, on our page, on our blog, on our website which is leadorbeled.com, and certainly interviews like Lee's deserve to be shared.

If you enjoy [indecipherable 19:11] today, tweet about it. Send it out on Facebook, send it out on Pinterest. Tell folks that here at Lead or Be Led, we have great guests like Lee, who are here to help you with your career, help you with your focus, and help you move forward as a leader.

With that, I want to thank you for being here today, and we'll see you next time on Lead or Be Led. My name is Al Getler. Thanks a lot.

[music]

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