

The **CRAFT** of **MENTORING** with **Jim Mannebach**



As a Leader, You Need Courage to Take Bets

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Jim Mannebach, Chairman of the Board at Velan, Inc., and a mentor and coach at The ExCo Group, shared compelling insights with Adam Bryant. Key themes include the power of simplifying complexity to drive execution, using vulnerability as a tool to unlock growth, and why patience is the hardest and most important lesson for rising executives.

Bryant: What do you consider to be the keys to effective mentoring?

Mannebach: What sets us apart at ExCo is the relevance and diversity of experiences that we bring to the table. Over all my years of mentoring, I have tended to work mostly with younger executives who are rising quickly in their organizations, and I can often share similar experiences to what they're going through and what I learned from them. That's something most coaches can't do, because they haven't had the kind of roles we've had.

I also spend a lot of time helping clients with one of the core skills of leadership, which is taking the complex, simplifying it, and then operationalizing it. Leaders and managers often over-complicate situations. It's about clearing away the clutter, simplifying the objective, and then driving execution.

Bryant: What tool do you use that tends to lead to the greatest unlocks when you first start working with someone?

Mannebach: It's the lifeline exercise, in which people share the highs and lows of their life, starting at a young age. You learn very quickly what made this person who they are, which in turn helps you

understand where they're going. I'll go through my lifeline, as well, so there is shared vulnerability.

That vulnerability can be very hard for senior leaders, because they can be justifiably concerned that being vulnerable might be exploited by somebody else in one way or another. But in the mentoring work we do, it's vital that there is open and candid discussion.

Bryant: Is there a story you can share of a difficult conversation you had to have with a client that ultimately landed in a good place?

Mannebach: It's a conversation that I've had with many clients over the years. As I mentioned, I've generally worked with younger C-suite executives, or ones who were about to join the C-suite, and they are often in too much of a hurry. Instead, they often need to let things play out and take a bit more time than they want. It's something I had to learn myself the hard way.

Sometimes my clients will talk about how their boss should step aside so they can move up. I will remind that they are one heartbeat away from moving into that bigger role, assuming they don't stumble. If they are thinking about possibly leaving to go somewhere else, I will counsel them that they shouldn't assume that they are going to be able to accelerate the process somewhere else.

After all, they're going to have a lot to learn in that new environment, and they're going to have to prove themselves. The lesson is that you need to be patient, but that can be hard for young executives who don't want to wait.

Bryant: What's the best lesson you learned from one of your mentors over the years?

Mannebach: I worked for more than 15 years at Emerson Electric, where I held a multitude of jobs. I had the great joy of working with Chuck Knight, who was one of the best leaders I ever worked for. He shared a lot of great advice with me, but the one I often draw on is that most people want to be led, and there are few people who can actually lead.

And if you are going to be a leader, then you need courage. You have to be willing take bets. You have to push people. You have to make people uncomfortable, but there are also times when you have to be nurturing and supportive. But most important, you have to be comfortable taking bets and then recognizing when you have to change course.

Bryant: Leadership seems to be getting more challenging every day. What are some of the most significant changes you're seeing?

Mannebach: The Covid experience permanently altered the trajectory of business, especially in North America, because it changed the relationship that many people have with work and their company. Many people simply decided that they were not going to put in the kind of hours at work that previous generations did. This is a huge change.

I see other changes that are generational and that accelerated during Covid. Younger workers are much more inclined to communicate over email or Slack, rather than talking face-to-face or over video. For two years, a lot of people were isolated during formative years, and it has really influenced how they engage with colleagues. The lack of comfort with human interaction is often startling to me.