



Joanna Meyer: ([00:03](#))

You're listening to the Faith & Work Podcast, where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work.

Paul Frank: ([00:17](#))

I think looking at continuous improvement in your organization shows that you care that sometimes in some ways you reject the status quo, you don't just accept that things are the way they are, but that you're going to continually look at how we can make this better, how we can improve it. That's not just the technology, the product, but it's the people, it's the process. It's everything you're doing for your customers.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:42](#))

Hello, and welcome to the Faith & Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, Denver Institute's director of public engagement, and I'm joined today by Brian Gray, our COO and director of the 5280 Fellowship. Hi Brian.

Brian Gray: ([00:55](#))

Hey Jo. Good to be with you. I'm looking forward to the conversation today. I love the people with us, and I love the topic.

Joanna Meyer: ([01:00](#))

It's going to be a good conversation. Today we're exploring the challenges and opportunities that come from working in the middle of an organization. There's an interesting dynamic that often happens at Denver Institute events. Typically we feature people who are at the top of their field as speakers. During the question and answer time a guest will inevitably ask, they'll say, "I'm not an executive in my organization. It feels like I don't have much clout or the resources to have the kind of leadership that these speakers are describing. How in the world do I translate what I'm hearing to my context?"

Joanna Meyer: ([01:32](#))

It's a classic example of the tensions that employees face when they're leading from the middle up in their organization. Brian, I'm wondering if you've ever been in this position and what your experience was like.

Brian Gray: ([01:43](#))

Yeah. This idea of leading up or managing up, I feel like I've known it a few times. I have ranged in organizations that are four people in size, all the way up to over 20,000 employees when I worked at the university in Texas. There are, I mean how many levels, like 500 levels of leading from the middle at an organization of that size. I found myself in some situations where just because of my closeness to the ground on the issues of our project, or the people we are trying to serve with an initiative, I could see



some details that just by nature of stewarding influence and busyness a leader up above me didn't have the same access to see.

Brian Gray: [\(02:29\)](#)

I actually pretty regularly, especially early in my career, found myself with a need to bring those to bear, bring those to light, help a leader to see that type of thing. In other words, I'm leading up. I'm not leading from a position of authority, but I'm leading from a perspective and having some information on the ground that would really benefit their leadership. I've experienced it a few times, and I've done it poorly. I've called myself a very precocious young leader in one organization, and I've hopefully done it with some humility and stewarding the agency that I had on behalf of the organization, so probably a combo of both.

Joanna Meyer: [\(03:07\)](#)

It's definitely a learned skill, this topic of leading from the middle, or to use that management term, leading up. I think it matters because so many employees will find themselves in this position. We can't all be CEOs of an organization. The challenge is figuring out how do you exert your influence in a godly way when you're sandwiched in the middle of an organization between senior leaders and people that you may be leading. Instead of really looking at those roles as places of little influence, we want to talk about how do you effectively influence those above us in our organizations in both a philosophical and a practical term.

Joanna Meyer: [\(03:44\)](#)

To do that, we have invited two amazing guests who are excelling in that middle role. Brian, I was wondering if you would introduce us to our guests today.

Brian Gray: [\(03:53\)](#)

Sure. Both friends of mine, Paul and Chanler who are joining us. Paul's an alumnus of the 5280 Fellowship. Chanler is a current fellow in our program. I'll talk a little bit more about the 5280 Fellowship later, but in essence it's a nine month spiritual formation, professional development, and civic engagement program. We're hoping to form women and men to serve God, neighbors, society through their work.

Brian Gray: [\(04:21\)](#)

We wanted Paul and Chanler to join us today because of both the types of positions, working from the middle of organizations, that they found themselves in, but also just because they really represent the values and the learning turned into application that we're hoping the fellowship can have, that ideas and concepts become career praxis and throughput. Chanler has worked in public health, predominantly non-profit and government agencies. Chanler is one of my favorite enneagram eights.



Brian Gray: [\(04:49\)](#)

I have come to love and appreciate female enneagram eights because they're butt kickers, and they're bright and they're strong, and we need their strength in organizations. I love that about Chanler. Paul is a good friend, has worked in technology project management. Paul is sharp as a tack, but also has a real meekness and a humility to him which I've come to appreciate. Paul and Chanler, we're so glad you're here.

Joanna Meyer: [\(05:17\)](#)

Paul and Chanler, welcome to the Faith & Work Podcast. Tell us a little bit about your careers.

Chanler Douglas: [\(05:26\)](#)

I'll jump in. I'm Chanler. I'm in public health. I've worked in non-profit and different government agencies. I do training and curriculum development. I've worked with mainly populations that are highly stigmatized and disenfranchised from regular society.

Paul Frank: [\(05:50\)](#)

Good afternoon. My name is Paul Frank, and I'm a product manager. I've been doing it for about 10 years. My background is primarily in solving healthcare supply chain automation opportunities, working on population health data and analytics, and then using that data to drive consumer experience and lasting engagement in different populations. Right now I'm actually working with non-profit and other faith-based communities to drive engagement using data, using SaaS and technology to really engage with community and belonging.

Paul Frank: [\(06:23\)](#)

I lead a team of different product managers. They do all the hard stuff, and I get to work on strategy and road mapping, et cetera.

Joanna Meyer: [\(06:31\)](#)

Cool. You lead up and you also have people that may be trying to lead up on you, so you're in a good spot for this conversation, Paul. I want to quick draw Brian back in again. I wanted to ask, the idea of leading or managing up can sound a little manipulative, like you're trying to influence your boss. Help us think about that concept from a Christian framework.

Brian Gray: [\(06:53\)](#)

As I mentioned just even in my introductory thoughts, I've been in various levels in the organization, and I felt like I was, the idea of leading up when I was at the university, it felt very manipulative to me. It didn't feel like a Christian concept. It felt, "Am I trying to get people to work out my agendas?" I think that we have to be careful.



Brian Gray: [\(07:14\)](#)

It can be manipulative based on our own heart intents, but to think about this Christianly, all leadership is a stewardship opportunity. It's an opportunity to steward our gifts, our perspective, our emotional intelligence, our access to the data, our institutional history. We steward that on behalf of the mission, the goals that we have. When we're actually managing and leading up, we're helping our, when it's done with a right heart and intent, it's actually a service activity to add the perspective we have to the perspective of our leaders, and hopefully the same is being done for us, that other people are adding to our own perspectives, so that we can move against the aims and agendas of our organization.

Brian Gray: [\(07:58\)](#)

Leading up, managing up, it can be manipulative. It can be towards my own end. It can be towards my purposes. To do it Christianly can also be a stewardship and service act that we take really seriously based on stewarding our own perspective that somebody might not otherwise have. Chanler, Paul, thoughts on this manager or leading up and how that can be done Christianly?

Chanler Douglas: [\(08:20\)](#)

I would just add for me that taking a step back before jumping in on managing up and making sure that, like you said, Brian, your heart is in the right place, but taking the time to pray through the decision. I think for me a lot of times I find that I want something to be a certain way to get this outcome, and really assessing is this the only way to get the outcome, and being aware of it could be manipulative if I'm only doing it because it's the way I want to see it done, and thinking about that outcome measure. I think that's really important.

Chanler Douglas: [\(09:08\)](#)

I think when you're doing it for the betterment of the agency, the betterment of the staff, the betterment of the community, it's not manipulative at all.

Paul Frank: [\(09:22\)](#)

I think the word that comes to mind for me, Brian, is compassion, and I think it's if you haven't been in that state. That's why I don't use the word empathy, because I think a lot of time that you're managing up you can't truly understand what the pressures and the forces that are on a leader, an executive leader. I think coming from a sense of compassion, knowing my challenges are my challenges, and I'm managing up, but there are all sorts of other forces pressing down on those leaders and from every other side.

Paul Frank: [\(09:47\)](#)

Coming at it from how can I really have compassion for from where they're coming from, and you'll see this in some of my answers in the other questions is, is the details and some of the gaps that they have in understanding the organization because they might be operating at such a high level, they may not know



what's happening on the ground and on the lowest level. I think coming from that space and helping to educate and give them that permission is a really good place to start is just assuming that they know it all, and just having a compassion of where the gaps that they might have.

Brian Gray: ([10:20](#))

Appreciate that virtue, that value. Let's talk practical lived experience on this. Composer Leonard Bernstein said, "The most difficult instrument to play in the orchestra is the second fiddle." Let's talk about what you have found challenging about working from the middle. When you are not the leader with the top level of agency or influence and you're in the middle or you're managing or leading up, what's hard about that? Have you ever done this in a way that's gone badly?

Paul Frank: ([10:53](#))

I can go first on this one. For me one of the hardest things that's challenging is the strategy that gets handed down at a high level, but missing all the details and the tactical aspects of how to achieve that thing. A quick example for me was at a high level we wanted to grow this business, and so I was, not me personally, but the team was given \$2 million to go build the next generation of the software app that we were trying to deploy in the market.

Paul Frank: ([11:24](#))

It was a tremendous amount of detail. As you probably know, those that are in software development or any project, that can have hundreds of tasks. There's constant up and down communication between the software development team and the engineers, as well as the leaders who are looking for completely different things. The engineers are looking for tasks and details and that they can go write code. The executives are looking more for metrics, are we on time? Are we behind? What is our burn rate? What are our costs?

Paul Frank: ([11:54](#))

I think being right in the middle of there is you have completely different stakeholders that you're trying to try to manage. You have to play both hats. Under my compassion part and empathy, trying to understand both of them. Then when you ultimately have to go launch the product, for me, this is part of my job, of course, but it's understand the needs of sales, and marketing, implementation, support, the technical architecture team. Working through all that is really challenging. There's a lot to organize.

Paul Frank: ([12:22](#))

At the end of the day, when you're managing up, it's, "Well, what are the sales numbers? What is the ROI? What is our profitability?" Just really working through and trying to appreciate everything that had to come through. I know we had this business case that talked about what our opportunity was, but all the things that have to happen to get there, and just trying to get the team to appreciate why you run



into issues and risks and things are delayed, but that you're still not hitting that primary KPI or that key performance indicator, that metric that was asked for.

Paul Frank: ([12:51](#))

I think that's a generic example, but that's one that I had to specifically go through. I think at the end of the day it was really trying to, when you said did it go badly, the problem was I got drowned in the details of trying to explain why something went bad, as opposed to giving them a more concise reason for what the actions were, and what we'd taken, and how we were going to prove it. I'll pause and pass it over to Chanler, and get her perspective.

Chanler Douglas: ([13:29](#))

I've had success and I've had some failure with leading up. It tends to change with the level of impact that you're trying to achieve, and what's at stake. Example of success is in a small team, seeing a gap and working to fill that gap. In this specific example, I really did have to inception, is what I always used to say, my boss about the idea, and make the idea her idea. Because she was pretty resistant to anything that wasn't her own idea.

Chanler Douglas: ([14:11](#))

Slowly giving, "Maybe if we had a mechanism to deal with this problem and to this problem." Eventually she was like, "We need a mechanism to deal with these problems." I was like, "Great. I built an infrastructure. Let's use it." That was an example of a lower risk, an easier solve. It took patience, because inception is not a fast way of doing something, especially when you're trying to make it somebody else's idea a little bit.

Chanler Douglas: ([14:46](#))

I wouldn't say that necessarily my other example, when it was much larger things at stake, much more gravity involved, that it went badly. The bigger the change or the bigger the idea, the slower the momentum, and the more there is at stake. I've stepped out for a group of employees before that were severely disgruntled, to be the spokesperson on, "Hey, there's a huge issue in the organization, a massive issue that we need to have addressed. Here is a solutions-oriented way that we can approach moving forward."

Chanler Douglas: ([15:26](#))

It didn't necessarily go badly, but a year and a half later the amount of change that's truly happened, at the beginning there was a large scale change, and then all of the really important things that needed to trickle downhill after that haven't happened. That momentum is lost. I think setting your expectations based on the level of leading up that you're taking on is really important.

Brian Gray: ([16:01](#))



I'm listening to both of your examples, and I'm thinking that a lot of this is going to come down to organizational culture and internal politics potentially. In our organization, I hold onto this idea that every organizational issue is connected to a leadership dysfunction. Well, guess who the leader is that is the dysfunction on most of organizational issues? It's me. It doesn't mean I'm at fault. It doesn't mean I'm responsible.

Brian Gray: ([16:26](#))

In our organization, part of our culture is I actually heavily encourage managing up. I onboarded an employee, said, "One of the key responsibilities you're going to have in your job is to lead up with me, because you're going to see things I don't." That's one version of an organizational culture. I can put myself in your shoes and see this to be actually a really politically risky thing, depends on where you are. You could be putting your own neck on the line.

Brian Gray: ([16:51](#))

I'm curious what you've learned about how to do this well on behalf of the organization and its mission, without being damaging to your career, or getting snagged in those politics.

Chanler Douglas: ([17:02](#))

Well, I can just say from my example that I've definitely taken the step to accept that what I'm going to do might damage my career. I think that was an important thing to recognize before doing it, and accept that risk. It's not for everybody to accept. I just was in a specific time that I knew I could do it and others couldn't. I was willing to do it at that time. I don't necessarily encourage just everybody to do that. I did feel like as a Christian and in my current life situation I could bring a very different perspective and a different way of leading to that situation, and so I chose to do that full well knowing that it could end my employment at that agency.

Chanler Douglas: ([18:01](#))

I don't think that has to be the case all the time. I think a humility of spirit can do a lot to protect your career, as well.

Paul Frank: ([18:15](#))

I think to add to that is that, is to almost sacrifice your career. When you have to take a complex problem and you know you're behind, for instance, in my example, or you're over budget, that you're going to not necessarily take all the blame, but you're going to have to sacrifice the idea that you took first place, you're an achiever, you're a success, and you're everything, but to say, "I'm not going to throw everyone else under. I'm not going to try to point fingers, but we're just going to be honest with where we're failing and put that on me."

Paul Frank: ([19:02](#))



I think that's hard, because I think people when you look at the optics of promotions and giving opportunities, people like people who get stuff done. I think when you're managing up and you come to a point where you know stuff has gone off the rails, to sit there and say, "You know what, I'm going to put aside my potential opportunities," kind of what Chanler was saying, "and I'll take that for the team." I think that's just being more selfless, knowing that you're sacrificing future opportunities, or at least deferring future opportunities potentially.

Joanna Meyer: ([19:39](#))

So cool. To make this practical, I wanted to introduce a few best practices for people that may find themselves in a position of leading from the middle. I love that this can be a learned skill. This isn't something that is innate for every worker. I wanted to explore these with you guys. Let me share these best practices, and then we'll have you weigh in of how have you learned how to do this. The first is making sure you're starting with the right attitude.

Joanna Meyer: ([20:04](#))

In his book, *Leading Up*, which we will link to in our show notes, Michael Useem describes leading up as an affirmative calling to help your boss accomplish what everyone in the organization wants or needs to accomplish. That's a good start, but I think our faith can really shape our attitude as we lead up as well. As a Christian, what do you think is the right motivation for approaching a superior with an idea or feedback?

Paul Frank: ([20:29](#))

I have three, and I'll try to go fast, or maybe I'll just do two. One is this idea of, this is coming from a software perspective, but this idea of continuous improvement. You might call that culture making, but this constant appetite for knowing that something can be better, something can be redeemed, something can be perfected. We're not striving for a perfect union in this country, we're striving for a more perfect union.

Paul Frank: ([20:59](#))

I think looking at continuous improvement in your organization shows that you care that sometimes in some ways you reject the status quo, you don't just accept that things are the way they are, but that you're going to continually look at how we can make this better, how we can improve it. That's not just the technology, the product, but it's the people, it's the process. It's everything you're doing for your customers. You'll see this even in Amazon, one of their biggest things is they're customer obsessed. Now everybody's borrowing that, but it really is what really matters and how does continuous improvement really get to the customer.

Paul Frank: ([21:33](#))



The second thing for me is transformation, or maybe even formation. I think that it's a bit of my continuous improvement, but not being afraid to take those bold changes in your organization. In COVID I saw this as well, a lot of organizations got very conservative in the risks they were willing to take. I think continuing to look at that at the other side, and say, "This is an opportunity for us to really change."

Paul Frank: ([21:58](#))

As anybody knows [inaudible 00:21:59] probably listening to this, COVID was the great accelerator. These things that may have been considered for a long time truly did transform industries, transform things. Looking at managing up and thinking, "No, not just a little small improvement. Here's how we really leapfrog, do something great." Then the last thing I'd say is peacemakers. Not just peacekeepers but peacemakers as leading up, is how do I look across the organization using my maybe highish emotional IQ, and understanding where I see gaps, where I see things that are not processed, or technology is the problem, but it's the people.

Paul Frank: ([22:36](#))

Some of that could be, of course, the process is causing bad conflict. My motivation for approaching this [inaudible 00:22:48] like how do we make this process, how do we create peace in this place, how do we make a peacemaker, and seeing why this is important because it ultimately does impact our top line, our bottom line and our customer satisfaction, so tying that through. I may not use those words specifically, Joanna, but I would definitely start with that place and knowing that a place that is not chaotic and does have peace is going to be a more flourishing organization.

Jeff Haanen: ([23:15](#))

Hi, this is Jeff Haanen, the founder of Denver Institute for Faith & Work. Hey, thanks for listening to the Faith & Work Podcast and for letting me interrupt you briefly to share just a request. I want to ask you to consider becoming a financial contributor to Denver Institute. Each day thousands of people listen to our podcasts, engage our short courses, and grow spiritually as a result of generous donors like you.

Jeff Haanen: ([23:35](#))

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Jeff Haanen: ([24:03](#))

Again, you can give by visiting difw.org/donate, or by checking out this episode's show notes. Thanks again for your generosity towards God's people, and toward the mission of Denver Institute. Now, back to the Faith & Work Podcast.



Joanna Meyer: ([24:19](#))

So cool, Paul. Chanler, how about you?

Chanler Douglas: ([24:23](#))

I didn't have three ideas like Paul. I really just had the one that I was thinking of and that's, "Am I coming with the motivation of human flourishing?" Thinking about the context of where I'm coming from in work, the ultimate person that I'm serving is the community member who needs a specific service, or who needs help with something that's very difficult happening in their life, or happening to them.

Chanler Douglas: ([24:49](#))

I might not see that end result, but thinking of the end result in how I approach every problem, and making sure that that person at the end of the line is getting the best service that they can have, and getting the most help that they need. Framing it like that for somebody that you're leading up and for the organization typically ties back into their mission mindedness, if they're tied to their mission and their values. That can be a really great place to start that conversation from.

Brian Gray: ([25:22](#))

Actually I'm listening to you Chanler, I think that can actually neutralize those conversations in terms of their risk when we're appealing to shared organizational values, or, "Hey, together we're committed to this mission. I see this opportunity to," and it puts us actually as a co-belligerent. We're against the same thing which is a missed opportunity in mission, as opposed to, "This is your fault." I love that.

Joanna Meyer: ([25:45](#))

The leadership guru John Maxwell says, "Most leaders don't necessarily want to be led." If you go in with this attitude of, "I'm leading my boss," that's not going to get you anywhere. They do want to have value added to what they're doing. If you can very clearly demonstrate that this is value for your boss, you'll get a better chance of being heard.

Joanna Meyer: ([26:03](#))

Our second best practice for leading up is picking the right timing and tone. Here's the question is how do you find the right time and way to approach a leader?

Paul Frank: ([26:12](#))

I'm going to be tactical on this one. I think you need to understand your leader's checkpoints and monthly and annual or quarterly milestones. If you start to understand a business that we operate on monthly, and then quarterly, and then annual. I think you need to be aware of those. If you talk about annual planning, there's a lot of strategy goes into that. Be aware of that. Understand those things,



because their availability and more their mental capacity might be really limited. Of course, there's always the exception, but understand that.

Paul Frank: ([26:49](#))

Number two, I think we live in a unique time where your leaders are available by many, many different mediums or modalities, so email, SMS, Slack, virtual, go on a walk. What are those things? I think understanding the medium that would be best for the idea that you're going through. It's a quick idea, SMS might suffice. If it's a longer discussion, hey, right now in this day and age with COVID maybe it's a quick walk. Maybe it is getting over that. Understanding that medium and what's their preference is really important.

Paul Frank: ([27:25](#))

The last thing is, I would say, work with their admin if they have one. That may sound really insignificant. Then with that admin, give them the purpose, give them the scope. Give them a quick summary of what you're at, what you're trying to accomplish in that meeting. I think it's been frustrating for leaders when you walk in cold, and you're spending the first five minutes even clarifying. Give them that quick little elevator pitch in a note before you have that meeting.

Joanna Meyer: ([27:54](#))

Brian, what are your thoughts on this? You had weighed in that you had-

Brian Gray: ([27:58](#))

I love that last suggestion. One of the things that I just heard from Chanler earlier, and it was really tactical with Paul, is that if we're managing and leading up, if we understand ourselves, if the tone we're bringing to the table is creating a win for the organization and a win for the leader, it puts us, and it really does put us in that posture of service. As opposed to, "I'm the hero." What we're saying is, hey, the organizational mission's the hero. In essence, you're actually a leader towards the end of that goal. I'm not the hero in having the idea.

Brian Gray: ([28:34](#))

As Chanler put it, sometimes we do have to help other people realize that our idea is actually their idea. The right timing might be it's not one time. The right timing is it's just a long, slow drip of, "What about this? I've seen this. Here's a possible solution that fits with what I've heard from you." I think that the timing could be plan more than once. Plan on maybe not being heard. Plan on it's going to take some time to absorb.

Brian Gray: ([29:05](#))



If we've learned anything from marketing, there has to be five to seven contact points before I'm actually actionable on what somebody is marketing to me. I think there's probably something instructive in managing and leading up on that.

Paul Frank: [\(29:19\)](#)

If I could just add real quick, I would just say, too, don't be afraid to be relentless sometimes, add what you said. Sometimes you do need to say it multiple times, and it's not to be disruptive or a pain, but be relentless and show that this thing is that matters, and you're passionate about leading that thing.

Joanna Meyer: [\(29:38\)](#)

So cool. Our third best practice, we've alluded to already, is not showing up with problems at your boss' door, but really being solution-oriented. What have you guys learned about the type of input that's likely to be well-received?

Chanler Douglas: [\(29:57\)](#)

This one is so important to me. I think I've learned from my experience that I'm very good at complaining, as are most humans. It's pretty easy to pick out all the flaws and be really critical and negative. It's a special skill and it's not something that everybody has to look beyond that pain and that frustration, and figure out what's next, what do we do. How do we tackle this? How are we going to make this not happen again?

Chanler Douglas: [\(30:30\)](#)

I think this is just so crucial. A boss does not want to hear about how something didn't work. They already know it didn't work, and probably six other people have already told them it didn't work. I think it's super important to come with that right attitude, and to have a plan for, "Here's something I thought of that we could do to move forward."

Chanler Douglas: [\(30:54\)](#)

I also think in that it ties back to that humility of understanding that there's probably, like Paul said, a bunch of things that happen that you don't know about, or that you don't have understanding for. Presenting your idea with the attitude of, "Hey, I don't have all the answers, but this is something I was thinking about. Here's a solution." I just think it's critical, in my opinion. When I have done it well, I've had much more success than when I have been part of the gaggle of people complaining.

Brian Gray: [\(31:30\)](#)

Well, I'm thinking, Chanler, too, the reason you're the type of person that I want to work with. Let's say you're my boss, if I come and bring a problem to you, then I'm actually making something your potential loss. If I show up with a solution to something I've seen and I bring that to my boss, I make it her



potential win. Then let's just be very honest, this is parable of the shrewd manager, to whom are we loyal? We're loyal to the people who are loyal to us.

Brian Gray: ([31:57](#))

I think this is not in the intent of being manipulative, but I want to know who are the people who are trying to create a better expression of the stated mission of this organization. Those are the people that I want to collaborate with. Those are the people I want in the side meetings. Those are the people I want to hatch plans with for kingdom and company. I just think am I bringing a loss or am I bringing a win. Because problems people are a dime a dozen in our organization.

Brian Gray: ([32:25](#))

It is so cheap and easy to find people who can point out our flaws and our problems. What have we done? We've passed the buck of responsibility up. Well, I said earlier every organizational issue is a leadership dysfunction. Make my job easier by not only showing me my dysfunction but solving my dysfunction if I'm in a leadership role. It's a really, really important professional skill.

Chanler Douglas: ([32:51](#))

I would also say that it also increases your influence. It might not necessarily change your standing in the agency, but it changes your perception and your value in the agency. It can just really increase the influence that you have, and you can bring more kingdom vision into that influence than maybe anything that's just in your control on a day-to-day workflow basis. I just think the return is so much bigger than you realize.

Brian Gray: ([33:28](#))

A final question for the two of you. I mentioned earlier that Paul and Chanler are and have been 5280 fellows. A lot of the themes we've just been discussing actually overlap with themes that we've talked about in the fellowship, whether it be practices, or points of theology. I'm curious, what learnings or practices from your 5280 Fellowship experience have been helpful in your own professional development around matters like this?

Paul Frank: ([33:58](#))

One quick one for, when you asked this I knew right away, me was the study on vocational power, and understanding my unique experiences and skill sets. In my case at a previous company, I was there a long time. I had viewed that as a liability, and a cohort peer told me that's not a liability, that's an asset. It was like this revelation to me, that there are certain things that you can only achieve when you've been somewhere for a long time.

Paul Frank: ([34:32](#))



Certainly title and breadth of responsibility and those things, sometimes you don't have to earn them as much. Especially from the perspective of managing up, I think the time you've been somewhere and the ability that you have to connect the dots at a very detailed and specific level has given me a ton of qualification when I approach a problem that, "Oh, Paul's been here. He's been with the customers. He's with them every single day. He gets it."

Paul Frank: [\(35:08\)](#)

I think professionally that gave me a lot of opportunity to be promoted and have other opportunities in the future. For me it was just really understanding that, and flipping for me, like I said, from a liability to an asset. Then not only that, but then really cranking the volume on that and saying, "You know what, this is something that only I have right now. I've earned that, and I've worked on it. I've lived, and blood sweat and tears."

Paul Frank: [\(35:32\)](#)

I think that was a big thing for me, that I was able to apply to my role, and seeing that you can have that in any position in the organization from the top all the way down. The second thing briefly is understanding this concept of everyone has a place, they contribute differently to the company and to the problem.

Paul Frank: [\(35:53\)](#)

Really not just saying, "We're all a team. This is the whole team member, all 400 of us, or all 10,000 of us," but I think really being specific with the people in your team, and calling out exactly how they're contributing to the overall story. Then eliminating that for your leaders as well, that this person A, B, C, they really nailed it on this part. Now, you might see the high level we grew a million dollars or something, but these specific people on the organization, and making sure your leaders understand that, I think, goes a long ways. Just sharing that and making it specific and tangible for your leaders is really critical.

Chanler Douglas: [\(36:34\)](#)

For me it's so funny, it's like day one of the fellowship we talked about imago dei, and seeing the image of God in every person that you're present with. Then it's tied throughout the entire fellowship. For me I had been in such a jaded place with the organization I was at that I just wasn't seeing God's presence or God's image in any person really that I was working with, or most of them I should say.

Chanler Douglas: [\(37:08\)](#)

I think it was a big wake-up call about how am I presenting myself, and how am I treating others. I was probably not exemplifying God's image in my own way that I was interacting with people, because I was just letting frustration take over. It seems so fundamental. I mean it is fundamental, but it seems kind of elementary, but I think it really gave me a different way of looking at organizational growth, and



organizational change by looking at people and seeing their benefit, rather than their liability, and having more grace for maybe their deficit.

Chanler Douglas: ([37:52](#))

The second practice that has really helped me, and I don't remember the name, so Brian you can help me out, but it's the three concentric circles about your control, your influence, and concern. I think using that as a what is in my control, what is in my influence, and then I can have concern about something, but it doesn't mean that I necessarily am going to be able to do anything about it. Then not becoming apathetic in that either, so letting go, but also still really focusing on what is the human flourishing that can happen out of this, or how can we move forward with this.

Chanler Douglas: ([38:29](#))

I think that having that framework really just let me narrow down on those things so much quicker. I can do it easily during the day, and just come away from a problem in five minutes, instead of coming away from a problem an hour later very emotionally drained from spinning in that place.

Brian Gray: ([38:50](#))

I'm going to grab onto something that both of you have already said. Chanler, I appreciate that idea, this idea of these three concentric circles. When we recognize that something's outside my control, we mean that in terms of responsibility, not control all the details, control freak, but in my responsibility. Or it's in my influence. It takes me and someone else. When it's out there in my concerns, doesn't mean I'm apathetic to it. It doesn't mean that I get blunted or cynical to it. I actually don't have the same kind of agency. I can lament at that level. I can grieve at that level, but I don't have the same direct influence.

Brian Gray: ([39:24](#))

You mentioned the idea also, Chanler, of human flourishing. One of the things that was really helpful that I wish I had earlier on in my career when I was at the university doing heart research is I didn't have a vision that flourishing of all people made in the image and likeness of God is of deep importance to God's heart for the world. I viewed people as primarily are they in or are they out with God in terms of salvation, which would make my work primarily about being a vehicle to build relationships to share the gospel.

Brian Gray: ([39:59](#))

Absolutely, amen. Let's do it, and our work can be about promoting that type of human flourishing to be helping the world to become something that is the way that God would view it. I love that idea. It's important to us in the fellowship. I do want to emphasize something Paul said earlier, and it was in passing. You mentioned EQI. As a part of a coaching-esque process, we take all our fellows through an emotional intelligence assessment.



Brian Gray: [\(40:27\)](#)

I want to suggest for anybody who's listening and thinking about managing or leading up, this is a really critical soft skill, and soft skills are many times more largely predictive of success in our career or our organizations than our educational pedigree, and some of the hard skills of our resume. I can just say, I will out my two friends, that both Chanler and Paul were very high in their emotional intelligence and also in the breadth of expression of emotional intelligence. One of the reasons-

Joanna Meyer: [\(40:59\)](#)

That's why we invited them on, Brian.

Brian Gray: [\(41:00\)](#)

Yeah. This is why we're having this conversation, which is it's not everybody who can be a diplomat, who can be articulate, who can be winsome, who can be accurate, and who can do that in a way that creates this compassion-like win for their boss. That takes a certain amount of emotional intelligence. We need to be cultivating the soft skills that make possible these types of organizational influence along the way. Just a couple of really key ideas in the fellowship.

Joanna Meyer: [\(41:28\)](#)

I hope our listeners are getting a glimpse of how broad the conversation around integrating faith and work can go. I think often as we think about our Christian discipleship, we think of personal spiritual disciplines, we think of our relational interaction with others, and our biblical knowledge. The reality is a Christian worldview has profound effects on how we engage in the workplace, but often we're not disciplined to think that way.

Joanna Meyer: [\(41:52\)](#)

Something like the 5280 Fellowship sinks deeply into your life, and has a pretty profound impact on how you go about your work. You have heard that in Paul and Chanler's conversations today. I want to throw it back to Brian for a final word. If people are intrigued by this idea of the 5280 Fellowship, tell us a little bit more about what's involved in applying, and also what some of the key deadlines are.

Brian Gray: [\(42:15\)](#)

I mentioned, just briefly gave an overview to it. This is a very wonderful and strange combination of spiritual formation, and professional development, and faithful civic engagement. We're looking for these well-rounded, holistic professionals who are Christ followers who want to see the integration of their faith in creating good work, in serving others sacrificially. Our fellowship runs, it's nine months, and it runs on a typical school year calendar from middle of September to the middle of May.

Brian Gray: [\(42:46\)](#)



Through May 3rd we're taking applications for our sixth class in the 5280 Fellowship here in Denver. That information about that is all available at 5280, 5-2-8-0, fellows.org. I'm sorry, dot com. There's a lot of listeners on the podcast who are coming from other places, and another application of this is we've had a lot of people call and say, "Will you help me set up 5280 fellows in my city?" The answer is no. 5280 is a reference to 5,280 feet, or the Mile High City, which is a nickname for Denver. We'll help you think about what it looks like to contextualize a fellowship like this using some of our learning and best practices in your city for your place.

Brian Gray: ([43:31](#))

Citygate.com is an effort that is sponsored by the Denver Institute to help leaders in other cities, amongst other things, reach, serve, and love people in their cities, or potentially develop fellowships like the 5280 Fellowship in and for their place. That's just another opportunity for people to connect.

Joanna Meyer: ([43:52](#))

So cool. Great opportunities. We will provide links to all of these resources in the show notes for today. Chanler and Paul, it is a gift for me to glean from your learnings both in your professional expertise and what you learned in the fellows program. Thanks for sharing your insight on leading up with us today.

Joanna Meyer: ([44:15](#))

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