

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

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Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to another installment of Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and local legends and allow them a chance to offer some keen insights into how they see themselves but most importantly just what makes them tick. I'm Kirt Jacobs host of Leadership Landscape where former interviews have been former mayors, state politicians, nationally renowned sports writers, heads of business concerns, community activists, and developers. Today our guest is Ed Mannassah he is a former publisher of the Courier Journal and today he is executive in residence at Bellarmine University. I'm going to read a bit of his bio to you and I will begin the interview. He received an undergraduate degree from Youngstown State University and a masters of arts degree from the University of Florida. His career with the Gannett Company included editing and publishing positions in Florida, Tennessee, Michigan, and California before moving to Louisville.

Ed worked in various editor and publisher roles for the connect company for 34 years before retiring. During that tenure he was cited eight times as one of Gannett's top editors or publishers. In addition he was a founding editor of USA Today. And for 12 years Ed was the publisher of The Courier Journal, the nickname around here is the CJ, which is the main newspaper for the city of Louisville and the single largest newspaper in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. During that time the Courier Journal continued its pursuit of journalistic excellence including being a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize for public service reporting and having its editorial cartoonist at the time honored with the award.

The Courier Journal continued to evolve developing a powerful presence on the Internet being cited as one of the top ten newspapers

in the country for readership. Ed oversaw the development of the highly successful young adult publication known as Velocity and the construction and implementation of one of the most modern newspaper production facilities in the country. Ed Mannassah was also instrumental in the Louisville Arena site discussion with his belief of a new arena on the LG&E and Main Street sites which the arena task force ultimately chose. While in Louisville he had been involved with several community organizations serving on the boards of the Leadership Louisville Center, the Fund for the Arts, and the Regional Leadership Coalition.

Previously he served on the board of the Bellarmine University, United Way, the Boy Scouts, and was a busy guy, Leadership Kentucky, the Urban League, the Kentucky Derby Museum, and Greater Louisville Inc. In his new role as an executive in residence at Bellarmine University, a position which he has held since retiring as publisher of The Courage Journal in 2006, Ed is charged with helping develop a plan to establish a nationally preeminent School of Communication, Mass Media, and Culture upon Mannassah's acceptance. Bellarmine University President McGowan stated and I quote, "We are extremely fortunate to have a nationally known, highly successful media executive of Ed's stature to lead our planning and development in the creation of this important new school. In more than 30 years as a top communications executive at seven newspapers across the country and with all his related professional and civic activities he is perfectly positioned to help us bring this enterprise to a brilliant fruition.

Ed has the intellectual organizational and financial expertise and the contacts and connections to help us make this happen." Wow He's an ardent sports fan enjoys playing golf. His wife Sally is a former health care public relations executive who's currently accomplished as a fiber artist. Several her pieces have been juried into shows including four displayed at Actor's Theatre. Their daughter Michelle as a production manager for a film production company in Washington D.C. with two documentaries in which she was an associate producer which appeared recently on The Learning Channel. With that I welcome you Ed..

Ed Mannassah: Thank you

Kirt Jacobs: ...to leadership landscape.

Ed Mannassah: Awful long reading there.

Kirt Jacobs: Yeah I know it's kind of biblical but we want to get that on the record because you guys are so amazing. That's why we want to have you on the show. What what drives you to do all that you do post retirement from The Courier?

Ed Mannassah: I think you're motivated to succeed. You see something that really stands out as an issue to pursue. And seeing the success that you're able to achieve with it. That's really the motivation that's what drives me.

Kirt Jacobs: It's a very poignant answer. Whom do you credit most influential in your life? Do you have one? Can be more than one.

Ed Mannassah: Well certainly the most important person in my life had always been my mother. My father died when I was eleven and my mom was just a strong-willed individual who made things happen. Made things happen in her in our world in Ohio where we lived. And she went on to be an elected public official and was extremely successful. So I watched her and saw the motivation that drove her and that was instilled in me.

Kirt Jacobs: What was the most defining moment of your life?

Ed Mannassah: Gosh the most defining moment in my life was the day that I thought that my career in the newspaper business was going to come to an end. I was I was running a small newspaper in Florida. Had five reporters. And one day when I came back from lunch I found a series of letters. Five letters in each of the letters indicated what a poor manager I was. I was a terrible boss. How I was overbearing and didn't quite understand what I was doing. Now and that the complexity of that was you know that was overwhelming in itself but the ending line of each of the letters was that they had requested a meeting with my boss, the publisher of the newspaper, to

express themselves. Feeling that as a group they had a little more power in being able to address these issues with me individually. The interesting thing we were all about same age. And so trying to... Thinking that I was doing the right thing in managing them was to say I had this feeling that that that I was Lou Grant, the city editor of a newspaper. And the only commonality between Lou Grant and I was that we both were balding and round. But beyond that that was it. So in this meeting that we did have it was devastating. For an hour or so these individuals charted a course that I thought was going to end with destruction. Because what they were saying were all the true things about my management style. And all the things that I thought I was supposed to do. In terms of being all knowing and creating goodwill from my perspective and ordering things done. And this whole process of a domineering manager and recognizing at that moment that my career was over because they really had the goods on me so speak.

Kirt Jacobs: So you saw never it coming.

Ed Mannassah: No because I thought that's what you were supposed to do. I think that wisdom came with title. When in point of fact it doesn't. And if the end of that meeting we literally all kissed and made up. And I made a decision on that day that I would change my style. And beginning or next day I changed. It was the greatest lesson that I had ever learned.

Kirt Jacobs: So you got to keep your position.

Ed Mannassah: I got to keep my business.

Kirt Jacobs: Learn from the mistake

Ed Mannassah: To learn from the mistake and to move on with the same people to do to do substantially great work. And we have many and many of us have remained friends. One of the people I was able to fire and shake hands at the end of the the the time that it occurred because of lack of performance. In the others and I who have maintained friendship for 30 more than 30 years.

Kirt Jacobs: It's a beautiful story because that's leadership it's very basic core to me. To see it readjust and move on.

Ed Mannassah: I think that's the most important aspect.

Kirt Jacobs: If there is one Ed what is your biggest professional regret? In other words is there something you would have done differently if you could armchair quarterback your life when you look back over it.

Ed Mannassah: Well you know that's an interesting question. I think every day you find small things that you could have done that would have been different. I guess if I was looking at it from a broad perspective it would be as much time as I spent with employees and that's what I preach I probably still didn't get to spend as much time being as personal as I would have liked to have been. And I think that that's the balance in managing sometimes, managing an organization is that that you do forget to be able to spend as much time as you should with individuals because you're still trying to manage a process.

Kirt Jacobs: Let me interject a side note to that. I mean how many people did you manage at any one time? Are we talking thousands?

Ed Mannassah: Well you know I think that in direct reports they're probably only eight or ten. But in terms of the field of individuals that may have been a newspaper that had 300 total employees to the Courier Journal that had 1000 employees but the fact of the matter is every one of those employees still wants to be able to know you. To spend some time with you. You still are an individual.

Kirt Jacobs: On the flip side of that Ed what is your biggest professional triumph? If you could name one, can be more than one.

Ed Mannassah: I would say that, first off being able to be a part of one of many individuals who was part of the successful development of USA Today. Certainly stand out. But each of the newspapers that I was fortunate to work at from north to south, east to

west there's been great opportunities in each of those that may have been management triumphs or successes of the newspaper that permitted me to be promoted. So in large part I think that the success. If I was to choose something or the success of the people that I've worked with. Because that really is your success is the credit to the individuals who are who you work with.

Kirt Jacobs: What do you find exciting about you know running the newspaper? You know you do the production facility USA Today, Velocity. What do you find exciting about this and now post retirement from that? Starting a communications school.

Ed Mannassah: I think in all those cases that that the process of learning. And then trying to lead is really the most exciting part. And once you have determined what it is that needs to be accomplished. It's putting the plan together. Which is interesting but the exciting part is seeing it being implemented. And so that's what I would really suggest is of great value is watching the implementation of a great plan.

Kirt Jacobs: Genesis of thought into a tangible reality.

Ed Mannassah: Exactly, exactly

Kirt Jacobs: Asking this to a journalist I love this is like giving drugs to a drug addict I guess. What is your favorite word? If you could name on in the English Lexicon...

Ed Mannassah: One word I use an awful lot is terrific. And terrific is a word that to me connotes a lot of success. And so you know I like when people tell me what they are about. I like when people tell me what they... How they've succeeded. And usually the response is that's terrific. And it really is an expression of congratulations you've done a good job.

Kirt Jacobs: This show is about leadership Ed. Can you define leadership in one word? Again in the great English lexicon. It can be more than one.

Ed Mannassah: Leadership is I believe this is seeing something to be accomplished. And putting your mind to accomplishing it. And in most cases that means leading from the front and not pushing from the back. And a defined leader, a good leader is an individual who truly brings people along as opposed to pushes them to get there.

Kirt Jacobs: And maybe that was something you were doing early on in that story we talked about earlier.

Ed Mannassah: I think there might very well be. The difference between being in the front being in the back.

Kirt Jacobs: If you could change one thing about the world what would that be Ed?

Ed Mannassah: Oh gosh. That's like one of those..

Kirt Jacobs: Loaded ones

Ed Mannassah: That a very loaded question. I think if there was one thing that you would change is that people who do not communicate are not in a position to compromise. And I believe that most of the issues most issues no matter how divisive are always.... There's always a better result by communicating. Communication is the great compromiser. And that if you can get people to the table you usually can resolve issues.

Kirt Jacobs: Without communication there's no compromise.

Ed Mannassah: Exactly.

Kirt Jacobs: Could you describe in detail a particular incident or scenario in your professional or personal life you know where you utilize this style or philosophy on leadership. About implementation now that we know.

Ed Mannassah: Well I think that this story that I gave about about my career thinking that it was over is a is is and is the ultimate. But

if I was to suggest how you use your use those skills and to get to the implementation stage I would think that you that I would suggest that it's by bringing a group of people together and and building a plan. A plan of consensus and not shirking from the fact that everyone has a different perspective because I think part of leadership is making it coalesce into a plan. So from that perspective that's how I would see the value of my of my experiences.

Kirt Jacobs: And this is a question I really want to ask you because you were around with the Courier. You know you were a company that had you know bought it from the Bingham's and then you can end up coming here. And then Barry of course. And then of course he's passed. Rest his soul. Barry Bingham Jr. Do you think there's a difference today in our leaders than there was in past generations? And there's no right or wrong answer here.

Ed Mannassah: Oh certainly.

Kirt Jacobs: Curious your thoughts on that and your take on that.

Ed Mannassah: Certainly. I think that you know and an expansive answer to that would be this. There was a day when there was leadership by exclusion and that is not a reflection on on this community per se but on many communities. And I believe that now with leadership by inclusion and having many more voices and many more people at the table that that has been the major change that that's occurred in all communities and and in Louisville. I believe that we have seen a much set of stronger voices and participate in things and because of that it has made and made leadership in some cases more difficult. If you defined it only by virtue of the loudest voices. The loudest voice wins. Or it has made leadership much more engaging by the mere fact that you've had many more voices speaking.

Kirt Jacobs: I love that answer. Asking this question you never know what answer going to get. Ed if you were granted two weeks right today. No obligation. No commitments. Put the Blackberry, the cell phone, the e-mail away. Maybe even though in your case no access to newspaper outside media maybe I'll take it a stretch

farther What I like to call a two week mini vacation from life.

Ed Mannassah: Oh gosh, a mini vacation from life. So that means can't read.

Kirt Jacobs: No. There is no wrong answer.

Ed Mannassah: You said that I couldn't have a newspaper.

Kirt Jacobs: I thought I'd throw that in to see if I could get.

Ed Mannassah: I think if I was taking a two week mini vacation from life. It would be a great opportunity to build a long list of things that I would like to accomplish. And I believe that every day people would like to spend that time that quality time with themselves. Trying to think about what they could do. But unfortunately don't usually take the time don't have the time.

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Ed Mannassah: And it's not afforded to them to be able to think.

Kirt Jacobs: our pace is much quicker today than it used to be.

Ed Mannassah: I love building a list though of what I would like to accomplish.

Kirt Jacobs: So you have the time to digest and mull over and go back and add and take away

Ed Mannassah: Yeah

Kirt Jacobs: That's great. This is a question that I want to ask to you i don't know if its a fair question or not. What do you think the leadership is today in Louisville that maybe it was or wasn't in the past. It seems like Louisville is in such a transition. Is that a function of leadership? Is it a function of generational change? I just thought I'd throw that question out.

Ed Mannassah: I think it has for many many answers. The first is that the core of business in Louisville has changed markedly over the last 25 years. And because of that individuals who grew up in companies and inherited thrones may not have those anymore. Likewise I think with the whole regeneration and the importation of talent and all of those things that are positive has set a new base for leadership. So I truly believe that we're in a we're in a spirited time when we are evolutionary and it's not revolutionary. That's the greatest thing that could happen in terms of leadership because there will be new voices. And they will have new speech and they will say things that just don't necessarily fit with the way things used to be. And that's really exciting you know.

Kirt Jacobs: Looking forward to see how it all plays out. This is a question we like to ask all our guests whether they're young or older It's somewhat of a dark question. But Ed when the great day comes how do you want to be remembered? You know God forbid you walk out of here and in your case a newspaper delivery truck text takes care of you if you will. How do you want to be remembered?

Ed Mannassah: I think I'd like to I'd like to be known as one of the good guys. Who actually did good and saw issues and was able to help participate in solving problems.

Kirt Jacobs: One of the good guys. I think that's a great note to end on. One of the good guys. Ed it's truly a pleasure having you...

Ed Mannassah: Thank you

Kirt Jacobs: ...on Leadership Landscape. Really enjoyed it.

Ed Mannassah: It's been great thank you.

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Kirt Jacobs: Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general

comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com