

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 sometimes legends and allow them a chance to offer some keen insights into how they see themselves and most importantly explore just what makes them tick. I'm Kirt Jacobs host of Leadership Landscape where previous interviews have included former mayors, state politicians, nationally renowned sports writers, sports legends, and heads of major business concerns, community activists and developers. Today our guest is Christine D. Johnson better known as Chris Johnson. She is the president of the Leadership Louisville Center. Now allow me to read a bit of her bio to you if you will. She began her professional career as the first woman sports reporter for The Courier Journal and before joining the Leadership Louisville staff in 1990 Chris was an executive with the Kentucky's largest public relations firm of Winds Neely Company now known as New West. Mrs Johnson is in 1987 graduate of Leadership Louisville and has been president of the Leadership Louisville Center since 1991. Today more than four thousand individuals have graduated from Leadership Louisville programs since its founding in 1979. And as president she directs the five Leadership Louisville Center programs Leadership Louisville it's signature program, Focus Louisville a two and a half day community orientation with an emphasis on volunteer service, the Bingham Fellows (of which I'm a graduate) a level program that provides in-depth leadership experience in a specific community issue, The Leadership Network which is a CEO roundtable for executive directors of nonprofit organizations, and lastly Ignite Louisville which was started in 2004 (of which I'm a chartered graduate as well)which is a skill building leadership course for young professionals. Other accolades Mrs Johnson has received include in 1996 the Kentuckiana Girl Scout Council recognized her as

a woman of achievement and Chris has been honored twice by the National Community Leadership Association for accomplishments guiding Leadership Louisville first in 1995 as a recipient of the Preceptor Award and in 2006 as the recipient of the Chairman's Award for the creation of the Leadership Louisville Center itself on West Main Street. In January 2007 in the issue of the Louisville magazine she was named as one of the city's most powerful women leaders and in April of 2007 she was named to the Presbyterian Community Center Hall of Fame for guiding the Bingham Fellows work in the Smoketown Shelby Park neighborhoods. Chris is active in several community organizations serving on the boards of Greater Louisville Inc., Actors Theater development board, in addition to the Louisville Collegiate School. Chris is married to John A Johnson who is a partnered Stice and Harbison and they have one son Drew. Welcome to Leadership Landscape Chris quite a pleasure to have you here.

Christine D. Johnson: Thank you

Kirt Jacobs: Being the head of Leadership Louisville maybe we should have had you on sooner but we have you here today. Before we go into our general questions that we ask all of our guests can you elaborate a little bit on Leadership Louisville and maybe the genesis of how it was founded back in the late '70's and early '80's. Yes, Leadership Louisville's first class graduated in 1980 and that was a distinctive year for the city because there was a front page story about us being known as strike city. Front page story in The Wall Street Journal. So it was really a time that people started thinking about the future. What kinds of leaders were we going to create and grow. And we had a strong group of what I would call iconic leaders in the community. Wilson Wyatt, Barry Bingham who owned the Courier Journal at the time, Nanna Lampton who is still with us and very active in the community and Henry Hyser, Maury Johnson and they worked to create a leadership program in what was then the Louisville Chamber of Commerce. There were a lot of programs starting up and we were around the country and we were one of them. But our mission was really to identify people who wanted to make a difference in the city and give them the network and the education and the tools that they needed to make a

difference.

Kirt Jacobs: Our first question we ask all your guests what has driven you to take the helm of Leadership Louisville? Stay there from the early 1990s till now? There's been dramatic changes in Louisville's leadership landscape and it's all ironic for the title of our show but what drives you to do that? and all the new programming that's come along?

Christine D. Johnson: Well quite simply I like to make things happen. And I like to connect people who can see opportunities in the city and work with each other to make change happen. And so Leadership Louisville has been just the best opportunity in the world to execute that because you may be familiar with the Malcolm Gladwell book *The Tipping Point*. Often he talks about connectors.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Christine D. Johnson: Individuals who connect with each other to create those tipping points that create change and that's really what drives me is I just like to see things happen.

Kirt Jacobs: You've made a lot of things happen with Leadership Louisville. Whom do you credit most influential in your life? Can be more than one. It could be professional or personal.

Christine D. Johnson: Well I would say kind of two groups. Obviously the first group would be my parents who were just incredibly supportive and nurturing of me. Instilled a sense of really an interest in current events and self-reliance and kind of the confidence you want to be a sports reporter as I was right out of college. That took.. that's not what most young women at that point were doing. And then secondly when I started at Winds Neely public relations I really had wonderful mentors there. The founders of the company Rod Winds, Randy Neely and (inaudible). And now that I look back I recognize the work ethic that they instilled in me and really the love for what I do. So I would say both of those you know my parents and early bosses really played a role.

Kirt Jacobs: What was the most defining moment of your life? Again it can be more than one, professional or personal.

Christine D. Johnson: Well mine was very very sad and I don't talk about it very often. But my father died quite young when he was 51 and I was working at the newspaper at the time. And it was a totally unexpected event and very traumatic as you might imagine. But some good lessons or reality I think. I realized at a young age of 23 that that you can be vulnerable and things that you never expect can happen to you. And as a result I think it pushed me more to make sure I did things that I wanted to do when I wanted to do them.

Kirt Jacobs: If there is one what is your biggest professional regret? In other words is there anything you've done differently..

Christine D. Johnson: Not a thing.

Kirt Jacobs: ...at this point.

Christine D. Johnson: I have no regrets

Kirt Jacobs: That's an honest answer. I love it when guests say that.

Christine D. Johnson: Yeah I've loved it and I don't feel that I feel like I've had evolving careers over the years and I never look at the road not travel.

Kirt Jacobs: Less traveled if you will. On the flip side of that what's your biggest professional triumph?

Christine D. Johnson: Well I would I would say just the cumulative impact that Leadership Louisville programs have had in the community. I've been just incredibly blessed. We had a our graduation recently of our 2007 Leadership Louisville class and to hear how people have been transformed as a result of what we do in a very positive sense and things that they're doing now and how they're connecting with each other is enormously gratifying. And then our new center. Not so new, we've been there for three years on West

Main Street. It's really creating a vision of what leadership is all about.

Kirt Jacobs: It's a beautiful facility by the way..

Christine D. Johnson: So very energizing and welcoming for top CEO's all the way down to students who are interested in getting involved.

Kirt Jacobs: I'm going to go off on a tangent real quick. In terms of leadership Louisville and it's a business model, are there really any other programs like that in the United States that A even compared to it and B are there even any?

Christine D. Johnson: Well there are a handful of programs who have what I call product extensions beyond the Leadership Louisville class. There are a handful of young professional programs but I would have to say that we are the the biggest and of course I am going to say the best.

Kirt Jacobs: Sure, sure

Christine D. Johnson: That we have taken that initial Leadership Louisville class idea and grown it over the years to be much more inclusive connecting people from young leaders all the way to CEO.

Kirt Jacobs: Cool. That is good to know. What is the best advice ever given to you?

Christine D. Johnson: Well that would be Bill Samuels Jr with Maker's Mark. Bill was a client of mine actually when I was in public relations. I did media contact for Bill and of course P.R. people are full of ideas and solutions and Bill was a very at the time very demanding client. But those are the ones you learn the most from and Bill's advice was to make sure you ask the right questions. A lot of times. P.R. people others offer up a lot of solutions or answers before you really know what the questions are. And as I have grown over the years I reflect back on that advice from Bill and

make sure that you are asking the right questions to get the best solutions you possibly can.

Kirt Jacobs: That's cool. That's a great answer. Can you define... Asking you this question I'm really anxious to see that your answer will be. Can you define leadership in one word? This show is about leadership.

Christine D. Johnson: Passion.

Kirt Jacobs: OK Can you elaborate a little bit on that.

Christine D. Johnson: Because I think the most effective leaders... It has to come from within you you know really motivate people to affect change and to keep yourself inspired. If you're just and I think that's the difference between a leader and a manager. A manager is trying to get from point A to Point B. A leader is really trying to go from point A to what they're not really sure that final destination looks like and that passion is while it sounds a bit cliched because we can talk about passion a lot and we can there are a lot of other great words commitment...

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Christine D. Johnson: But I think it it really boils down to having the the drive as you talked about earlier. The fortitude to overcome obstacles that come your way. Anything that is a big idea has to have some obstacles to work out so that's my my one word ingredient.

Kirt Jacobs: You may have touched on this earlier but this question we ask all of our guests .What do you find exciting about Leadership Louisville and and just from your viewfinder it's so unique because you are a leader but then you are training leaders. And very you know I don't think we've had a guests actually training leaders in the way that you are.

Christine D. Johnson: Well I would say what's exciting to me is Louisville right now. And I say this now to all of the classes that we are

connecting with for I would say the past year than that I cannot think of a time in my career goes back many years to my early days at the newspaper. That I can't remember a time when we are so excited about downtown development.

Kirt Jacobs: I agree.

Christine D. Johnson: I think the merged government had more of spiritual inspirational catalyst to us than we realized at the time. And when you think about the arena. When you look at what the new skyline is going to be.

Kirt Jacobs: It is pretty amazing.

Christine D. Johnson: With Museum Plaza and you really have to pinch yourself. And and then now Todd Blue's new development on Iron Corridor right by the bridge. That's that block of buildings I don't think a day goes by that people haven't driven by there and said why won't somebody do something with that. Well now we have someone like Todd who is really a visionary in his efforts so that's what I think is exciting. And our growth and what is going on in our organization and our programs is really reflective of the excitement in our community.

Kirt Jacobs: If you could change one thing for be it in life in general what would that be? You can interpret this question really any way you like.

Christine D. Johnson: Well I would have said a couple of years ago that Louisville needs to be less risk averse. You know Louisville over the years has never been a city that's jumped out there first. You know sometimes you know the saying has been we've gummed a lot of issues and ideas to death. But today I think we are being more dynamic and more big picture thinking in our in our planning. I would say sometimes and this might sound a little contradictory if I could change anything it's just the pace that people are are working and maybe not taking time to really take full advantage of everything that is going on in our community.

Kirt Jacobs: It is going to be interesting of the next generation that came up. I'm probably the last generations that's kind of half and half to where we've had this technology just influx into our life and there's going to a whole generation where it's been there from the get go.

Christine D. Johnson: Well I had an experience the other day at a doctor's office seeing two little boys who had to be three with some sort of electronic device that looked just like my PDA. It wasn't a plastic one it was some sort of game and if you don't believe that's the future take a look.

Kirt Jacobs: Have to get a grip I'm afraid.

Christine D. Johnson: But I think at the same time what we offer at Leadership Louisville and it's always difficult to communicate what it is we offer in terms of our programing. I talk about our different programs but what is it that happens when you come. What we really offer are those personal experiences. The opportunity to touch, to meet people, see behind the scenes. In our Leadership Louisville class for example participants get to ride with a police officer for a shift. That is eye opening. We give Ignite Louisville participants a chance to think about their personal brand and how are they going to protect and enhance their brand over time. So while we talk a lot about technology I think at the end of the day people still want that individual experience and they want those relationships. That's another thing that probably in hindsight in addition to passion leadership is about relationships especially in a city like Louisville where it's small enough to meet a lot of people and to connect with each other, have a great idea, and see it come to fruition.

Kirt Jacobs: This is a question we ask all our guests and I'm always curious to see what your answer will be. Could you describe in detail a particular incident or scenario in your professional personal life where you utilized your style in philosophy and leadership.

Christine D. Johnson: As well you'll love this story because I said to you were a beneficiary of it and that was how the idea for a

young professionals leadership program came to actually fruition. Y-PAL, the young professionals group, came to us and said we need a leadership program for our age group that kind of 25-30 or 40-something and it was challenging because it was well what is it that they need and want that's not what we're already offering. To quote Bill Samuel's I couldn't just start putting together a program so I spent time in this is part of my leadership style is to ask the right questions to make sure I understand what the issue is then put together some ideas and got consensus from the group. Here here's kind of a scenario of what a curriculum might look like. And get buy in and then also funding. I want to give National City Bank a big thank you because it was Mary Griffith and National City who really saw this as an economic development investment and invested in the future of the young leaders and then putting it all together getting a group like your class evolved and I hope over delivering. Nobody really knew what it would be. You were the guinea pigs. The pilot. We did get add some things the second year with an overnight retreat. we found out that your age group enjoys the social interaction. So we put that in and so for me the personal leadership of seeing an idea come to into action and then now with the Make Your Mark Challenge and the Maker's Mark has sponsored our Make Your Mark Challenge projects. If those are impacting all sorts of community groups and will for many years to come. So that to me I wasn't out there with a banner and waving look at Leadership Louisville for certain look at me but what is it that we can do to make a difference and getting the right people around the table and and having an outcome.

Kirt Jacobs: Just curious a tangent question to that. Were there any challenges or difficulties when you had to take their concept to the Leadership Louisville board? Was it embraced? I'm thinking from a style of leadership.

Christine D. Johnson: Well I think that this is an interesting answer to that because it. It might show how progressive Leadership Louisville is because the one of the programs that Y-PAL had looked at was a similar program in Cleveland. And Cleveland that group had gone to Leadership Cleveland to see do you want to embrace this idea. And Leadership Cleveland believe it or not said no. That's not

what we do. And our board by contrast and Tom Monaghan from Business First was our board chairman said bring it on. If we don't invest in the young leaders, the emerging leaders well who will Leadership Louisville be. So it was a very important strategic decision for us to not keep doing things the way we always had been doing. But to be responsive still keep our flagship program. But also look for ways to serve the community in a new way when new opportunities were being present.

Kirt Jacobs: Total 360 question here. We like to ask this of our women guests because this is a show on leadership and how leadership has changed for women in the last 20, 30 different 40 years. Do you think it's harder or easier for women to get into leadership roles today?

Christine D. Johnson: Well that's.... That's a tough question attempt to generalize..

Kirt Jacobs: Sure it is.

Christine D. Johnson: You know my first job being the only woman and kind of pretty male dominated totally male dominated profession. I never let it stop me. I didn't really go in there thinking every day I'm the only woman. I was always thinking I've got a job to do and I want to do it the best I can. And I think most women today who are successful will not say that gender played a role one way or the other.

Kirt Jacobs: Interesting

Christine D. Johnson: I really think that that leadership, that drive, what you want to do to be successful is not really gender specific. So I can't say that I've been held back in any way and maybe in some cases I might have got some better assignments in the sports department because I might have gotten out to the Derby to cover some part of that race sooner than I would have if I had not been doing a good job so. It's an interesting question but I don't tend to look at it as that relevant.

Kirt Jacobs: OK great. Question we ask all of our guests. If you were granted two weeks right today. You could take a mini vacation from life. You know you put down back to technology. Put down the Blackberry, the e-mail, the computer and go anywhere you want. Take family with you or not what would you do with those two weeks. We always think it gives great insight into...

Christine D. Johnson: Wow I guess. I would take my husband and my son as you might imagine and spend one week kind of out. Like we love the southwest out around Sedona. And certainly the Grand Canyon the southwest and have really a nice outdoor experience and then the other week. I have to say I love big cities. I love New York and Chicago and I do a blend of the the the Uptown Girl and the. and the outdoor adventure. But I have to say to I'd add we've got of my husband I have a farm in western Kentucky and some of my best days these this at this point in my life and career are sitting on the front porch in Crofton, Kentucky watching the...

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Christine D. Johnson: ...cars go by so I like it all.

Kirt Jacobs: That's good. This is one.. This is our last question. This is what we ask all of our guests whether they're young or older. When the great day comes Chris how do you want to be remembered?

Christine D. Johnson: As a loving wife and mother first of course.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Christine D. Johnson: Who made a quiet difference in the lives of many people and for her community. I think that sort of sums it up. I would say a quiet difference because I love my role behind the scenes making things happen. But I love most of all my role as a wife and mother.

Kirt Jacobs: It's a great answer and I think you have a potent role in Louisville's history. I think there'll be a pretty decent footnote

somewhere along the way because of Leadership Louisville and what it's evolved into.

Christine D. Johnson: OK

Kirt Jacobs: With that I want to thank you for being on Leadership Landscape Chris thanks for being here.

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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