

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

(music)

**Kirt Jacobs:** Welcome to another installment of Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders 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 none other none other, excuse me, than John H. Harralson Jr. He is the former publisher and current editor of The Voice Tribune suburban newspaper. I'm going to read a bit of his bio for you. He was born in Louisville and is a native Louisvillian. Harralson has a degree in business administration from the University of Kentucky. Harralson served three terms as Mayor of Brownsboro Village and was chairman of the Jefferson County League of Cities for six years. He was then employed by Bellsouth telephone company for more than 30 years and is active in a number of political and civic organizations. He served on a number of committees that worked on merging the Louisville and Jefferson County in 2003. And in 2003 and 2007 Harralson ran unsuccessfully for the District Seven seat on the Louisville Metro Council. However Harralson is most notably known for becoming editor and publisher in 1987 of The Voice Tribune an extremely popular weekly newspaper reaching roughly 70,000 weekly readers in Louisville and across the nation covering all the who's who and who ain't as I say in Jefferson County. Been known to be in there a few times myself John. He was a former member of the Louisville Jaycees and a past president a University of Kentucky Alumni Association. He's a member of the Ad Club of Louisville and the Rotary Club of Louisville. He and his

family are members of Second Presbyterian Church and he is a descendant of a pioneering Kentucky family. He has four grown sons Johnny, Tom, Jim and Ben. Welcome John to Landscape Landscape.

**John Harralson:** Thank you

**John Harralson:** Thank you sir for joining us. That's a pretty eclectic bio in Louisville history. I mean you've been through all the changes. You've seen the merger. You've been around before merger. There's ever a big event in Louisville you usually got your camera in tow and then you running around taking pictures. So welcome.

**John Harralson:** Well I tried being on all the big events that go on that I can you know and I get coverage for our newspaper The Voice Tribune.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Nice. What drives you? That's our first question we ask all of us guest. What drives you to do what you do? I mean you cover a great deal of events for The Voice.

**John Harralson:** Well I like people and my mother had worked for the weekly newspaper in Central City and so after being public relations manager for the telephone company I dealt with the newspapers a lot. So when I got a chance to buy The Voice Tribune I did. So I got to start covering a lot of events and it was something I enjoyed doing. I enjoyed meeting the people you know.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Whom do you credit most influential in your life John? It can be more than one.

**John Harralson:** Well there was a lot of them. I would think that one of my high school teachers are Wayne Miller was an inspiration to me. And George Taylor a long time basketball coach there in Central City. And George Taylor our superintendent there. And they all had an influence on me. And at the University of Kentucky believe it or not the Brooks Hamilton there who taught hygiene

and also photography was one of the greatest professors that I ever had. And he was wonderful and and he really I guess got me really going on photography which I had been working at since I was eight-years-old.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Really. Interesting. What was the most defining moment of your life John?

**John Harralson:** Well...

**Kirt Jacobs:** It can be more than one.

**John Harralson:** I guess when when I decided to join the army in the. The end of World War II and was sent to Japan and spent two years over there. The Japanese people were very hard working clean and and we built a Misawa Air Base there and we had 7,000 laborers where we work 12-hour shifts seven days a week. Two 12-hour shifts night and day and you could almost see things mushrooming over there.

(laughter)

**Kirt Jacobs:** Interesting. If there is one what is your biggest professional regret? In other words is there something you would have done differently ?And again that can be personal or professional.

**John Harralson:** Well I really can't think of anything right now. They've... I've done just about everything I wanted to do in my life.  
(laughter)

**Kirt Jacobs:** Was there maybe a moment where you think back where you could have gone left but you went right. It's not necessarily regret but you ever have a passing thought like that

**John Harralson:** Well you come to the fork of the road. When I got out of high school at 17-years-old I came up to University of Louisville and talked to them about going to school there and the registrar told me since I lived outside of Jefferson County it would be a lot cheaper for me to go to the University of Kentucky. So I

had never been to Lexington before and so I got over to Lexington talked to the registrar and two weeks later I was in school there.

(laughter)

**John Harralson:** So that certainly made a big impact on my life.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Sure it did. Sure it did. Next question We like to ask your guests on the flipside of regret what is your biggest professional triumph? It can be more than one.

**John Harralson:** Well the newspaper. The Public Service Commission had a rule that we were going to have to dial the three area code digits on the local calls. So if you called your neighbor next door you'd still have to dial 10 digits. So we wrote editorials in the Courier Journal in The Voice Tribune and and other papers around the state picked up our editorials and and Governor Patton told the Public Service Commission to look at it again and then they had a public hearing and they decided to break up the area code 502 and put 270 in western Kentucky in that way our people would only have to dial their regular numbers and not have to dial the area code. That sort of showed the impact that the what our little newspaper could do.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Really. I want to I want to digress for a moment on that. Like I said in the bio you said there's roughly 70,000 or more...

**John Harralson:** Right.

**Kirt Jacobs:** ...current readers. What was it like in 1987 when you took over?

**John Harralson:** We had about 1800 subscribers.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Really? That's it?

**John Harralson:** Probably you know seven or eight thousand readers you know then.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Why do you think The Voice has become what it is today? It's a pretty unique publication.

**John Harralson:** Well. I always enjoyed making photographs and so I started running picture pages with a lot of pictures going to parties. Making pictures and getting a lot of those in it and our circulation began to go right on up. And so somebody said to Harralson was trying to make a Life Magazine out of it when they saw all the number of subscribers skyrocketing you know. Now nearly every paper in town is copying The Voice in trying to run more pictures you know.

**Kirt Jacobs:** What do you find exciting about all that you do all that you've done? You're still a pretty active guy. I mean you've got an event to go to tonight you mentioned before we started the interview.

**John Harralson:** Well that's right. I enjoy going out to the events meeting the people. And at the number of the years that I've attended the Derby well you know I've met Lee Iacocca, Mellon Bell Eye, Loni Anderson and Larry Birkhead.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Oh yeah you had to go there didn't you do.

**John Harralson:** Yeah. Right. Anna Nicole Smith.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Yeah. I remember when she was there a few years back.

**John Harralson:** So it's been a really interesting and to be able to meet those people and photograph then you know.

**Kirt Jacobs:** You've probably got a heck of a collection. You know I think someday you should maybe build a book of or a library of all the stuff. I mean you've probably got stacks of photos that never were published is my point.

**John Harralson:** Well that's right. We've got lots of photos and some day and I've got the back of my mind to do something like

that.

**Kirt Jacobs:** As you are exiting stage door left then the photos will hit. You won't have to explain it. I got you. What was the best advice ever given to you John? Can be more than one piece of advice.

**John Harralson:** Well I was trying to think you know what that could be and I guess they... Some of our people were trying thinking about dropping out of school and going to work during World War II and one of our teachers told us that you people stay in school because you'll regret it if you don't finish high school.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Were you one of those people who was thinking...

**John Harralson:** Well everybody was thinking about it you know.

**Kirt Jacobs:** That was a defining moment.

**John Harralson:** Yeah people of the Illinois Central Railroad came up to the school and were offering everybody big salaries to go to work on the trains.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Now this show is called Leadership Landscape so we always like to ask this question of our guests. Can you define leadership in one word in the great English lexicon? Could be more than one word if you choose.

**John Harralson:** Well I think some people are born leaders and others are born followers you know. Take a guy like Winston Churchill or some of those people that are real leaders and even George Bush is a leader because he's willing to go the way he thinks is right and doesn't worry about the distractors.

**Kirt Jacobs:** But could you name leadership in one word? If you had to pick a word?

**John Harralson:** Just personal drive I think.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Drive?

**John Harralson:** Yeah

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK. Fair enough. If you could change one thing John be it in your own life or in general what would that be? It can be you can interpret that question really any way you want. It can be national, international, local, personal, professional.

(laughter)

**John Harralson:** Oh one thing I'd change in my life I really can't think of anything right now on that.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Really?

**John Harralson:** (laughter)

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK. That's fair. Could you describe in detail a particular incident or scenario in your professional or your personal life where you utilized your style and philosophy on leadership. You just spoke about drive a moment ago. I mean you're in a pretty unique position with what you've done with The Voice Tribune over the last 20 years or so.

**John Harralson:** Well as the as I want I was chairman of the Jefferson County League of Cities we were of course working for the merger of Jefferson County and the late Payton Hoag who was Mayor of Anchorage and Foster Farris who was mayor of Lyndon we all went to Frankfort and lobbied to get the bill through. The legislature that would give Jefferson County the authority to have a merged government.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**John Harralson:** And that was something where and we got most of the small cities to all go along with us on it. They saw that it would be to advantage to have a merged government and Jefferson County.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I'm going to go off on a tangent for a moment. Were you in favor of the merger? I assume you were obviously when it finally passed but way back when when when the two things went across the bow if you will? Back in the early 80s.

**John Harralson:** Right

**Kirt Jacobs:** Were you involved in any of that?

**John Harralson:** When it was came up in '82 that's.. I would Chair of the League of Cities then and we had we were official observers we worked with and our cities worked for it. We came within 1500 votes of passing it that year but the Louisville police were afraid that they were going to lose their union and so they bought television ads and worked against it.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**John Harralson:** I remember one public hearing out on Dixie Highway this old gentleman got up and said it was a communist plot a step toward one world government.

(laughter)

**Kirt Jacobs:** On that note I'll move to the next question. Is there a difference today in our leaders than there were in past generations John? I mean you've had a pretty good view finder on that. You worked a lot of events. You've gotten to travel in circles not everyone gets to travel in.

**John Harralson:** Well I've known most of our mayors from Charlie Farnsley and Frank Burke. Let's say a couple of the others. And. Of course Jerry and Jerry Abramson and. Bill Calger And and try to thank the sheriff later was sheriff It was like that mayor. I've know all of them. I think all of them had the best interests of our and and some I were able to get more done than others you know.

**Kirt Jacobs:** And they don't even have to be political leaders when



I asked that question. They don't have to be local. It's more of a general question. Do you think leaders are different today than they were in the '60s, in the '70s, '50s, in the 1980s.

**John Harralson:** Well I think television has made a big difference. Just like Happy Chandler got to elected governor twice. But when he ran the third time well television had come along and and he did he went over great in person but he didn't come over that well in television. And so Ned Breathitt was able to beat him you know.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK. I always love asking this next question John because I think it gives great insight into the guests that we're having. If you were granted two weeks right today. No obligations. No commitments. How would you spend that two week mini vacation from life? You know in your case put the camera down. Take off. Come back in two weeks what would you do?

**John Harralson:** I guess I'd just travel through the west.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Would you?

**John Harralson:** Yeah.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Probably want your camera now that I think about it.

**John Harralson:** Yeah that's right. But...

**Kirt Jacobs:** How would you do it? Would you drive? Would you fly?

**John Harralson:** I'd rather drive so that you can see what you want to when you want to.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I recommend everybody do that. I've done it twice. The drive across country. It's a huge country.

**John Harralson:** Right.

**Kirt Jacobs:** The United States is huge. Would you take your family

with you or would you fly solo? They say drive solo.

**John Harralson:** We made a trip the southern route and came back the northern route when my children were smaller and now that they're older well they have their own lives to lead.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Sure

**John Harralson:** So hopefully I can talk my wife into going.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Well they will see this interview. So you know. Now this is a question we like to ask all of guests younger or older. And I think it really says a lot about the person as well. When the great day comes John how do you want to be remembered? You know God forbid you walk out of here today something tragic happens. How do you want to be remember when they look John Harralson up somewhere?

**John Harralson:** Well I just remember that that I get along with people and I could get an organization to work well. And and and yet not have to be mean them or anything. I could treat them like human beings. And what I would with a telephone company my section always got the top results and our people really worked with us. We worked as a team and I was able to find people the were could be good leaders and work with them you know.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Well John I want to thank you for being on Leadership Landscape. You've left an indelible mark on this community that should live long after you're gone.

**John Harralson:** Well I've enjoyed being on here.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Thank you. Appreciate it John.

(music)

**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](mailto: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](http://www.moxietalk.com)