

**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 leaders from the world of politics, business, sports, real estate development, community activists, and civic engagement. Today our guest is Brian Thomas Quail better known as Brian Quail. He's the CEO of the Louisville area chapter of the American Red Cross. Now before we go any further we have a dubious honor for our guest. We don't have any confetti but he is our 50th guest on Leadership Landscape so

**Brian Quail:** There you go.

**Kirt Jacobs:** New Year's Eve will be coming by the time the airs so we'll see what happens. Any way I'm going to read a bit of his bio for you and then we'll begin the interview. He was born and raised in a small town named Sterling, Massachusetts and is a self proclaimed die hard Red Sox, Patriots, Celtic, and Bruin fan. So hopefully some of you will enjoy that. Quail holds a bachelor's degree in sociology with a minor in community services where he graduated cum laude no less from the University of Massachusetts and a master's degree in management for public and nonprofit agencies from the University of Chicago. Brian has 22 years of service in the public/nonprofit arena with significant experience in fundraising, communication and public relations, strategic planning and budgeting. Prior to coming to the American Red Cross Brian served as president and CEO of the Heart of Florida United Way in Orlando, Florida from 1995 until 2003. In 2002 Quail was named the Best Nonprofit Executive and one of

the 100 most influential figures in Central Florida by the Orlando Business Journal. Quail joined the Louisville area chapter of the American Red Cross as CEO on March 31, 2003. Since his wife Liz is from Louisville his decision in 2003 to leave Louisville, excuse me, to leave Florida was because he felt the need for a quote “strong family support system for his family.” 2003 the Louisville American Red Cross board’s decision to hire Quail was quoted as saying Quail is a proven leader who brings a strong fundraising background. Well guys I’d say so. At the time he led Florida’s United Way for eight years during which he raised more than drumroll 143 million dollars to help fund health and human service programs and agencies. Prior to those eight years from 1987 until 1995 he pulled stints between both the United Way of Chicago and Metro United Way here in Louisville. Today the Louisville American Red Cross chapter has a regional chapter jurisdiction covering 31 counties in Kentucky and southern Indiana. It’s extensive service to our community encompass says everything from disaster relief to transportation services to the elderly and under Brian’s leadership an emergency services call center has been established which supports, listen to this, 165 chapters in 35 states serving over 750 counties across America. Do you get any chance to sleep there?

(laughter)

The chapter has embarked on a disaster capacity building project to raise over seven million dollars by 2010 and to increase its local response capacity to six times its current level. To date 2.4 million dollars in commitments have been generated to increase the infrastructure needs of the chapter and enable better community response to local disasters. Brian is a 2004 graduate of Leadership Louisville. Brian and his native Louisvillian wife Liz and their daughter Chloe live in Louisville. Welcome the Leadership Landscape Brian.

**Brian Quail:** Thank you Kirt. Good to be here.

Kirt Jacobs: Appreciate having you here. Well as we ask all of our guests the first question what drives you to do this to such a level

and extent?

**Brian Quail:** For me it's about the mission. There is no other organization in this town that does what we do. So 365 days a year we're responding to people who have gone through a single family fire have lost everything. That the smaller local disasters that you don't hear. On a national scale that's 70 thousand disasters annually the Red Cross is working through in every community across America.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Wow

**Brian Quail:** Along with that it becomes the passion of the work. We are through our congressional charter through disaster relief. We also are charged with armed forces emergency communication where we're the military link between military personnel and their families. So that's what drives me. And I've been very fortunate through my career. I've worked with two organizations United Way and now Red Cross and you know those are two organizations which are vital to the fabric of any community I believe. And so I consider myself very fortunate and that's that's the main driver.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Alright. Whom do you credit most influence in your life Brian?

**Brian Quail:** You know on on that question I was fortunate I had a great relationship with my father.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** And he was a stonemason.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Really.

**Brian Quail:** Really. And as being a stonemason at the age of around 14 we started to work together. And so it was that time in that relationship where when you would build things from stone walls to chimneys to foundations. And as a part of our discussions the line that he would always say to me is use your brain and not your brawn

to carry you through life. And I've always listened and I always still hear those words in that conversation or the conversations I should say that we had. Because he was one of 11 children. And so he is a very unique individual where his dad took him out of school to put his eldest brother he was the he's the second most in the family to go through seminary and then after that he made sure all of his brothers and sisters went through school

**Kirt Jacobs:** Wow

**Brian Quail:** And so he was big on education. Is big on education and it wasn't until later on in life that he graduated high school. Went and worked on a college degree towards a college degree and just have a lot of respect for him and that's a guy that I look is as kind as really the establishment of the foundation for at least Brian Quail.

**Kirt Jacobs:** That's great. That's a great answer. I like that.

**Brian Quail:** Thank you.

**Kirt Jacobs:** What was the most defining moment of your life Brian? It can be more than one.

**Brian Quail:** With defining moments I think through stages in life there are you know different points in life that I think through that you look back on and you think of those experiences and how you've grown and with each of those I wouldn't say there's one particular one. But I like to look at as saying that particular incident took me to prepare me for the next level

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** in my leadership. You know so what I think about my decision to at the time when I was in high school I graduated high school three and a half years. Got out of school and decided it was it was winter of '78 and the blizzard of '78 hit and I was working on a construction crew.

**Kirt Jacobs:** That was a big time here too. Blizzard

**Brian Quail:** And so that moment really helped me to shape my thinking in a say you know they're got to listen to Dad. You know use your brain not your brawn and that really propelled me to take the next level in my academic career. And so as I kind of look at those stages and grades along the way I'd say each particular event of which maybe we can talk about later on Hurricane Katrina being the one.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I'd like to mention that.

**Brian Quail:** Which you know has had an accident and a large large impact

**Kirt Jacobs:** I can imagine. I can only imagine actually. What is your biggest professional regret Brian? Can be more than one and it can be personal as well

**Brian Quail:** Yeah you know.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Regret is a strong word.

**Brian Quail:** Yeah I know and I really thought long and hard about that question.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Most of the guests do. It can be a tough one.

**Brian Quail:** I don't have any. I mean as interestingly

**Kirt Jacobs:** That's the best answer to give to that.

**Brian Quail:** And the reason I say that is that I think one of the things that I look at as I've gone through my professional career. I think there are things that you wish you would have done maybe differently but in terms of having regret I couldn't really think of any. And again I think it goes to how I just answered the last question. It's using your experience and the time and how you can let an event either shape you in a way that it gets under your

skin where it bothers you for the rest of your entire career or you chalk it up to experience you learn from it and you don't you don't do either again or you reshape your thinking or maybe the way your approach is so but no regrets.

**Kirt Jacobs:** That's cool. I like that. On the flip side of that Brian what is your biggest professional triumph? Again it can be more than one and it can be personal.

**Brian Quail:** Yeah triumphs. You know when I was in Florida we built a building that our United Way was in desperate need of. That would be one instance where I look at that and that's the legacy that I left that community and the volunteers and the staff who remain. And here I look at a triumph at this particular juncture is really looking at our disaster capacity campaign of what we're trying to do. Because in the initial stages we're getting people to stop and sit to think about is this community prepared at a level where we could handle a major disaster in a way that maybe we learned from Katrina that we're not as good as we thought we were.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Right.

**Brian Quail:** And having those candid conversations and with the initial written support that we've received thus far that to me is an achievement and so and our call center. We've had over the past four years that I've been here going on five now we've grown our call center reach by 300% and cover the demographic actually is about 58 million people that are chapter call center here actually picks up picks up the calls for for other chapters in those 35 states.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Wow. You might have already touched on this but what do you find exciting about all of this? I mean usually I would suspect I haven't been involved at the Red Cross Red Cross in a direct fashion but I would think when you're called upon on a major level it's not a happy time. Wherever you're going usually you know when you hit the ground running it's likely a disaster I would assume. How does that excite you?

**Brian Quail:** Yeah I think there's there's a couple stages that you go into and when you go on a disaster. It truly is not knowing what you're going into. And Katrina for me after Katrina hit I actually was here taking care of the 4200 people that made their way to Louisville from Gulf Coast regions. But then was a part of the task force and the team that went into New Orleans and reopened up the city of New Orleans and I was on that team that did that. And I think one of the things that I remember from that moment was initially going in and to be quite honest with you not knowing what the heck you were going to face.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Sure.

**Brian Quail:** The other part of it though was once when I was there you know catching your stride just the people that were there and how they would ask you where you're from and why are you here. Why did you come here all the way here for me? And I always ask that question to people who come and get blooded at our center. You know why do you give blood? Do you realize that that time that you take can save up to three lives? So those are things that you know I kind of stick in my mind and I do my work throughout the course of my career. That I know that when I get up in the morning I'm going to shape somebody's life and I may not actually ever meet them.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Right

**Brian Quail:** May not know them. But my team from the volunteers to staff all the way to myself I know we're going to have some type of an impact and that really excites me.

**Kirt Jacobs:** To me that's the beauty and essence of leadership is you don't always meet the people that you impact. That's kind of the basis of the show. It may impact or inspire someone who sees it,

**Brian Quail:** Right.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I want to go off on a tangent for a second and talk

about Hurricane Katrina.

**Brian Quail:** Sure

**Kirt Jacobs:** First off how long were you personally down there?

**Brian Quail:** Personally I was down there for almost three weeks.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK. The reason why I bring it up is it's Red Cross and it's disaster and it's a great textbook case of leadership. What can go well and what can go wrong. Was Katrina a systematic catastrophic failure of Mother Nature that no leadership could have really handled properly or was it...

**Brian Quail:** Well here's how

**Kirt Jacobs:** I will leave it to you to answer because this show is about leadership so I thought it would be an interesting one.

**Brian Quail:** Thank you for the opportunity of giving me this question because sometimes people shy away from it. And for me I first look at and reflect on that the size of the operation it wasn't just New Orleans. What we were talking about was an area of the Gulf Coast which the affected areas full scale size of Great Britain.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Wow. Really.

**Brian Quail:** So when you think about the land mass. So you're dealing with an area the size of Great Britain. That's the first thing. Second thing is infrastructure is totally wiped out. It was 20 times larger than the 2004 hurricanes that went through Florida.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** OK So it's the biggest event that we have ever seen. And you know it becomes the wake up call. And the wake up call for me coming back here quite frankly was how do you prepare ahead of time. And how do you you know maybe using a military



term lock and load the resources that you need and to make things happen not after a disaster happens but before it and then during it and then obviously after it. And I think with the level of leadership that was there you know for me it was we weren't everywhere we wanted to be but we were everywhere we could be.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** And I know that there have been some that have and I'll just speak from the Red Cross' perspective that some have said you know well gee in this area you did really well but in this area you know you were slow to get there. And you know unless you were there and really saw what we were going through as a team of people that is is to me the commentary that I think hasn't been talked about enough through.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Sure

**Brian Quail:** And you know and you talk about leadership. You know 95% of people who go on disaster assignments are volunteers.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Correct.

**Brian Quail:** So during Hurricane Katrina 280 thousand people

**Kirt Jacobs:** Was it that many?

**Brian Quail:** deployed to provide service.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I figured at best it was 100 thousand. I never knew that it was so high.

**Brian Quail:** Two hundred eighty thousand and from that community there were 238 people who joined me on going on some sort of disaster assignment where they left their families. You know the comforts of home and you know feeling the same way I did and that's a level of leadership of being a volunteer for the Red Cross that I think we sometimes think of leaders as being CEOs or presidents.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Right. The title.

**Brian Quail:** The title and it's not.

Kirt Jacobs: Just out of curiosity along that front. Was there anything down there that you wish you would have done differently? I think it's a fair question.

**Brian Quail:** From a personal level?

**Kirt Jacobs:** Personal or Red Cross. You can really answer any way you want.

**Brian Quail:** Yeah. No

**Kirt Jacobs:** Whatever you are comfortable with?

**Brian Quail:** I think the thing that I reflect on the most is that we provided service to people as best we could in the conditions that we had.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** That we were facing. And and I think that quite frankly I'm very proud of what we did. And I would not see us doing anything else differently from the aspect of at the time of what we knew and how we were doing things

**Kirt Jacobs:** Sure

**Brian Quail:** We have we have learned from that event and have changed protocols such as now we have stood up in the Gulf Coast regions in 21 cities. Supplies, sheltering operations, other things that we never had before. So again taking the experience of you know of of learning from what you did which was for us we did a lot of great work. And there were times when people didn't think we some who didn't think we didn't do it well. But we took that criticism, took that commentary and have since I think done a

great job of trying to address those challenges in the future. Example right now you know the the wildfires that impacted San Diego. You have no not heard much criticism about how Red Cross and other community based agencies and the government for that matter have you know responded because we have changed. Different circumstances different ways we do business. And that to me becomes a telling factor.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Goes back to your comment early in the beginning of the interview about how you can take something and let it either really impact you in a negative way or learn from it.

**Brian Quail:** Exactly.

**Kirt Jacobs:** So what was the best advice you've ever given to you Brian? It can be personal, professional, family, friend.

**Brian Quail:** Hopefully you'll enjoy this one.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK. We get some good answers.

**Brian Quail:** It was when I first started my career in 19... Well I started my career in '84 but in 1987 I was a green entry level fundraiser in Chicago for the United Way. And a gentleman by the name of John Rylie who was a reporter with The Sun Times came up to me and said you know just remember one thing never get in an argument with a person who has more ink than you do because you'll never win. I've always at the time he said it I was a little bit. OK.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Yeah sure.

**Brian Quail:** And that really kind of for me thinks about how you address people and what you write can always be taken and so you know you need to understand that when you communicate you do it in a fashion where it can be spread out all over the territory. So understand you know what your position is. How you're going to say it and make sure that you do it in a in a good way. And you know 20 years later now with the Internet and other ways to

communicate you know I think that still holds true. Because as much as we try anyone tries to get their message out you need to help in the forum obviously as John would say more ink then you do.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I got you. Alright. If you could change one thing Brian in your life or in general what would that be?

**Brian Quail:** If I could change one thing mine would be to find a way where I could spend more time with my family at this point. Given the responsibilities.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Honest answer.

**Brian Quail:** Given the responsibilities and whatnot it can really consume your day and it can really take you over and and I try to work on that a lot. And I have an 8-year-old daughter and a wife and we we're a great team we're a great team and as being a great team. They let me know when they pull me back in when you know at the office too much or you know letting the work consume me.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Sure

**Brian Quail:** Or bringing the work home sort of speak. So that's for me that's kind of that's the important one.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Well you're honest. I like that.

**Brian Quail:** Trying to stay focused. You know this show's called Leadership Landscape. So I'm going to ask you the obvious question. Can you define leadership in one word? In the great English lexicon as I always say.

**Brian Quail:** Sure

**Kirt Jacobs:** Can be more than one.

**Brian Quail:** For me the one its vision.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Really.

**Brian Quail:** It's vision. And I think a leader needs to be able to let and in my case both volunteers and staff know what the vision is for the future. And such as with our capacity campaign where we're going to try to go from being able to handle a disaster that impacts five thousand people locally to 30 thousand people where we could handle that disaster on our own without calling on outside Red Cross resources.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** So that that to me becomes that vision there says why. Why do we want to do that? And you know through what I saw during Katrina is that we need to raise the bar. And we need to to change the way how we prepare our community. And so many times the generosity to the Red Cross and other agencies flows after that disaster happens. What I'm personally trying to do in this vision and that that we've created is to say look can we can we flip that a little bit? Can you know individuals, organizations, foundations, corporations. It's the dollars up front that are going to make us better. And the partnerships we build now are going to save lives. Are going to make a difference. And so for me it's providing that vision to people to say. We've got to raise the bar. And here's why. And so that that for me is where the vision thing becomes real important.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK. Well this is going to be an interesting segue then into the next question and actually this is a question that's kind of new to the show or is new to the show. If someone asked you Brian. What does Brian Quail stand for what do you think they would say? It's a very introspective question.

**Brian Quail:** I would think I would hope they would say that he stands for credibility and honesty. And that he would... He's a guy that you'd want to hang around with.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Yeah.

**Brian Quail:** And that you'd want to not just on the professional side but on the personal side.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** Wears his emotions on his shirt sleeve for sure.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I can imagine with what you do it has to get emotional at times.

**Brian Quail:** It does and you know I think it's important that as a leader that people know where you stand during good times and bad. And I think being honest is never I believe hurt anyone. And that honesty sometimes can either shape relationships or break relationships but.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Sure.

**Brian Quail:** If you're honest about it I would I would hope that people would say he's an honest credible guy.

**Kirt Jacobs:** That's a pure answer. Good one. First time we ever asked that one. Now this one I'm not sure if I asked you this one or not. Is there a difference today in our leaders you think than in past generations? And you don't have to name anyone specifically. I mean you've been in leadership positions for a couple decades now.

**Brian Quail:** Ask it one more time?

**Kirt Jacobs:** In other words do you think the leadership positions today are different than they were previously or held by people differently or viewed differently probably from a way to put it.

**Brian Quail:** I think that leaders today face more of a challenge than ever before.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** And here's why. I believe that leaders of yesteryear were really trusted by the communities in which they served. And I think today sometimes people don't really put that face in organizations and the people who lead them. And I think that it's either well what is it that they're really looking for or you know does that leader really care about what I need? You know I'm going to show them what I think we need. And and you know there's a lot of different communities discussions going on at this particular point in time and I think when people call the question of leadership and decisions that are made that sometimes people think that there must be an endgame. That leader mustn't be honest with me. And I think over the course of time I think that's how I've seen leadership really kind of taking more of a maybe a hit. Because being a leader is a lonely place and you know there was there was a professor one time that just said you know leaders eat lunch alone. And..

**Klirt Jacobs:** It's almost the best advice ever given to somebody maybe potentially.

**Brian Quail:** And it's true. I mean sometimes when you when you make decisions that you think are the right decisions people may not agree with them. And and I think you know in yesteryear people probably weren't as vocal. Maybe didn't sound as much. But today and I'm not saying that's a bad thing I'm kind of directing it on what I believe leaders face is is that I think we're put on the spot more to justify to communicate more. Which are good things but I'm not always confident that people want to hear it unless they want to hear that it's what they want to hear.

**Brian Quail:** I got you. Now we're running very short on time but I ask this question of all our guests so I want to get it in. When the great day comes, it's not a fun question Brian, how do you want to be remembered? You know if at all ended today like I ask all the guest. You know you walked out of here God forbid something tragic happened. I mean what you do impacts a lot of people's lives very directly.

**Brian Quail:** I think for me it would be that I've left a legacy.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Brian Quail:** And that decisions that I've made and things that I've done have made some really great changes for others in the future where it's really going to impact their lives.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK. That's a great note to end on. Many great more good chapters to come.

**Brian Quail:** Thank you.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Thank you Brian. I really appreciate you being on Leadership Landscape. Until next time on Leadership Landscape.

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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](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)