



LEADERCAST

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Speaker Q&A: FRANS JOHANSSON

Who has influenced you the most in your life? Why? Describe the relationship?

I have been fortunate to have many influences in my life, but my parents' influence, without a doubt, form my bedrock. My father helped me to understand and develop my passions, and to believe in pursuing whatever dreams these passions aspired to. My mother has broken many boundaries in her own life, and as a teacher, she helped foster my curiosity and convinced me that a good education was the best way for me to reach my dreams.

What has been a defining moment in your role as a leader?

Sometimes leadership evolves naturally. And sometimes you have to make a deliberate choice to be a leader. I arrived at this defining moment only recently. When I first began formulating my ideas around *The Medici Effect*, I certainly hadn't planned on spending the last six years talking about the lessons of the book and connecting with people around the world. It has been a wild ride being a thought leader on innovation -- and a relatively safe path, where I was only responsible for myself and my family. But clients' demand for more of my time, more structured events around *The Medici Effect*, etc. has brought me to a crossroads: to continue picking and choosing projects that fit my schedule and interest or to make a commitment to something greater. So I have accepted this challenge and have made an explicit choice to become an organizational leader by building a company around The Medici Group, and this brings a huge responsibility for the livelihood of a lot of people. But it is a choice I committed to as a leader, and I am excited by what we can potentially achieve.

What are you most passionate about?

For me, it's about creation. If I am not creating, nurturing, building something, I lose my fire. In the past I have created games, started both a health care company and a software company, started a magazine and so on. In writing a book, you're creating ideas. In the course of building a company, you're creating an organization that can have a huge impact. I may come from a business background, but I am also very passionate about making the world a better place in a very specific way. It's not an accident that I wrote a book like *The Medici Effect*, which is really about bringing people of diverse backgrounds and experiences together to create something new, which can help create a better world.

How did you get to where you are today? What advice would you give to other leaders who are working toward their goals?

I have always sought out intersections of different cultures and industries, both personally and professionally, and I have learned that doing so is a phenomenal way to success. If I am pursuing something that someone else is already doing, I stop. I seek uniqueness, and rather than follow someone else's path and do it better, I would rather strike out on a new road for others to follow. And while paving this path, I always ensure that I am pursuing a passion, am genuinely not afraid to make mistakes, and insist on having a good time the whole way. Having a good time, in my opinion, is a prerequisite. If you enjoy what you're doing, it helps you to rebound from mistakes and failures, giving you courage to try it again.

If you want to be a leader, focus on something that drives you. It can be passion (my preference) or something important to you, such as a mission. As a leader, you have to pay close attention to what others are saying and be reasonable in your own demands. You have to expect failure, while believing wholeheartedly that you will succeed. And lastly, you have to balance being dead serious about what you're doing without losing a sense of humor (you know, having fun the whole way through).

Define leadership.

I like to think a leader is honest, fearless, and unique. Let me explain. To be a leader means to be truly honest about who you are -- at the very least to yourself, whether you choose to show it or not. The pieces that you do show should be authentic. A leader also has to be fearless, in that they don't let their fears stand in the way; they keep going around whatever obstacles there may be. And lastly, a leader is unique, someone who strikes out in a new direction, and encourages and inspires others to follow.

What are some ways for the Chick-fil-A Leadercast attendees to apply your talk to their professional life?

The CEO of one of the world's largest media companies recently posed a similar question: "How can I apply this now?" When I started answering he said, "No, I mean 'now' as in 'within the next 45 minutes.'" So I asked him what he was doing over the next 45 minutes and he said he was going to the airport. I told him go to the newsstand and pick up a couple of magazines he would never, ever read, and try to connect ideas, concepts, business models, designs, etc. from that field to his own. A few months later when I returned to talk with his direct reports, he told them he was reading more wedding magazines than ever. It was funny, but highlighted a key point: see inspiration and insight from fields and cultures different than what you know already.

Obviously, these ideas are further outlined in my book, *The Medici Effect*. I convinced my publisher to provide a PDF of the book for free. You can download it off our website, no strings attached. I really think this has helped expand the book's message in areas where it might otherwise have been tough -- for instance universities in Romania where students were fighting over the one copy that existed in the library.