Alison Dean (00:03):

TheoremOne is the leading innovation and engineering firm for the fortune 1,000. We design, build and deliver enterprise-scale technology solutions and are very excited to present The Breakthrough Podcast, an ongoing series where we interview technology leaders to share their experiences and perspectives on what's next in tech.

Welcome to The Breakthrough where we talk with technology leaders about their successes, struggles–and everything in between. I'm Alison Dean, VP of operations at TheoremOne. And today we're talking with Kevin Gray, currently the Chief Information Officer for the city of Burbank, California, and previously VP of Global Media and Infrastructure Technology at Viacom. And before that, VP of IT Infrastructure and Operations at Paramount Pictures. Kevin sent me one of his favorite quotes by W. Edward Deming. "A common disease that afflicts management the world over is the impression that our problems are different. They are different to be sure, but the principles that will help to improve the quality of products and services are universal in nature." So hello, Kevin.

Kevin Gray (00:26):

Hello Alison, how are you?

Alison Dean (01:19):

I'm good. I'm good. Why does that quote resonate with you?

Kevin Gray (01:23):My career has gone from the private sector to the public sector. Media and entertainment into local government. Very, very different sectors. Very, very different types of organizations. However, I've learned a lot of things in my career, gained a lot of skills I've found are applicable wherever I go. As an example, one of the things that I realized here in the city of Burbank is that there's a tremendous opportunity for process improvement everywhere. When I first brought up the concept of lean and Kaizen in one of the executive meetings here, one of our executives looked at me and said, "What is that?" And one of the other executives looked at me and said, "Isn't that for manufacturing?"

Well, needless to say, all of this underscores why there is so much opportunity for process improvement here because the city has never applied those kinds of principles to really improve how we do things here. And that's what Deming was talking about. These principles are applicable, whether you're talking about manufacturing, whether you're talking about the production of a film or a television show, or issuing permits for the development of new structures in a city, the principles still fit.

Alison Dean (02:37):

That's well said, Kevin. So I want to dive into your transition from your tenure in the private sector in media and entertainment, to leading technology for a city that happens to be known for media and entertainment, but nonetheless, an interesting transition. Let's talk about it.

Kevin Gray (02:52):

The worlds are very different and the roles are very different. When I was at Paramount, and when I was at Viacom, the scale of my role was huge. I had team members in Los Angeles, in New York, London, Berlin, Amsterdam, Miami, Tennessee. And before I left, Viacom had acquired Telefe in Argentina. And so I found myself in Bueno Aires incorporating team members down there. So the scale was massive, but it was focused on infrastructure, media infrastructure, yes, but it was still infrastructure. The scope was kind of narrow. Here in the city, we have a population of 108,000 people. We've got a city staff of around 1,500 people, around the same size as the staff that we had at Paramount Pictures when I was there. But my IT staff is very small, our infrastructure is very small, but the scope of what we get involved in, running a city is like 15 entirely different businesses.

A police department is nothing like a power utility, which is nothing like a fire department, which is nothing like a system of libraries. 15 entirely different businesses so the scope is much, much broader. And I find that to be really, really exciting. The pace is different between media and government. The pace in media is super, super fast. Media is always changing so much. When I got the Paramount Pictures, the biggest moneymaker was the sale of DVDs. You can imagine that is not the case anymore. Technology was constantly changing and the pace is really fast. Government is slower, but the thing that was really helpful for me is that slower pace allowed me to learn all of these things that were non-infrastructure that I really needed to learn about, to be an effective leader.

Alison Dean (04:48):

So interesting. So I want to talk about your first year with the city of Burbank and the Re-imagine IT Program. But also how you prioritized the components of it.

Kevin Gray (05:00):

Yes. So the re-imagined IT Program was really about the IT department here taking a step back and taking a fresh look at ourselves. How we do things, how we deliver the services that we deliver, taking a look at our maturity levels, and trying to figure out how we would get better. And so I really came into the city with an open mind. I didn't want to come in with preconceived notions, but I had a wealth of experience and knowledge behind me to really bring to bear. It didn't take me very long to figure out that we really needed to take that step back and take a fresh look. And I really needed to teach my new leadership staff, that there are better ways to do things.

And so the program really consisted of everything from implementing a new project management framework for the city. And this wasn't just an IT problem. This was the citywide problem. The city just did not manage projects well. So we needed to put in a new project management framework, the IT

department had sort of started the semblance of a new ITSM program if you will, trying to implement principles of ITIL, but it was in its infancy. And so we just didn't really have good processes around incident management, problem management, change management. There was a lot that we had to do there. So it was a comprehensive program that looked at everything that we did and tried to find better ways to do it.

Alison Dean (06:28):

I like it. So Joseph was recently on the podcast and he has this question for you.

Kevin Gray (06:37):

My friend, Joseph. I love Joseph.

Alison Dean (06:39):

He says, "Hey, Kevin. Marshall McLuhan said technologies are put out long before they are thought out. How does this affect the work of a CIO and what can a CIO do about it?"

Kevin Gray (06:53):

Yeah, I think there's a couple of perspectives here. More recent years in my career, I've become a believer in the concept of fail fast. Fail fast doesn't mean you're trying to fail really quickly. What it means is to try something. If it works great, if it doesn't fail, take a left turn, take a right turn, whatever you got to do, but keep moving forward. So I'm a firm believer in that and I think it applies here. Yes, sometimes we get technologies out too fast. Sometimes we're putting the cart before the horse. Sometimes we're running so fast, we're tripping over our feet. I get all of that. But the speed of technology, the speed of digitization is fast. And the only way you can keep moving at the pace that you need to is to keep moving forward.

In the old days, when we implemented our project management framework here, we were looking at what's called waterfall project management fundamentals. But the problem with waterfall is you spend all of this time discovering, you spend all this time planning, then you spend a bunch of time trying to execute on what you plan and things change along the way, which suddenly makes your plan not really valid anymore. And then you go months and months before you actually deliver a product, whatever that product is.

Well in this new world, we've got to move fast and we've got to be more agile. Let's get something out there. Let's bring value to our citizens as quickly as we can. And we need to learn as we're bringing that value to do better, bring better, add more features, fix whatever needs to be fixed that's broken, but must keep going. Yeah, that is my view on that today. Now I couple that with my belief that haste makes waste. So don't run so fast that you're tripping over yourself. Think about what you're doing. Take some time to try to think out what you're trying to build, what you're trying to deliver, deliver it in small increments and learn along the way. Does that help?

Alison Dean (08:50):

Well, we'll have to ask Joseph.

Kevin Gray (08:54):

All right. I'll ask him when I see him.

Alison Dean (08:55):

So I want to talk about a presentation that you sent me regarding leveraging design thinking principles with a unique culture of collaboration. I want to know when you realize the effect of all those different design principles on the projects that you were working on or that you were tasked with.

Kevin Gray (09:15):

So it's really a new framework that we've brought here to the city of Burbank. Although I realized along the way that a lot of the principles of design thinking I've actually used and implemented in the past and didn't really realize that it was design thinking. But when we started the design process for our new website, which was something that was 10 years coming, we needed it for a very, very long time. I wanted to take a fresh approach to design. And then that's when I really discovered the full breadth of principles around design thinking. The one thing that struck me immediately was the concept of building empathy for your customers, your citizens, for us, and really trying to understand what their real needs are, what their frustrations are, and what it is they're looking to do. And designing around that. If I had a nickel for every time I heard a developer in the past say something like it doesn't matter what they want, what are the business requirements? I wouldn't be working anymore.

I understand now how bad of an approach that really is. And so we adopted the design thinking principles and really dug into building empathy for our citizens and coming up with personas that really represented our citizens and really designed for what their needs were, that I think in the end, we ended up with five can say, so I think is one of the best municipal websites I've seen. So we did competitive reviews, looked at the websites of Minneapolis, St. Paul and the city of Miami, and the city of Las Vegas. Really some of the best municipal websites out there to really get ideas from them. And we coupled that with all of the discovery that we did with developing our personas and looking at the analytics from our current website and looking at call data for calls that come into the city to really figure out what it was we needed to build and how we needed to present it. I think we ended up with a wonderful product in the end.

Alison Dean (11:13):

Well, I've looked at it and I think it looks great. If I lived in the city of Burbank, I'd be proud.

Kevin Gray (11:17):

Well, thank you. I appreciate that. Now let me ask you, did you have an opportunity to see them before?

Alison Dean (11:24):

In the presentation, you did the side-by-side so yes. And it definitely looks a whole lot better.

Kevin Gray (11:29):

Thank you.

Alison Dean (11:30):

So this year is focused on scaled agile framework transition. Can you talk about all the things that are being prioritized?

Kevin Gray (11:40):

This kind of takes me back to one of your earlier questions about moving too fast. The scaled agile framework is going to give us the ability to deliver value, to deliver digital much faster than we do today. And give us a level of agility for us to be able to turn right, turn left, whatever it is we need to do figuratively speaking, to continue to deliver value for the city. The way we're approaching this is it's not an IT initiative. It's a city initiative. And the first thing that I did was I brought the concept to our entire executive team to explain what it was and how it could be better for the city and how it will improve the way we work together, the way we partner together. And in the end, I've gotten full support from all of the executives of the city. We've defined what was called the lean-agile center of excellence. This is the group of leaders that are going to drive this transformation and of the 18 people that we have, two-thirds of them are from the city, from the business.

They're not all from IT, and everybody is all in, and everybody's very, very excited about it. We've already started to implement some of the concepts. As an example, the safe has this thing called lean portfolio management, which is a more agile and easy, simple way for managing the projects in your portfolio. We implemented that this year and we implemented a formula that you use for prioritizing the things that you're going to work on. We leveraged that for our budgeting process this year with the city and everybody loved it, except for the people whose projects didn't get a high enough score to make the cut. But for the most part, everyone found it to be really, really beneficial. It gave us a fresh new look at a better way of prioritizing the work that we're doing to bring the greatest value to the city. This initiative being a city initiative as it is, I think is going to have a really, really great impact throughout the entire city.

Alison Dean (13:44):

So now let's talk about smart cities. What's on the horizon for the residents of Burbank, California?

Kevin Gray (13:51):

To me, smart cities, digital transformation–those are buzzwords. But there's substance behind those buzzwords. And for me, a smart city is really about leveraging technology to improve the services that we provide to our citizens, whether that is IOT infrastructure that's out in our city, monitoring our environment levels, providing video management or video monitoring to key areas where we need to have that. Or whether it's around automated parking systems or traffic management systems. Whatever it is, it's really about leveraging technology to improve those services that we provide to our citizens. I struggle a little bit with how buzzwords sort of developing a life of their own, and they start meaning all these different, crazy things to different people. I struggle a little bit with the term smart city because we're already a smart city. We just want to continue to leverage technology to continue to improve the services that we provide to our citizens and businesses.

Speaking of my friend, Joe, I was actually on a panel with him at one point in time. And he told the story about these smart garbage cans, that supposedly were going to help the city pick up trash more efficiently than they did before. The problem with rolling out smart trash cans is people already know how to pick up trash and they already know how they want to pick up trash. So those smart garbage cans ended up doing nothing because they're taking the same routes they took in the first place. That's one of those examples of rolling out the technology too fast. We rolled out technology that we really didn't need. There wasn't a problem there to solve in the first place.

Alison Dean (15:37):

It's always interesting when you solve problems that don't actually need solving. I would like to know what you think the most crucial aspect of IT strategy is. Do you think it's the same in the private sector that it is in the public sector or does that strategy change?

Kevin Gray (15:55):

It changes and it doesn't change because technology changes. The most crucial aspect of a company's IT strategy is the business strategy. I argue that if a CIO or CTO wakes up in the morning, thinking about technology, then that person is thinking about the wrong thing. IT strategy must support the business or the agency's business strategy. IT technology is the means to the end. It's not the end. Our city doesn't do technology for the sake of doing technology. Our city provides services to its citizens and its businesses. What we need to do is develop a technology strategy that enables and improves that. I'm a really big advocate of business, objective-driven enterprise architecture, because your enterprise architecture, your strategy, your plans, your vision need to be based on your company or your agency's business needs.

Alison Dean (16:56):

You're not the first person to answer that way, Kevin.

Kevin Gray (17:01):

Technology is technology, but your business strategy changes based on all kinds of factors, economic factors, the business that you're in, partnerships.

Alison Dean (17:12):

Pandemics.

Kevin Gray (17:13):

Pandemics. Thank you. Man, I'm still trying to forget that as quickly as I can.

Alison Dean (17:20):

You and me both. So when does a city leverage outside consultants or vendors versus keeping it in-house with the team that you have? And if you're working with outside vendors, what are the most important attributes that you're looking for?

Kevin Gray (17:38):

My strategy is to keep a small team that can deliver value for the city across the entire city. Because of that, we sort of focus our team on being broad technologists, focused on products and product management, if you will, so that we can deliver whatever value it is that we need to. But we leverage third parties. We use third parties for the delivery of our website. It was led by my team, but we used experts from UX Design Collective. We used experts from SSAI, science software applications, and of course, we deployed it in Cloud. So third parties are really key to everything that we do, but I think it's important that we own what we do.

We own what we're delivering for the city. I'm not a big fan of just outsourcing everything and handing it over. No, we're still accountable. So we need to be accountable. We need to lead it, but we need to bring in the help that we need. And we need to take the burden off of our shoulders to keep the lights on here so that we can focus on bringing new value to the city.

Alison Dean (18:45):

Collaboration and empathy are obviously very important to you. So when working with third parties, what's selling them to you? Is it just that they're experts in what they're doing?

Kevin Gray (18:54):

No, there are other layers to it also. They need to be good partners. They need to be invested in what we're doing. I tend to work with smaller organizations because of that. one of the things that I've experienced and learned in my career is that when you work with these big giant companies, their attention may turn to where the big giant opportunities are in a heartbeat. I experienced this with our outsourcing provider from India, one of the big ones that we used to work with years ago at Paramount

Pictures. They were great when we started off, but then suddenly they got a bigger contract over at Sony and I started seeing my great engineers suddenly disappear and go over to Sony. So working with those big corporations sometimes puts you at that risk. So I like to work with smaller, more boutique firms that can demonstrate that they will be great partners and also have the skills and knowledge to deliver what it is needed to deliver.

Alison Dean (19:52):

Kevin, I'm excited to work with you then. So when I say digital transformation, what does that mean to you?

Kevin Gray (20:01):

For me, it means building a digital ecosystem that enables your organization to provide services to its customers and do its business digitally. That means something different for every business and every agency. For us here in the city, it means putting services in our citizens' pockets, at their fingertips. In the past, they used to come into the building to actually do and handle, what they can now do from their mobile phone or from their PC at home. It also means bringing technology and process improvement to the things that we do internally in the city to enable us to deliver these services faster, more seamlessly, and more frictionless to our citizens and businesses.

Alison Dean (20:48):

Very eloquent. What has been the most impactful digital transformation project that you've been part of?

Kevin Gray (20:54):

Jeez. That's hard. I'm going to talk about the city here. The rollout of that new website and the online services that we've provided, including simple things like online bill payments that we used to not have, online inspection requests, where people can schedule inspections for developments that they may be doing, that you used to have to call in for or used to have to come in and visit. There's a whole range of things that we've started to roll out and we continue to roll out and we're doing more and more and more.

But all of it built on the new digital experience platform that we rolled out for the new website. It wasn't just a website. I should have talked more about our digital experience platform serving really as a primary portal for all of the digital services that we're bringing to our community now. I think that's the biggest thing that I've done here at the city. At Viacom and Paramount, there were just so many things. We were always running 100 miles an hour. I was there since 2006. So you can imagine there were so much that we did, digital film distribution, we were working on streaming right before I left and consolidation and Cloud migrations, and all these things. I've been involved in a lot.

Alison Dean (22:08):

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Of the ones that you just rattled off, when I say, which one did you find to be especially compelling, what jumps out at you?

Kevin Gray (22:16):

I don't know if you could call this a digital transformation project, but these are the two biggest projects that I was involved in. Number one was a global SAP implementation or Paramount Pictures, and then turned around and did the same thing for Viacom a few years later. And then there was the consolidation of global infrastructure teams across Paramount Pictures, Viacom Media Networks, BET, Viacom International Media Networks, and then Telefe. We're talking a lot about technology, but the most impactful and intriguing thing about all of this is the people. What we develop in terms of technology is all about serving people, whether it's the customers or it's the team that I'm leading, the people are always the most intriguing and the most difficult thing to deal with. Whether we're talking about trying to marry different cultures, different languages, different values, and expectations.

I remember when we were consolidating this infrastructure team and I was having to try to explain California people to New York people and New York people to California people, to try to get them to understand each other. And then you throw in support team from India and then the dev-ops team from Belarus and trying to get these people to be able to be effective team members was the most compelling and impactful thing from a career perspective and just from achieving that kind of synergy was a big accomplishment I felt for me.

Alison Dean (23:46):

So in terms of struggles that you might've overcome, were those struggles related more to the people side?

Kevin Gray (23:54):

Always, always. The technology is the easy part. And I've always said this and it is really, really true. The technology is the easy part. The person part is always the most difficult because that's where the most dynamics are. Data is data, but those people, everybody's different.

Alison Dean (24:12):

Because of that, what do you do now when you kickstart a project to help to align the people as much as you can?

Kevin Gray (24:20):

I always focused on the people. I focus on relationships. I focus on my relationships with them and I focused on their relationships with each other. one of the other things that I love about Agile and Scrum, if you will, Safe if you will, is the intrinsic motivation of knowledge workers. People want to learn. People want

to grow. People want to add value. Finding what drives each and every person and helping to bring the best out of them is one of the things that I love to do. And I'm also a coach. So I bring some of those things from coaching to the job to help try to motivate the team and help the team work together.

Alison Dean (25:02):

What do those things look like? How do you motivate them?

Kevin Gray (25:04):

First of all, vision, lay out a vision that you can paint a picture for them all to see and tout the benefits for the city and for them, for us to head in this particular direction. Again, everybody's motivated differently. So I think is really, really important to build those relationships with those people, understand everybody and understand what motivates them, and tailoring your story, what you're trying to sell or accomplish with them to that particular individual. Individualization is one of my strengths. So I really leverage that. I'm a big fan of Phil Jackson as a coach and how he was able to bring complete opposites together like Shaq and Kobe and win three championships with them. And he did that via how he built relationships with all of them and drove the relationships between them also.

Alison Dean (25:57):

So in general, how would you describe your leadership style?

Kevin Gray (26:02):

In general, I'd like to say that my leadership style is thoughtful. I've heard some people say that I'm extremely tenacious, that I never take no for an answer, which is true. I never take no for an answer. I may accept a different direction, a different path for getting to our goal. But when I set a goal for myself, it's all about getting there. The problem with that is sometimes you can cause problems along the way when you're solely goal-focused. That's one of the things that I've learned about myself recently, that I need to manage a little bit better, but I say thoughtful, I love to build cohesive teams and bring people together to drive towards a common goal.

Alison Dean (26:47):

In that case, what do you want your direct reports to remember you for?

Kevin Gray (26:49):

I would like my direct reports to remember me and that I brought my knowledge and skills and talent to the city of Burbank, to develop and drive a vision, to make the city of Burbank IT department, the most vital and trusted business partner, advisor and service provider for all municipal IT departments in the state of California. So me and Joseph are sort of in a competition there. He's my great friend. I love Joseph. So I

love that you actually brought a question from him for the interview today, and I'm going to give him a call and say, "Hey man, why do you do that?"

Alison Dean (27:23):

I want to talk about the most important lessons that you've learned from your mentors.

Kevin Gray (27:28):

I've had so many mentors. I always have a mentor. I've had a mentor at every level of my career. Even today, I work with an executive coach so that I have a mentor. one of my other strengths is I'm a learner, I'm always continually trying to learn and grow. I'm going to take this back real basic. one of the things that I learned from one of my early, early mentors and I've heard throughout my career is basically that reading is fundamental. For me, the book that set my course in leadership is called The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership by John C. Maxwell. When I first got to Paramount Pictures from Dreamworks, my first six months were an abject failure. Dreamworks was kind of a startup company and it was really small at the time. I tried to bring my tactical approach and tactical mindset to a role that was really a strategic role. And those first six months were an abject failure for me.

I really had to learn a different approach at that point in time in my career. And one of the things that help set that course for me was that book. Now, since then, I've continued to read, I read today, some of the books that I'm reading are What Got You Here Won't Get You There by Marshall Goldsmith. Start With Why by Simon Sinek. Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goldman. I re-read The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership with my leadership team here last year. I thought it was really important for us to do that as a team and we read a chapter every week. And then we would talk about the chapter in our weekly meeting afterward. Just trying to bring a common mindset to strategic thinking. So I'm looking now, I'm thinking very seriously about reading The Speed of Trust by Stephen Covey. Also, right now I'm re-reading You Can Negotiate Anything by Herb Cohen. So now we've got audible books, which makes it easier for people who don't really like to read, but just continuing to grow and learn, I think is really important for anybody.

Alison Dean (29:34):

I also really like the idea of a workbook club, especially given that many of us are working remotely right now. And I think if you all can be doing one thing, that's the same thing and then talk about it. I think that's pretty powerful from just a feeling of togetherness, even if you don't necessarily agree on the subject matter. I think it's still a bonding experience.

Kevin Gray (29:59):

Yeah, it was. We had some great discussions. The problem with the 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership in 2020 is that the book was written 20 years ago. So some of the examples aren't very contemporary. There are some leaders there that have since fallen from grace and things like that, but still, the stories are so, so

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relevant. And the debate that we were able to have after each chapter I thought was really, really interesting.

Alison Dean (30:27):

Absolutely. Actually, I've tasked a few people in my organization with reading through a particular book and we're going to do a mind dump session in about a month to talk about it. So I'm excited about that. I want to know what projects you're especially interested in as you move forward in your career?

Kevin Gray (30:47):The truth is we're not really doing projects anymore. We call them epics.

Alison Dean (30:51):Epics?

Kevin Gray (30:52):

We call them features, user stories, and we're taking them on prioritized by the value that they're bringing to the city. But I'll tell you what most intrigues me right now. And that is the possibilities around the marriage of data analytics and machine learning, AI. I feel that the possibilities are boundless and it really excites me to be able to bring those things, to bear, to solve our problems here in the city, to provide better services for our citizens and businesses. That's what intrigues me the most.

Alison Dean (31:31):

Can you talk about one application of that, that you're looking forward birthing?

Kevin Gray (31:37):

Yeah. So in our roadmap right now for our website is an interactive AI-driven chatbot. So that's one of the things we're going to roll out here really, really soon. We're going to need to feed this chatbot the data and the information it needs to really be effective. But if we can do that, which I believe we really, really can, it would be of such great value. People could just go to the website, ask the chatbot a question and have the chatbot answer the question. Or if the chatbot can't answer the question, direct them to the human being that can. That's really intriguing. And I know we can do it. We're going to do it here really soon.

Alison Dean (32:14):

So besides AI machine learning, which I agree, I'm very excited to see what new things we'll all be working with. But what other future innovations are you excited about? It doesn't have to be focused on your current role, but just in life what future innovations do you feel excited about?

Kevin Gray (32:33):

I got to say self-driving cars. Self-driving cars, self-driving public transportation I'm really, really intrigued by. I think it can go a long way with helping us with our environmental issues, our traffic issues, especially here

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in Los Angeles. I think there's a lot of promise there. And then, of course, clean energy. I am really, really enthused about the potentials for clean energy, for so many things that I think will be a benefit for the human race.

Alison Dean (33:07):

So you'll definitely have to check out my conversation with Megan Pritchard who's leading autonomous vehicles at Ford. We had a very interesting conversation about self-driving cars. Yes, indeed. And apparently, there'll be with us pretty soon there Kevin.

Kevin Gray (33:23):

I know they will. I know they will.

Alison Dean (33:26):

I said, so 50 years? And she was like 20 years, 10 to 20 years and I thought, oh, okay. All right, we're really doing it.

Kevin Gray (33:33):

Yeah. I think we commonly overestimate the time that something will come to us and underestimate the impacts. The self-driving cars, although they are right around the corner, I think it's going to take some time to get here, but I think the impact is going to be huge, just in terms of the reduction in the number of traffic accidents. Removing human error from driving is just incredible. And then for the flow of traffic.

Alison Dean (34:01):

Yeah, which we need here in Southern California.

Kevin Gray (34:04):

Yes we do.

Alison Dean (34:06):

Let's talk about a breakthrough that you had recently.

Kevin Gray (34:09):

So a couple of things professionally, the breakthrough that we had with our executives here at the city for the support that they're giving us for our Safe framework rollout, I think is huge. A lot of technology organizations take on these kinds of things and they just look inside. They don't really look outward and look to the impact that they may or may not have on the partners that they're trying to work with. And so

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bringing them along, I think was a huge breakthrough for us. For me, that book that I'm reading, What Got You Here Won't Get You There, and recognizing some of the 20 habits that hold you back. Things that didn't really come to mind before reading the book. As an example, one of the bad habits, passing judgment. I'm so good at passing judgment on people in a second. Talk to you for five seconds to size you up and I've already judged what kind of person you are. But that can be so detrimental when you use that incorrectly.

Failing to give proper recognition. I have been known to say, you know what? I'm not congratulating these guys until the project is done. If it isn't done, you aren't getting any congratulations, but people, they accomplish things. They do positive things all along the way. And you know what? It doesn't cost you a dime to thank somebody, to recognize somebody for the good work that they're doing along the way. You don't have to wait till it's done. That's a huge habit of mine that I've had for many, many years that I'm going to fix. I'm fixing it here at the job, you know what? I'm fixing it with my family, with my kids. I love my kids and I just need to give them proper recognition more often and tell them that I love them more often.

Not listening. I'm very good at not listening. I used to call it convenient hearing and I think I kind of needed it. So many kids around or whatever, it's a gift and a curse to be able to concentrate deeply. And I am very good at concentrating very deeply. I can block everything out, 20 people talking to me and not hear a thing. The curse is the impact that that has on others who are trying to communicate. So I've learned that I've got to do a better job of listening. And then there's the book calls it, the excessive need to be me. I say I'm really good at convenient hearing and all of these other things. And just accepting that as being me and not really trying to improve things that I know that I can improve. So I recognize those things in me and so I'm taking steps to improve those. So that's been a big breakthrough for me personally.

Alison Dean (36:45):

I like it. Kevin, thank you so so much. You certainly have left me with many books that I apparently need to add to my shopping cart. So appreciate that.

Kevin Gray (36:54):

It's a wonderful thing. I got them all sitting right down on my tablet.

Alison Dean (36:59):

I like it. I had a conversation with someone on my team recently because I was saying to him I buy all these books. Like I really like buying a book and my husband is like, why are you buying all these books? I don't immediately read them. I mean, there are many I just have never even opened. And someone on my team said it's that the knowledge is there for you when you do need it though Alison. It's that it's right there. Like you can just access even a chapter of it. And I thought I like this logic. I really like this logic. I'm going to keep buying books because of that. I'm like, that's my logic. All that knowledge just on the shelf. I love it.

Kevin Gray (37:35):

Yes. I agree. When we started our Safe transition, an agile coach told me about a book called How to Avoid a Train Wreck about Safe. So I got it on Kindle and I was riding somewhere with somebody. I wasn't driving so I had the ability to read and I read through the first couple of chapters and I'm like, I am so happy that she told me about this book. And that I happened to have it with me cause I was riding and had nothing else to do.

Alison Dean (38:04):

Perfect. Any final thoughts?

Kevin Gray (38:07):

No, just that, Alison, it has been wonderful talking to you. It's wonderful meeting you. And I will say, like I've said before, you have got the most wonderful smile I've ever seen in my entire life. So that smile, if nothing else has made my day.

Alison Dean (38:21):

Thank you, Kevin. I appreciate that. I'll just keep grinning now because you're making me blush. Thank you for tuning into The Breakthrough, brought to you by TheoremOne. Make sure to hit that subscribe button and leave us a comment. You can find us wherever you listen to podcasts and for more great content, follow us on Twitter and Instagram at Breakthru Pod. I'm your host Alison Dean. Until next week.