

Hey, the focus of this podcast rarely comes up directly in discussions about leaders making decisions—but one thing is for sure: the folks who excel at long-term sustained stewardship use this key tool in their toolkit—and they do it relentlessly! Intrigued? OK, here goes. Long-term, sustained, successful stewardship requires astutely *navigating conflicting mindsets*. What, you say? Well, to be blunt, it's absolutely crucial that leaders effectively *navigate conflicting mindsets*. So, let's break that practice down.

To start, let's look at the fancy word "ethos." Webster's defines *ethos* as "*the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution.*" Repeating that: *ethos* is "*the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution.*" Solid synonyms for *ethos* are *ideology* or *mindset*. Here, we're going to settle on using the word "*mindset.*"

How about a reality check? In every organization, each and every person has at least a slightly different mindset, a different set of assumptions, goals and values. And those mindsets may be a whole lot different from one another—they conflict! Perhaps you were rudely awakened to this reality in your first year of marriage—yeah, when you entered into that covenant arrangement with at least a few different basic mindsets than your spouse! Like how to handle finances. Or what church to be a part of. These types of differences in mindset are unavoidable! But resolvable! But also, how about you navigating conflicting mindsets from a workplace perspective? To slice and dice this most effectively, let's break some concrete realities into categories, doing that purely from the workplace perspective of a CEO. Here we go.

*First, your employer's mindset.* This encompasses a broad set of possibilities. Examples can run the gamut, say, from you leading a Planned Parenthood location with its mindset to you leading a nonprofit that works against Planned Parenthood's goals. Or from you leading a luxury retail store chain to you leading Walmart because it provides low-cost necessities to low-income people. So, just what is the mindset of *your* workplace as to its mission...focus...reason for existence? Is it customer-centric, like Amazon? Employee-centric, like many government offices? Cause-centric, like churches or environmental groups?

And could that change? Yes, sooner rather than later, it's likely you will be surprised in some facet or another that's a major change in the overarching mindset of your enterprise. Many folks nowadays are finding that some of the organizations where they've spent their entire career and thought they knew well have suddenly shifted their values pretty radically. Hey, we're now living in a culture-radicalizing era!

Or maybe you just joined the organization and find it wasn't really what you thought it was. Along those lines, a great movie several decades ago was *The Firm*, starring Tom Cruise as a budding lawyer. Turns out, what looked like a prestigious law firm doing everything on the up-and-up was a law firm in bed with the Mafia. That's radical! But we all should always test our going-in expectations. How about joining a Fortune 500 company with its current values as compared to the same company 20 years ago? Or how about even five years ago? How about a church's theology today compared to the same church 100 years ago—yeah, from one generation to the next, some churches in America have morphed their mindset from "getting their neighbors saved" to "winning culture wars." So, what happened? Well, their mindsets shifted!

*Next, your personal mindset.* Quick, can you identify your key *personal mindset* for your work-life? So, at work, just what is your key personal mindset: is it *recognized stewardship of the company that you steer*...or is it *personal wealth accumulation*...or is it *supporting your family*? Maybe it's *service to others*...or *standing for Christian values*...or *Gospel witness*. So, what is it? Frankly, many can't name their key mindset, much less convert that mindset into fruitful results. And that includes how they react to their workplace's shift in cultural agendas! Indeed, these can be rocky times...so are you on firm ground?

Let's take an example where conflicts in mindsets can and do arise. So, you decide as CEO that *your priority as a personal mindset* is your devoted stewardship of the company that you lead...that you navigate. But your Board of Directors just informed you of its new social agenda that clearly does not represent your Christian values. Now *you* know that no human organization is perfectly aligned with the Bible...even churches! But here, the Board has deviated from what you consider a solid moral compass.

So, what do you do? *Are you still sure your prioritized mindset of stewarding your organization is the most important?* “Well, of course not,” you might say, “the Board’s change here violates Biblical standards...I can’t lead that, so I must resign!” ...But wait, you made commitments to your kid’s college tuition and your charitable giving. Are you really going to resign the CEO position when your priorities like those weigh in?

Besides, did you fully consider here that no organization is perfect...and perhaps God’s intent for you is to stay in your position to influence and provide Gospel witness in due course, toughing it out while your “purist” Christian friends criticize you? After all, did Daniel need to have fully agreed with Babylon’s values in order to serve in the king’s courts? In fact, perhaps it will be your stewardship in the new, conflicted situation that best affords effective witness for the Gospel! ...*But maybe not—perhaps God wants you to resign your CEO position and simply trust Him.* This is the *crucial navigation of conflicting mindsets*, and, frankly, situations like this are defining moments of the Christian life, a challenging walk with Christ!

Next, how about *the conflicting mindsets among other key people in the organization* you lead as CEO? That’s a common type of conflict that often arises. So...your CFO is fantastic at making his entire finance division efficient, like getting the company’s product suppliers to accept delayed payments. Wow, that means the company can borrow much less from the bank—gaining great financial savings to the company!

But not so fast. The performance of the COO, Chief Operating Officer, now looks bad because she is unable to get those very same suppliers to offer the best prices and get needed production materials on a timely basis. Of course, you as CEO challenge her to do so—that’s key to her job performance! But, when you look into it, you find what’s really happening here is the CFO is indeed deeply restricting funds in the supply chain to meet his own, *limited* department-level goals—yes, that’s his workplace mindset! But he’s directly hindering the COO in her broader, organization-wide mindset. Frankly, these types of conflicting mindsets happen in the real world all the time!

So, who’s obviously at fault here? Your CFO, right? No, the fault lies with you as CEO for not realizing this earlier and reconciling the workplace mindsets of the CFO and COO, that is, by making the rewards for *both* congruent with total organization performance! You see, *that* result would be the CEO astutely navigating conflicting mindsets! The reality is, a CEO’s key, ongoing task is to identify any multiple conflicting mindsets, then *resolve, reconcile, restructure, and reward across those mindsets synergistically.*

Now let’s back up: the real focus for all of us is to make sure our personal ship is “on course” to significantly help our employers thrive. We must dedicate ourselves to being a good steward in our particular role. So, here’s the deal: in order for each of us to thrive as believers in relation to organizations and other people, first and foremost we need to know what *our own key mindsets are* about life in general and our work life in particular. Then we need to find roles and enterprises where those mindsets can bear great fruit! Again, in this era of radically shifting, highly-politicized, volatile mindsets, this pursuit is crucial for each Christian.

So let’s talk “real world”—where theology meets hard reality, where, as they say, “the rubber meets the road.” If someone were to ask me what my primary mindsets in life are, the following come to mind.

1. Jesus is Lord and Savior—and specifically *He is my Lord and Savior*, by faith.
2. Every Jesus-follower like me is in *full-time ministry*, regardless of his or her vocation.
3. God has appointed me to be a *great steward in every role* that I am appointed to throughout life...roles like believer, husband, dad, grandpa, teacher, businessman, and neighbor-lover.
4. *God desires all people to be saved* (1 Timothy 2:4). That *intensifies* extending love to neighbors!

The interesting thing about these four awesome, Bible-based mindsets is that they work to vector my behavior to serve as a great steward for every person I come into contact with—that’s because God calls me to love every neighbor and, in the fullness of time, share the Gospel unto salvation!

So, with the turbulent waters that are almost always certainly ahead, just what are *your* mindsets in life and workplace? Are you ready to astutely navigate conflicting mindsets? Yeah, is your own mindset ready?

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Articulate your condensed, working set of your personal mindsets for your work life in the context of Biblical truth. Then give an example of your recent effective navigation of conflicting mindsets.
2. Have you personally observed a business or nonprofit where an inattentive CEO allows one key executive to serve his or her limited mindset to the detriment of the whole organization? Discuss.
3. Several Christian denominations which used to be very solid Biblically have dissolved or split into different factions. What is an example of one faction separating from another due to mindset conflicts that, in your view, is justified? Discuss.