

Transcript for The City Speak Podcast Season 4, Episode 8, “Staying Plugged In”

[A message from a member of the League’s Business Leadership Council]

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[Podcast theme music begins]

Luke Fischer:

From the League of Minnesota Cities, this is The City Speak. I'm your host, Luke Fischer. I'm joined today by a good friend of mine, Joel Young — Mr. Chatfield. He served the community for 30 and a half years as a city clerk [podcast theme music fades out]. Through his city leadership, he's taken on broader roles in the state, serving with the Municipal Clerk and Finance Officers Association, the Minnesota Association of Small Cities, the Southwest Minnesota League of Municipalities, and with the League of Minnesota Cities. I've gotten to know Joel personally standing in the back of a conference room at a League conference, or at a Minnesota City Managers Association event. And I've always found him to be a thoughtful and insightful leader, and somebody who always leaves me with a lot more than I'm sure I've left him with. So Joel, thank you so much for joining us today.

Joel Young:

Yeah, Luke. Thank you, I appreciate it, Luke. I look forward to chatting with you today.

Luke Fischer:

So Joel, I'm curious, 30 and a half years with the city of Chatfield — what brought you into public sector leadership to begin with?

Joel Young:

Yeah, it's pretty amazing to think about that much time could have passed. Uh, you know, before working here, Luke, I had a financial planning practice. I had an office in Chatfield. I had ...

Luke Fischer:

Really?

Joel Young:

... a second office in Preston, just down the road here. One of the things I did for getting to know people was community service. I joined all sorts of civic organizations. And then at some point, I was able to help the city write a small city development program grant.

Luke Fischer:

Oh.

Joel Young:

Did that two years in a row, actually. And that, you know, kindled my interests even more. And so then when this position opened up, they were looking for somebody that had some financial expertise and by this time I was a pretty well-known quantity with people here and vice versa. So, we got together, and it's worked out, it's worked out for me. That's for sure.

Luke Fischer:

So Joel, with over 30 years in the city of Chatfield, my guess is to have that type of staying power in the city, you've had to have gotten a lot of things right. You've had to have done a lot of things really well. But I'm curious if there's been a time along the way, maybe where something didn't go so well or maybe you even made a mistake. And it's kind of one of those informative things that have changed your approach as a leader in your community, or as a leader in your organization.

Joel Young:

No one can be in a position as long as I have without people who are willing to accept you and encourage you and support you. So yeah, there's obviously lots of mistakes in the past. I can drive around town, show you a bunch of 'em. When I think about a story of the value of being connected, the value of relationships, the value of being invested in the industry. And I was thinking about one person in particular, but there's actually, as I thought about it, there's been several I've known over the years who left the industry earlier, sooner than they probably would have needed to. You know, folks who were thriving, who were totally engaged, totally doing all the right things, right? And then for whatever reason, maybe not going to that conference or, maybe not joining that small group, maybe not going to that regional event. And slowly losing perspective, slowly losing the understanding that what they're doing is really, they're engaged something so much greater than themselves.

Luke Fischer:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joel Young:

And, without getting recharged, without a support system, without staying plugged in, it's easier to become a little bit downtrodden, negative, maybe, maybe sarcastic. And then, you know, if that slips into cynicism, it's pretty hard to reconcile the ship. So, I think about my own need for those connections, my own need for those relationships. And the need to watch for that in others around me. And to encourage those things that you need to do that keep you healthy.

Luke Fischer:

Yeah. You know, I think when you're in a leadership position in a city, oftentimes it can feel isolating, right? You're kind of by yourself, you're on an island, you've got a public that's watching you so closely. So Joel, what do you do to keep your batteries charged and to maintain that perspective that you mentioned?

Joel Young:

I do have a pretty good support system built. I'm in a leadership growth group. And that represents about eight people, eight peers that, we get together every other month. We read books, we talk about ideals and ethics and values, and we support each other.

Luke Fischer:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joel Young:

I've got another group, which is another six or eight of us that ...

Luke Fischer:

Sure.

Joel Young:

... we get together once a month. We're there to talk, we're there to listen, we're there to support. And then I've actually, I've got another group. But there's about four of us. We just text each other, and you know, "Hey, check out what I just put on the grill," you know. "Check out this cool beer I found."

Luke Fischer:

[laughs]

Joel Young:

And so on and so forth. And that's this lighthearted connectedness. And then every once in a while we really need each other, and it's really easy to talk. So, those are the things that I have in place. Like I say, they just kind of happen organically. But it's really important to me.

Luke Fischer:

Yeah. So how do you make that a priority for your staff and the people that work with you and for you?

Joel Young:

We all got to know the concept of the one word. And for those who don't know, that's the concept of, you distill your priorities for the year, you might say, to one simple word that might lead you to be the person that you want to be in the future. That you understand you're always a work in progress. I introduced the one-word concept to the group, and now every one of us has a word. And we've been doing that for about five years. So, in the end here in Chatfield, when we have those meetings, we end up sharing a piece of ourselves. And we're talking about business, we share a piece of ourselves and that's really helpful.

Luke Fischer:

Yeah, so what's your word this year, Joel?

Joel Young:

It's self-talk. I had to hyphenate it.

Luke Fischer:

Okay.

Joel Young:

[laughs]

Luke Fischer:

[laughs]

Joel Young:

You know, I had gone through a period, somewhat stressful. I had that, you know, which dog do I feed in my head, right? The negative dog ...

Luke Fischer:

Right.

Joel Young:

... or the positive dog. And, listening to that talk in your head that ... those moments of doubt. "No, I'm not gonna feed that one. I'm not gonna listen to that. I've got this", you know. "I'm prepared for this. I love this", you know, whatever it might be. So self-talk has been a word that, it's been working for me.

Luke Fischer:

That's wonderful. And, you know, with the context of the past year that we've had, I think everybody's been tempted by both dogs in their mind, right?

Joel Young:

Absolutely.

Luke Fischer:

So that's good that you're doing that with some intentionality. That's outstanding.

Luke Fischer:

So Joel, I think you kind of hit on my next question a little bit here, but a lot of what we're trying to focus in on with this season of our podcast is the concept of resiliency for leaders. I'm curious if you have any other advice or perspective for people on something you've done to stay resilient.

Joel Young:

I think about driving home from a conference. Almost every single time, I drive home and I think, "Well, why didn't I know that? You know, I got it pretty good." Or, "Holy cow, they're really doing something cool over at that city, I wonder if I could do that. I wonder if my department could do that. I wonder if my city could do that." You know, you get that point of inspiration. And so then you can come home and maybe aspire to it. But we all have our times in life when we can do more or less than other times.

Luke Fischer:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joel Young:

But, you need to get yourself in a spot where you can be inspired. And you need to be able to be, I don't know, confident enough or vulnerable enough to share of yourself so that others can be inspired, too.

Luke Fischer:

Yeah, that's great. Joel, thank you so much for making time for us today and sharing your story and your perspective about the importance of staying connected with people.

Joel Young:

Well, thank you, Luke, I always love talking with you. So, I appreciate it.

Luke Fischer:

As I reflect on my conversation with Joel Young today, I think his point about looking out is one of the most important things that we can do today. These are tough times, and we shouldn't try to do anything alone. And, if you can build a network with people you can trust, people who can be honest with you, you can be way more effective as a leader. I know that's something I'm taking away from our conversation today.

[Podcast theme music begins]

Luke Fischer:

So that's it for our show. Thank you so much to Joel Young, city clerk in the city of Chatfield, and to all of you out there, listening and doing the hard and rewarding work that cities do. You can find us in all the places where podcasts are found, and you can write and review us there as well. We love to hear from you, so please send us your comments or suggestions to podcast@lmc.org. Thanks so much, and be well.

[Podcast theme music ends]