

Corey Andrew Powell (00:00):

I am so excited to be joined today by Neil Khaund, the CEO and president of the National Society of Leadership and Success that we also affectionately call the NSLS. And we are the accredited, largest leadership honor society in The United States and Neil brings over a decade of higher education experience and organizational growth experience as well. And we're really excited to have him here leading the way as we take on new international initiatives. So Neil, welcome to Motivational Mondays.

Neil Khaund (00:29):

Thank you so much, Corey. It's honestly a thrill to be here. I've heard a few of the podcasts and Motivational Mondays, so I'm, I'm honestly, I'm honored to be here.

Corey Andrew Powell (00:38):

Oh wow. Well, we are honored to have you here as well. So it's really, really evident to people who've worked with you that academia is not just a job for you. It is a passion, considering the work you've done with Kaplan online and Livius Prep, which is a college preparatory franchise. You definitely have a passion for this. So I would love to know what is it that drives your passion for working in the educational field?

Neil Khaund (01:02):

Yeah, it's a good question. So I would say there's, there's two reasons that I would say, kind of education has just become my focus. So the first was one I was not expecting. So the first is that you know, my family actually really comes from the education background. And so what I mean is my extended family in India, right? So I'm actually of Indian descent. I grew up in north America. But all of my extended family is in India, right? So my grandfather actually is a noted historian in our part of India. And so, and actually you can find his books in the library of Congress and then all of my aunts and uncles, they're professors, they're teachers. And it's interesting because when I graduated college I don't really have an interest in education.

Neil Khaund (01:44):

Right. I mean, I went into investment banking like everybody else. Right? And so it's funny how, like, within just a couple years I ended up in education and that's really where I've spent, you know, the better part of two decades now focused on this industry. So I would say one is I just kind of, I think I have a natural desire to be a part of it, maybe part my DNA, but, and then secondly the other aspect of it, I think is also more important I guess, is in terms of just a passion I have for coaching and mentoring others. And the role here at the NLS allows me to do that at scale, right? Not only with our team, but are we also able to kind of build tools and solutions and programs that, that really can help students strive to find that best version of themselves. Right? And, I think education, it really is that effective way to do it. So I would say it's kind of the, the combination of those two.

Corey Andrew Powell (02:35):

But I do wanna ask you though, working in an educational field, it's an ever-changing landscape Neil. So how do you stay abreast of all the current changes, right. Constantly moving this, this whole academic world, especially when you include technology. So for you, although you are the president of an educational institution now, how do you still stay abreast of learning new things within your role?

Neil Khaund (02:59):

Yeah, so I, you know, within my role, I would say the good part is that there's no shortage of information today, right? Whether it's, you know, through LinkedIn or other places, I mean there's, there's plenty of opportunities I would say to learn. It's a question of how do you filter it to find something that's useful and you can distill to your every day. And I would say that there's kind of two specific ways that have really helped me just kind of continue to evolve myself. So one is certainly, you know, I am a big reader, so I definitely enjoy as much as I can getting different perspectives from books. Right. And so but I like to do it in, in a more, I guess maybe it's a little different ways. I try to look at different times in history and I try to like, get a sense of two perspectives.

Neil Khaund (03:41):

So more recently I had just completed I just read Napoleon Hill's "Think and Grow Rich" right. Which is, I know is a big, big book for the NSLS. And so really helpful to get that perspective in terms of kind of you know, what that book is talking about. And at the same time I've been reading sat NAELA as a ready refresh. Right. So it's a book more recently or, well, he

published it, I think just a few years ago. Really talking about kind of his time at Microsoft in terms of kind of his approach. So I find that helpful to kind of get two perspectives from two different time periods and try to kind of put it all together. Yeah. So I would say that's more on kind of the academic side. But in terms of on the day to day side, I think one thing that's really been helpful for me is kind of building my own mastermind group with other CEOs and executives who I've become close with over time to really just kind of have somebody to bounce ideas off with that isn't working with you on a daily basis.

Neil Khaund (04:35):

Right. And I, and I would say that for everybody, it's crucial. Try to find that mastermind group for yourself of folks who, it shouldn't be a transactional relationship, right? It should be something where you're just as willing to give as much as you take as much as you take. Right? And so it's something that I would highly suggest for everybody. So I think those two approaches that really serve me well.

Corey Andrew Powell (04:59):

That's really important to mention because we are obviously a leadership podcast and when it comes to some common commonalities that I found between CEOs successful people, I have found that there is this understanding that you have to nurture the support group around you. You have to make sure that they are well taken care of and they are given the opportunities also to succeed. So share with me how you feel about that as far as the importance of you are only as good as the team that you are nurturing.

Neil Khaund (05:30):

Yeah. I mean, I can't say enough about this right. In terms of, and, and I, I would say that this is something I've, I've found to be consistent among folks that, that tend to be really successful is just continuing to focus in, on bringing the best talent into your organization. Your job as a CEO, and as a leader is to really acquire that talent for the areas that you wanna focus in on. And how do you make them work well together, really the, as a CEO, as a leader, your job is to bring these people together towards the achievement of a goal. Right? And so the good part is that you don't have to be the smartest person in the room. And I think that's the mistake many leaders make is that they try to be that smartest person in the room.

Neil Khaund (06:15):

And really what talent is looking for is to be inspired is to be motivated towards a goal and be organized towards that goal. So I think that that's something I really do, try to focus in on is let's bring the best talent in that we can, let's really make sure they're supported in a way towards a goal that we've all kind of identified and how do we continue to develop them, right? Like what are those areas or gaps that they consider that we look at and how do we work together to continue to improve those gaps? I think if you can kind of focus on those three elements, that's really how you can build that kind of that team that is not, can not only be successful during the good times, but can be adaptable when things aren't going that well, and, you know, we saw more recently with COVID how important that is. So that team dynamic it's crucial.

Corey Andrew Powell (06:58):

Yeah. And it's interesting for what I learned as a manager for the first time, years ago, when I got my first role as a manager, as a copywriting manager and I had my first team and within like the first week I realized maybe 80%, I don't know exactly, but maybe 80% of that job was managing people. It wasn't the job. Like we knew the job, right. I was a writer, they were writers. That's how I, that's why we hired them. They were talented, but it was the person who came in and they weren't doing well that day because maybe something was going on at home or they were having some difficulties, you know, personally. And I realized that so much of that is kind of also being compassionate with your team. Definitely. And not making it all about work sometimes. So I found that to be one of the things that helped me out. Now, I know you were also a big proponent of the Gen Z generation, not to say that every generation is not great. Yes. But we do have some very specific, really interesting talking points when it comes to generation Z. And now I know that in many ways, I think they're misunderstood. I think sometimes corporations misunderstand them, think that they perhaps are a bit self-centered, but actually you have a very different approach to that. So speak to me about your thoughts about gen Z and why they are actually one of the potentially most influential generations to be in the workforce.

Neil Khaund (08:14):

Yeah. So I, I can't speak enough about this just because, you know, I think in our, I work with the NLS, but even my own more recent work in kind of the college prep world, I've really had the opportunity opportunity to see gen Z kind of grow up into this, what I would consider extremely dynamic and talented aspect of our workforce. And, they're gonna be the dominant part of our workforce soon enough. But really what it comes down to is, you know, gen Z is like really the first true digital generation, which gives them the talent and the ability I would say to be really productive and impactful in this new, like work

life fusion that we live in. Right. I mean, they are like built for it. The other aspect that I would say that defines them compared to other generations is that because of that digital capability, they've had access to information so much faster than, you know, millennials or gen Xers have had.

Neil Khaund (09:05):

And so as a result, they have developed their own opinions on issues that matter to them at a much earlier age. Right. And so because of, you know, you combine that plus their capability in the digital world. They've also been able, able to find a way to communicate through social platforms again, on the opinions that they care about. So not only are they able to kind of understand issues a little bit quicker and communicate them, they're able to take action. And so I, I find to be really exciting and impactful. And, and on top of that though, I think companies need to be aware of that. And instead of being scared, look at it as an opportunity to bring a new and dynamic element to your company. And I think if, if you approach it that way, you'd be, you're gonna be blown away at the talent that you can bring in and kind of force multiplier that they can be for your company.

Corey Andrew Powell (09:58):

I've had that conversation a few times with past motivational, Mondays guest, most recently with a woman named Joan Fallon, who's really amazing. And she spoke about how so often the, she called them the gatekeepers, I guess the previous generations who are resistant to change. You know, there's a component there too, where they're like, you just mentioned, there's a fear. And she took a different approach when she needed something done, technically for her company, she went to her 20 something year old nephew who knew how to code and program. And she's like, I need files to do X, Y, Z on my computer. And she said, I've been trying for like six months. And he did it like in 20 minutes, you know? Right. I'm gonna code this blam blam blam. Yeah. You know, and she was like, you know what, he's worth every moment of what they're demanding because they are, as you mentioned of a generation where technology is just second nature.

Neil Khaund (10:47):

Right. It's, it's second nature. And I think what's also interesting though, too. And an opportunity is because they're so mission driven. If you can be more clear about your values as a company, you're not only gonna get a workforce that is talented technically, for example, but you're also gonna get a workforce that is, I would say, even more loyal, right? Like in the sense that if their values align to yours, that is a phenomenal match because they are more clear about what, what, what those values are in terms of how it means to them. Right. And so if that alignment is there, you got a phenomenal match.

Corey Andrew Powell (11:19):

Yes. I do remember reading that one of the big things with generation Z is that they have a, a high standard of social consciousness that they hold a corporation to, that they would wanna work for. So, you know, that corporate consciousness is a big deal with that, particularly demographic. And if you're not really aligned with their, what they think you should be doing though, they have no problem leaving, going, well, this is not for me. And I'll figure it out when I leave. Whereas my mom and I talked, she's like, well, I was at the same job for 37 years because that's what we did. Right. Just a very, very different generation. So yeah, well, I will never speak ill about them again. I promise. And we did mention COVID though earlier. And I was wondering, because you know, you've come into this situation where you are now leading an organization into you're leading an organization into whole new territories, as we embark upon more international situations and opportunities, which we're so excited about, but you are at the helm of the ship. And so everyone looks to you obviously for that leadership. And you've come in at a time where we're sort of coming out of a pandemic, but it's been a really rough couple years. And thus, we must stay optimistic and, remain hopeful and, you know, keep everyone engaged. So how do you remain hopeful in a time like this when things are a little crazy in the world, divisive, civil unrest. Yeah. But you seem to me to remain optimistic as you lead us into new territory. So how do you stay optimistic?

Neil Khaund (12:46):

Yeah. So this is a great question. I think something that doesn't really get talked about in the business world right. Is, is how do you look at, you know, hope and how do you bring that to your organization? And, and, and I think right now is, is certainly it feels divisive. I also think it's a bit amplified because of, again, the speed to which information travels and is available and accessible for everybody not to, not to deemphasize what's going on right now. But I think in most periods of history there are those kind of times that you are gonna have to kind of manage through. But more so I think what gives me hope is that, you know, and again, I think, you know, blame it on the day job to me is, is the accessibility of education. And, what I look at is that to me, when you look at any civilization over time, the common denominator of its progress is education, right?

Neil Khaund (13:35):

And is the level of education of that civilization. And so now that I'm seeing, again, more tools in terms of kind of how education is progressing, not only in terms of online and those types of things, but the types of formats to make it more engaging, whether it's, you know, potentially the metaverse and virtual reality, right? Whether you know, it's understanding tools like blockchain and other things to really kind of bring education to the forefront. I think there's, there's that to me is what gives me hope is that education is moving fast. And, and so the more, or I guess the larger part of our civilization that continues to be educated and continues to focus on that education. I, the brighter our collective future will be. Right. And so that to me is what's really given hope.

Corey Andrew Powell (14:20):

Yeah. I think also on that same note. Yeah. I think as we get closer to each other, all of us together, hopefully removing barriers, I think that even makes a more harmonious world as well. I think we're seeing this sort of a strange place where on one hand, the world is more divisive, but at the same time, I do see a lot more people fighting against that. Like I know if we look at, for example, the George Floyd situation where the world rallied, and there were points where I looked at the television and I thought that crowd of like 100,000 people protesting, they're not even, I don't even see a person of color in that crowd. That was actually other people saying we are done with this. We don't want this anymore. And so I think that, you know, as we move forward, hopefully we'll move to more of a harmonious place.

Neil Khaund (15:04):

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you look at with Ukraine right now. Right. I mean, I think there's been a rally impact on that, you know, across the political lines. Right. Which is the first time we've seen that in like five, six years. Right. And so so you know, things like that certainly bring us together. But again, I do think it's that it's having access to that information, but being leveraging education to filtered in a way that I think is positive. Right. And I think that's the, you know, to me, that's definitely a good sign and a good, you know, good for hope in the future.

Corey Andrew Powell (15:35):

Yes. Yes. I agree with you. And speaking of that, as we're talking about international territories. I didn't, didn't really cover this in our preliminary, so I don't wanna catch you off guard.

Neil Khaund (15:43):

No, no, no.

Corey Andrew Powell (15:44):

But I am curious to know just as a person who's on the inside and I'm really interested in the idea of us working towards more international opportunities. Does that mean like more chapters, perhaps opening in colleges that are international, like schools abroad? Like what would you say would be some of the first initiatives? Like what does that, what does that look like as far as the international endeavors?

Neil Khaund (16:06):

Yeah. So the NSLS is definitely going to be more global. And I think it's for a few reasons. So to answer your, your question, yes, we will be opening up chapters. In other parts of the world, specifically, we're starting in Latin America, that's gonna be kind of our initial focus in terms of, you know, actually setting up chapters to provide to work with students in those countries. I think the other part too, that I think is really exciting for our members and our universities even stateside is that our hope is to then provide that global connection amongst our students and amongst our universities, right. Is pro facilitating more of that global perspective that I think every student must have. Right. I think being able to relate and communicate with a potential associate or colleague who's in a different part of the world provides you with that per that you just can't read out of a book. I mean, it's being able to kind of communicate and even build a mastermind group with somebody who is, you know, maybe working in the same field with you, but dealing with completely different exogenous factors in their region, I think is really exciting. And I think it's, it's something that every student should aspire for. And it's, it's, it's definitely a core part of our strategy going forward.