

# Leadership (Part 1) Transcript

## Episode 6 – Startup Survival Podcast

By Peter Harrington

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Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

Hello, and welcome to this startup survival podcast. All about inspirational leadership. My name's Peter Harrington. And in this episode, a very special guest will be sharing his leadership experience and insights. During this crisis,

Speaker 1 ([00:24](#)):

Through my teens and twenties, I spent 12 consecutive summers at an outdoor field centre, helping as a voluntary leader, working at Castlehead Field Centre was a joy. It was a place that made me sing. Many who experienced Castlehead quickly bought into the educational and environmental values rooted in the inspirational leadership provided by Centre directors, Frank and Fev Dawson. Each year. I eagerly anticipated those working weeks with groups of young people, young people who often arrived with unease and fret on their faces yet typically left with triumph and wonder in their hearts being a small part of the census discovery and adventure summer program, which fused outdoor environmental education and personal development is still a big part of my life. It wasn't so much the lessons I learned from leading young people on canoeing rafting, climbing, and mountain expeditions, nor is it the memory of learning that night is not dark or that badges and DIA will play right in front of you. If you apply patience stillness and silence, moreover, it's the memory of Frank Frank and Fev's inspirational leadership their, pioneering philosophy, total commitment, unwavering values, and thought through ability to create followers, a whole energized community who liked me could not resist forming a deep appreciation for what they did for thousands of people. And if you've read one of the books referenced in episode five, Robert Cialdini in this text all about influence you'll know the issue of rarity is one of his six influencing principles. Frank and Fev were rare people and their work had a profound impact.

Speaker 1 ([02:16](#)):

And years later, as part of my research for this podcast, I've been fortunate to discover another rare individual whose inspirational leadership throughout this crisis deserves a wider audience. So significant are the consequences of one man's actions and leadership that I will be sharing the extraordinary feats of this young volunteering crisis hero over two episodes, a single episode, doesn't do justice to John Lo and John's work with his recently founded organization Dare to Care. To give you an idea of what's coming. I'll be sharing how in under three months and working all over London and beyond, John chose to step up and ultimately arrange for over 18,000 PPE items to be sent to the NHS and secondary line services for over 1000 care packs and 20,000 meals to be provided to isolated and compromised individuals for over 250 people to be recruited and mobilized. So all work was done and for over 40,000 pounds to be fundraised, to pay for the whole initiative to do this. John often worked 16 hours a day, day in, day out and remarkably this 28 year old

entrepreneur chose not to receive a penny for his endeavours. Just before we hear from John, I must thank even more people who continue to provide wonderful podcast support and fan feedback. Please excuse title emission. You are all stars. So big thanks go to: Amit, Mishra, Lindsey Cole, Robert Newberry Mohd, Arif Amina, Wakefield, Joshua Anthony Deepak Cashwell, Nina Lanson, Angelie Ramachandran. Marcus O'Dair, Emmanuel Godin, Patrick Dunn, Chris Jackson, Douglas Shand, and Druv Bijour.

Speaker 1 ([04:21](#)):

Like no other episode that's gone before in this series. I really hope what you're about to hear not only resonates with, but builds your spirit now and always, so let's get going. My name's Peter Harrington, and this is your inspirational leadership startup survival podcast. Interviewing John has involved many conversations, emails, and shared Google docs. And I'm very grateful that John who lives in a London apartment found time in his busy schedule to answer all my questions. I started by asking John to provide an outline of Dare to Care.

Speaker 2 ([05:04](#)):

So Dare to Care packages has two core components. There's the side where we send personal protective equipment or PPE for short to GPS, hospitals, care homes and nurseries. And then there's the side where we send care packages, consisting of essential items and food to isolated individuals. And our target is specifically vulnerable individuals who are falling through the cracks of larger scale government responses.

Speaker 1 ([05:33](#)):

And John, you were involved in both the care packages and the PPE

Speaker 2 ([05:40](#)):

As a founder of Dare to Care packages. I was heavily involved in both of these sides, but I was also the only person doing the PPE side. So I'm going to focus on talking mostly about that and also the leadership lessons for the care pack side and the PPE, a very different it's very different sectors. It's very different types of people you're engaging with and just the general strategic direction for those two sides is quite dissimilar. Thanks, John. And how would you best describe the way the PP sided dare to care has functioned? So let me start by first explaining what Dare to Care actually is. So think of Dare to Care as having a short term aim and having a long term aim on the short term side, we're trying to get as much PPE as possible to the places that need it most urgently.

Speaker 2 ([06:32](#)):

And how we did this was we first started by collecting very granular data from GPS and hospitals and care homes about what PPE they requested and in what quantities. And we got very detailed. So we're able to make claims like based on 300 responses, we know there's 260,000 PPE items requested across the UK. And that's broken down into say 24,000 advisors in the greater London area or 9,095 mask in masks in the West Midlands. So the question then is how do we get to PPE to these places? We partnered with PPE manufacturing organizations who were doing things like 3D printing masks who were laser cutting visors, who were making gowns. And we paid for all the costs of delivering these PPE items to areas that were in the most need. It was very important for us to not manufacture PPE ourselves because that's quite risky.

Speaker 2 ([07:37](#)):

It's very capital intensive and is not high enough in the value chain where our impact could be maximized, which was identifying where the needs were, the greatest, and then matching those needs with other organizations. And there were many voluntary organizations who were manufacturing this PPE already. So that's a short term site getting PPE to places that need it most urgently. And then in the longterm side, we realized that the sheer scale of the PPE shortage meant there was no way a voluntary organization like ours, we're operating as a nonprofit would have the ability to provide the literal millions of PPE items that the NHS and secondary services needed. But what we did have was the data which could serve as argumentation and ammunition for a case to fundamentally change how PPS procured into this country. So we partnered with the doctor's organization called every doctor who is campaigning for fundamental changes in how the government treats the NHS and using this data, we were able to bring before MPS more precise numbers about how much PPE shortage there actually was, because it's very different to just generically claim that is APB shortage, versus being able to pinpoint exactly how many visors I demanded in what quantities in what regions and the variations between these regions

Speaker 1 ([09:07](#)):

And John, based on what you've said, I assume this operation isn't just yourself.

Speaker 2 ([09:12](#)):

No, Peter dare to care is not just myself. The best way to think of dare to care is not so much what we do, which is send PPE to the NHS and care packages, to isolated people, but more about how we did what we did and how we achieved impact so quickly. So the best way to think of dare to care is to see it as the combination of strategic focus and technological scalability. And let me walk you through what this means. So about strategic focus, Derek take care. It was very much about prioritization and doing one thing. Well, instead of doing many things to a mediocre fashion, and it's actually defined more by opportunities, we said no to rather than opportunities. We said yes to. So we were sending a lot of visors to GPS and hospitals, but we had many opportunities to also be sending masks or eight prints. And we chose not to focus on that. And we turned down a lot of those opportunities because we wanted to do visors really well. And then in terms of technological scalability, every aspect of dare to care is empowered by cutting edge tech. So from the data collection process to the route planning of delivery services, to communication with volunteers where using cloud technologies and various APIs to link them all together to achieve impact and maximize it collectively

Speaker 1 ([10:45](#)):

As part of our conversation, John shared the fact that over 250 people have been recruited and mobilized in order to create and sustain the distribution network. I was also discovering that John had no interest in bigging up himself and his own achievements, but I really wanted to understand whether he appreciated the scale of the project from the outset.

Speaker 2 ([11:07](#)):

So yes, I definitely appreciated the scale of this project when I first started, because if we were just going to help a few hundred or even a few thousand people, there would be no point and I wouldn't have done this. I would have rather donated just a fraction of my income to a charity who was doing

something like this and we would have made greater impact. So it was very important to right from the get, go build with scale in mind, right? Like to make sure that how we laid out the fundamentals of dare to care packages was scalable. So let me go through what this means. So the most important key to our scalability is honestly, just technology tech nowadays and knowing how to use it correctly is the as knowing how to read and write in the middle ages when scribes were far and few between, it gives you the power to mobilize people in a way that you simply cannot do manually.

Speaker 2 ([12:03](#)):

So let me give you a few concrete examples. What this means. For instance, we built a volunteer portal to coordinate volunteers who wanted to sign up for say deliveries or the packing of the PPE for the creation of the care packages. And that's infinitely more effective than say emailing volunteers when opportunities have Rose, even if this was done automatically. So things like that are a game changer. We have things like a recurring sponsorship system where people can subscribe to sponsor the care packages of an amount of their choosing per week. And this is recurrent. So if you look at this from a startup perspective, it's basically the idea of recurring revenue, where it's much more sustainable. It's much more predictable instead of these one off donations that you would otherwise get. There's also things like systematically working through and eliminating friction points in the journey of people we were engaging with.

Speaker 1 ([13:03](#)):

So for example, for all our volunteers, we have automatic emails that remind them of when opportunities are coming up. We have automatic emails that let them know about, you know, where the warehouse is like, what are some things to pay attention to making sure they read all the health and safety policies and automatic system, which lets them sign the volunteer waivers for legal reasons. All of that stuff is done automatically without any human involvement, because time is our greatest asset. And we don't want to be doing these administrative tasks, which are so critical by the way, to ensuring your business or this social enterprise doesn't break.

Speaker 1 ([13:40](#)):

So you're saying John technology was central to the success of your project.

Speaker 2 ([13:45](#)):

So there's this quote I really like, which is something along the lines of the best ideas occur at the intersection of disciplines. And that's to say that when you bring together two sectors that do not overlap such as the technological sector and the charities slash nonprofit space, you often get exponential returns. So like what we saw here was every aspect of dare to care packages was enabled through technology all the way from the volunteer recruitment to the outreach, to the planning of the delivery routes, to identifying what needs were the greatest amongst hospitals and GPS, every single aspect of it was empowered through tech. And I simply do not think there is a substitute to this. You can have the best strategy skills in the world. You can have the best people skills in the world, but if you like meant that through technology, you will always get significantly more returns than you otherwise would have. So learn technology is what I'm saying.

Speaker 2 ([14:55](#)):

And if you're asking me what kinds of technology I'm referring to or what I even mean by tech, I think it's best broken down into three categories. The first is a data science background. So I don't mean like a data analyst background, right? I mean a data science background where you have programmatic knowledge of data and how to work with it. And this is so important because all data is it's facts, right? Data is just facts about the world and knowing how to use an organize those facts to have the most impact. So data science is number one, number two, it's understanding web development. Why is web development so important? Because the internet is the one of the biggest game changers in the last few decades and websites are essentially the window of the internet. So you need to know how they work. You need to know what they can do, and you need to know how to make sites in such a way that you make it frictionless for your users.

Speaker 2 ([15:52](#)):

So that users are able to come into your site and do what you want them to do. In this case, it's to do things like volunteer it's to donate to us it's to support us in various other ways. And the third thing, and the final thing is to understand the ecosystem of technological tools that are out there because this sector has exploded. The tech sector has exploded in growth in the last few years, and they're already so many people doing game changing things. It's very important for you to not reinvent the wheel and understand what tools you can leverage. So for instance, instead of building a database, we used air table instead of building our own route optimization tool, we use something called optimal route instead of building like an entire eCommerce system from scratch, we use something called WooCommerce and we further built on these different tools and customize them in ways that specifically met our needs rather than doing it from scratch because that's reinventing the wheel.

Speaker 2 ([16:54](#)):

It's incredibly time inefficient. So having that strategy mindset that is enabled by a knowledge of what is out there in terms of technology is so fundamental and so critical understanding what's out there instead of making it yourself and knowing what you should be making yourself is what sets us apart. So let me be clear. It's one thing entirely to have the ability to bring people with these technological skills onboard your team to help versus being a founder or CEO who actually understands how these things work. The latter approach is exponentially more impactful. I'll use an analogy to illustrate this point. It's a difference between say you being completely illiterate, right? And reading and writing, and then relying on this writer to write your life story for you, just based on what they, what you tell them. You have no ability to understand what on earth they've, you don't know if they're you know, representing what you want correctly. If it's done in the most effective way, you at the very least have to be able to read and write so you can critique them, even if they are a better writer and the exact same thing applies for technology. If you simply do not speak the language well, you're going to be severely limited can compare it. If you were able to speak the language

Speaker 1 ([18:14](#)):

Like me, you might be thinking John qualified as a data scientist or software engineer, but we're both wrong. John's family moved from Hong Kong to Canada, where he was brought up and went on to gain his first degree in economics at Calgary university. John then came to the London school of economics, where he completed a masters in local economic development. As you'll discover on his LinkedIn profile. John builds websites in his spare time and has developed full stack expertise in HTML, CSS, and Java script. And there's much more, but let's get back to the interview. Having

learned about the imperative value of technology. I was beginning to comprehend how John managed to mobilize hundreds of volunteers, but as he proves time and time again, in this interview, John's answers rarely fail to surprise. And the contextual case study nature of John's responses often go way beyond the standard leadership textbook. So how did he attract and build a small army of support so quickly?

Speaker 2 ([19:17](#)):

It all starts with the recognition that during COVID-19, there are so many people who want to help, but don't know how to help or who to help. And if you recognize and are able to take advantage of that fact, all the other pieces fall into play. When you do three things, the first is to actually be doing something that's genuinely better than the alternative of what's out there. And I'll explain this in a bit more detail. The second is to communicate what you're doing and then communicate it again and again, so that you show your impact rather than just making impact, which is so important. I'll break this down in a bit more in a sec. And then the third thing is to be able to balance diversification of risk so that you're never putting all your eggs into one basket so that your project can continue.

Speaker 2 ([20:10](#)):

And this is especially important given that COVID-19 is changing so quickly and the medical and legal landscape and regulations and all of that is changing really fast as well. So let me go through these one by one. So the first thing is to do something that is genuinely better so that your project is actually adding value to the world that no one else is. And for us on the PPE side, that was the data collection and displaying this stuff in real time about where the PP shortages, where the greatest no organization is doing the same. And we've received a lot of media attention. We're interviewed on the BBC multiple times, because it is, this data has been brought before MPS articles have been written about us about this data. So that's something that genuinely different and a better, because it allows us to prioritize where to send the PPE.

Speaker 2 ([20:59](#)):

The most, it allows a volunteer organizations to understand where the PPE needs are the greatest. So this is so important because it creates a natural value that has a lot of organic multiplication potential. And what I mean by that is a lot of the media interviews we never sought out may came to us. A lot of the larger sponsorships we got from donors, like having a 500 quid sponsorship per week. We never sought out. They came to us. A lot of the large corporate donations were referrals from volunteers who were working with us and saw that we were genuinely doing a good job and then convinced their companies to donate to us. So we never sought that out either. So the key is to put yourself in a position where others approach you to help you instead of the other way around. And that's the most effective way I found of doing that is to do something that is genuinely useful and better than the alternatives.

Speaker 1 ([21:53](#)):

So tell me, John, how do you communicate all of this work, all this impact? So the different stakeholders know what is happening?

Speaker 2 ([22:01](#)):



It's not enough, not even close to being enough to just do something impactful and assume others will know about it. You have to tell them and you have to tell them again and again, because no one remembers there's so many other things going on in your life. And you're like a blip in their attention span. So we showed our impact in real time on our website about exactly how much PV we have sent to what locations, photos of this taking place as evidence. We've done the exact same thing in the care pack side. And that's incredibly important. We've done blog posts about what went on every week about what the donor money was used to do about what impact we made. We have a weekly newsletter to support this, and all of these things are critical. If you were to ask me what should be the relative prioritization of showing impact and actually making impact, I would say it's 60, 40, 60% of your time and energy.

Speaker 2 ([22:58](#)):

You should be on showing impact. And 40% of it should actually beyond making impact that might sound counter intuitive, but showing that impact allows all of that organic growth and traction that I was mentioning in the first point of other people coming to you, which then naturally allows you to multiply your impact even further, because that's the end goal, but it's, it's so important that you show people what you're doing, or you might as well just forget it. And the third thing is a bit interesting. It's striking a delicate balance between diversification of risk and focus of priorities. So what I mean by that is you never want to put your eggs in one basket, especially when you're starting an initiative that is based on a COVID-19 response, right? Like COVID-19 changes the legal field, the medical field every day, every day, it's a completely different landscape.

Speaker 2 ([23:51](#)):

So you never want to be committed entirely to doing one thing because that thing might as well disappear overnight. So instead of us manufacturing PPE, for instance, we partnered with other organizations who already were doing this manufacturing and our value add was linking all of these different places together and delivering the PP that was already created to areas that needed it the most, right? That was something we were adding that no other organization was because there are so many organizations doing this manufacturing that it was much more useful to join them up together and like meant to impact collectively rather than just doing the same thing that they were doing. And it's also important that we partnered with not just one organization, but multiple organizations, because all of these other places were also newly founded, which meant they have not proven that they are stable yet.

Speaker 2 ([24:45](#)):

Right. So for instance, when you have a bunch of people coming together rapidly, there are often conflicts. And many of these organizations we've worked with I've actually disbanded because of interpersonal conflicts, or maybe they didn't get enough supply or enough you know procurement guidelines were not passed things, things like that. So it's very important that you're never just dependent entirely on one organization to fulfil your mission. So that's about diversification. The part about focus is knowing who to say no to. There are so many volunteers or organizations or people claiming they want to help who have reached out to us, like on our contact form on email whatever, but it's really understanding who are the highest value people that we should be responding to. And it's totally fine to not respond to some people because they are not adding value for you in that particular moment.

Speaker 2 ([25:45](#)):

And knowing who to turn down is so critical because the most valuable thing you have is time, especially in a rapid response initiative like this. So the more time you spend on people who are not worth it, the less time you have to spend on people and organizations who are worth it, what is done, John is fascinating. So how would you summarize your mobilization strategy? If you're doing something that is genuinely better than the alternative, you communicate, what you're doing and the impact you're making very clearly and do it again and again and again, and you know how to diversify your risk and focus our priorities. Then you take advantage of the natural fact that there's so many people who want to help during COVID and you bring together different stakeholders. Like volunteers like sponsors like team members, and so many partner organizations who want to help. And you're able to mobilize essentially a small army in that way. For me, effective leadership has much to do with the ability to create followers.

Speaker 1 ([26:44](#)):

So to hear John talk eloquently about selecting, rather than simply accepting followers, show deep self-belief and high quality leadership thinking, and it's fair to say many others have recognized John's talent. Well, before we spoke raising over 40,000 pounds, mentee, forged, trusting partnerships with the likes of a Carta Vita, Coco Camden ale, Citrix Gayle's bakery, Felix project, city harvest Forster's LLP Santander, not West ADA ventures, LSE, and more, and notably Theodore Schneider, the former owner of the luxury watch company, Breitling agreed to provide 500 pounds a week for care packages. At this point in the episode, you'll know that I normally recommend a book to read, but on this occasion, it's far more appropriate that I leave this choice to John.

Speaker 2 ([27:41](#)):

So a book I would recommend is tools of Titans by Tim Ferriss, which is about the habits and routines of billionaires while performing icons and other high performance individuals. Many of my friends who have read this book have very different takeaways, but personally, my biggest takeaway was the importance of using leverage to achieve what you want.

Speaker 1 ([28:04](#)):

Thank you, John. And thank you for mentioning the takeaways, which in many ways is what this series is all about in the second part of this story, we'll be hearing about what inspired John, the journey, highs and lows and lessons he wants to share with others who seek to lead, whether you were simply inspired or can use John's work as a modern case study. I hope the intertwined subjects of leadership have resonated. No one gave John permission to lead. He just did it. And he did it with energy focus, intelligence, compassion, and that scale and achievement came about through effective use of technology, trusting partnerships, risk management, relentless communication, leverage making a distinct difference and more. So I really hope you can tune into the second part of John's story. And after we've caught our breath and digested John's impact, I'll be moving on to teamwork and then money management through all this mayhem, your feedback is not just welcomed. It's needed like, like you, this is the first time I've ever dealt with a pandemic whilst in business. So please keep letting me know your thoughts and questions by the Hitchhiker's guide to entrepreneurship blog or LinkedIn. I love to hear your views, whether it's good or for get better. And finally, well, before we close, come on, let's hear it for John Lowe, whose details are referenced on the blog.



Speaker 1 ([29:26](#)):

Thank you, John. And I look forward to talking more with you in part 2.

Speaker 1 ([29:30](#)):

My name's Peter Harrington, and this has been your startup survival podcast go well, stay safe and thank you.

Startup Survival Podcast by Peter Harrington