Can Strategy Help Shape a Life Well Lived?

Published on Dec 10, 2025 by Niko Canner



David Lancefield and I have been in conversation for nearly five years, since Paul Leinwand introduced us as people who might appreciate each other's thinking about strategy and the art of advising.

David's podcast, *Lancefield on the Line*, is built around a distinctive kind of attention. He prepares deeply, asks questions that create space for his guests to surprise themselves, and treats the conversation as a form of thinking together rather than performance. Over sixty-plus episodes, he has drawn out people like Rita McGrath, Roger Martin, and Amy Edmondson on the questions that matter most to them.

Three years ago, David interviewed me for the show. This time, we tried something different: I interviewed him. David is writing a book about how strategy applies to a life – not strategy for organizations, but for the person trying to figure out how to live. It's rare to hear an interviewer become the one reaching for words, testing ideas aloud. I wanted to give him what he gives others: a thoughtful interlocutor to sharpen ideas against.

The podcast begins with how David came to this question. His son suffered catastrophic brain damage shortly after birth. For years, David was a strategist at work and something closer to the opposite at home – getting through, not choosing. Over time, that became unsustainable. He began reclaiming control over what felt like a system utterly out of control. He couldn't change what had happened. But he could choose the time he spent with his son, the energy he gave, the adventures they tried together.

Crisis made David's occasion for self-examination unmissable. But most of us don't get a signal that clear. We get something quieter: a friction we keep explaining away, a question we keep not asking, a recurring sense that the life we're living and the life we intend have drifted apart.

Robert Lowell, near the end of his life, wrote a poem called "Notice" that ends:

> But we must notice –
> we are designed for the moment.

All progress begins with dissonance. The strategic question is whether we notice it – and what we do with our noticing.

David's framework for strategy at a human scale is "Aspire, Choose, Thrive." What I heard in our conversation were the fundamentals of a practice: a way of staying awake to your own life.

We examined the parallels between what it means to be intentional in life and what it takes to build an organization's breakthrough strategy. Both require staying with stuckness long enough for insight to emerge, testing conviction against the world's resistance to your best ideas. Both demand the forge of conversations – arresting, unpredictable conversations with ourselves and with others – that interrogate what matters most.

Here's our conversation, in which we attempt just that.

You can find David's work at davidlancefield.com and subscribe to *Lancefield on the Line* wherever you get podcasts.