

Michael Pullman of Franchisee Connect Interviews Jenn Shallvey

Episode 40: Mindful Leadership for Franchisees

Michael: Welcome to Franchisee Connect, I'm here with Jenn Shallvey, Jenn welcome to the podcast.

Jenn: Thank you Michael, it's a pleasure to be with you on this podcast.

Michael: It's great to have you, thank you so much for your time. Now I want to dig into what you do Jenn, because I've read your LinkedIn profile, I'd love you to tell the listeners what is it that you actually do?

Jenn: I coach leaders who want to create change in business.

Michael: Fantastic, so coaching leaders. How did you get into coaching leaders and where were you before that?

Jenn: I've gone through lots of different iterations, I think I'm the person that reinvents herself every year and perhaps that's why I work with others who want to create change. I've gone through many different careers, different positions but I've always come through that idea that I am passionate about people, passionate about people growing and developing. When I first started out I was an accountant and I worked in that field. I came from this background of understanding business from the point of view of an auditor. Right away go "oh, an auditor, that sounds boring". It's not, it's so not boring. I thought it was absolutely fabulous and fun because I got to see how business worked.

But my undergraduate study was in psychology and I always wanted to be around people so I ended up moving into human resources, mostly on the learning development side and leadership development. I went through all the different iterations within corporate and then I moved out on my own and I haven't look back, I've been working on my own for I think, 12 years, I've lost count now. It may be 10, I don't know. I work with people in different ways and over the years even that's changed so again its lots of different ways of helping people be better leaders.

Michael: Fantastic, I love that you talk about auditing as an exciting thing. I had so many friends who went down the CPA path and they went into auditing for the big firms and they said "oh my god, it's so boring", I love that take on it.

Jenn: It's not boring, it's actually really interesting.

Michael: That's awesome, so you've got a take on it. where you can – because you get right into the depth of the businesses, right you can see exactly what's going on?

Jenn: You do. There aren't many jobs you can do, and I guess even today where, as a young person graduating from university, that you get to meet people running companies, you get to go talk to CFO, you get to understand how their business works. There's not a lot of opportunity to do that, most of the time you're put on the side and you don't get to speak to people like that.

I was interviewing people about their business and learning how it worked, and that's exciting.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely, getting to talk to the C levels as a graduate, that's fun.

Jenn: Yeah, it's fun.

Michael: That's brilliant. So I want to have a chat about leadership, we're going to have a chat about leadership in the context of a restaurant or a fast paced environment

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because I think a lot of franchisees that I talk to at conferences and trade shows, they don't realise that they're actually a leader. I mean they might understand that they're a business owner and that they've got some responsibilities and they've got a team but they don't really see themselves as a leader in any leadership context.

So it's interesting, would be interesting to delve into the way that leaders work and the way they see themselves. But first of all something about you, who's the person who's had a big impact on you as a leader?

Jenn: Gosh, you know I'm not prepared for these questions and you can tell your audience that because I love that question and the people that have had the most impact on me are different people I've worked for. I've had challenging people and I've had amazingly inspirational people, and what those people have been for me is not a bad boss or a good boss but a person who helped me figure out who I am and that's saying I learned from the people I work with who I am and then therefore I followed where I wanted to go. That's where the impacts come from.

Michael: I love that, tell us about one of those challenging people that you've had to work with.

Jenn: The ones that tow the company line and I have a couple of experiences where I've worked with people who were more caught up in the politics of the organisation and them as examples of listening to everybody other than themselves and so I would be the challenging person, I can be a bit challenging in that respect, and say "why are we doing it this way" and they say "well that's because that's the way we're doing it" and what was missing was that opportunity to have a real conversation. I didn't need to have everything changed but I found that I was stopped in my tracks a bit because I wanted to do things differently. And there was a few people that also, I think, felt threatened by that and so therefore because I was maybe not the same level or a report, then they didn't want to have that conversation.

So those were the ones that didn't work for me, ones who didn't respect the contribution even though I was equally a person in the team.

Michael: So would you class them as strong leaders or not very strong leaders, or was it a different leadership style?

Jenn: Different leadership style, it's a good question. I think it's not so much being the strong leader because you can lead in so many different ways. It's more that sometimes people can lead through fear, it could be fear on many levels I think, you can be afraid of losing your own job, there could be restructuring around the corner and most times I think people in more senior positions know a lot more about what's going on in the company and they can know what's around the corner and so they could be acting out in protecting themselves and not even realise it.

And then there's the politics that might get a person to have certain behaviours I think reinforced, they're not constructive behaviours and they've gotten ahead because of that and they think that's okay, and no one's challenged them on that, and that's what I've seen.

Michael: Yeah, that's interesting, so people will act out just to protect themselves, they don't necessarily realise that they're acting out but they're just protecting themselves from some kind of hurt.

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Jenn: Yeah, I think, I see it that way. I see it as someone is defending their territory or defending their career path or the way they see things as being done and not ready to maybe change that. Changing is really threatening for people.

Michael: Yeah for some people it definitely can be. So they're leading through fear because perhaps they're experiencing some fear on the inside as well.

Jenn: Yeah.

Michael: So you mentioned fear as a leadership style, what are some other leadership styles?

Jenn: Well then I'd go into the other end of the spectrum, and I'm not referring to any tools or instruments. I've been accredited and qualified in many different tools to assess leadership styles, I don't use that anymore but they have a place for people that need that awareness. So when I look at this I'm looking from my own experience and my observation and then a leader can also lead from passion, from almost like an inner knowing of what's right for them, and this is more what I'd call an intuitive leadership style. It takes a bit of time to get there I think for people because they need to have some experience, like I said you have to go through the ups and downs to say "who am I in all this leading business, how am I going to be a leader" and you might try on a few different styles. You might say "I'll copy my boss for a while and do what he or she does" and then you find out that's not who you are, and that to me is the ultimate leadership style is to say "I lead from within, I lead from where I am as a person and do it authentically and real", that to me is the ultimate style.

Michael: I love that, and that comes from experience, so trying on a number of different leadership styles until you find one that fits?

Jenn: Yeah, people can say "I know how to do it" and I'm sure you're the same, you can go back just even five years in your life and say "what I thought I should do then is so different from what I think now". To me, the real effective leader is the one who can say "I am a different leader today than I was five years ago and it's a better one because I keep evolving, keep growing and keep maintaining that awareness around how I can lead from within".

Michael: Yeah, so just continually having that self-awareness to look at your leadership style and keep evolving it?

Jenn: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

Michael: Absolutely. So I noticed on your LinkedIn profile as well there was a section on mindfulness, so tell me how you bring mindfulness too because I'm fascinated by the topic of mindfulness and meditation and becoming more present in every moment, it just fascinates me. How would you apply that to leadership?

Jenn: Very easily, it's funny because it's a real buzzword right now and I find that amusing because as you may then be aware there have been people practising techniques related to mindfulness for eons and it's not something that's actually new. But it's getting mainstream so people find it's okay, acceptable to mention that in a business environment now.

For me it can be simplified down to being present with yourself. And I'm not trying to discount any teaching out there because there are so many different types of teachings and therefore I'd say if it's just simplified down to "I'm aware of myself in this moment

and I can be present with myself enough to know that I'm here doing what I'm doing, and I can act from that position".

Michael: So you're aware of yourself in that moment, how do you develop that because that's something that I'm trying to develop as a leader now in the organisation that I'm in? We're growing quite quickly and we're going to start bringing in people, how do you develop that present moment focus with yourself?

Jenn: You practice, and I also think you practice with kindness for yourself because if you give yourself the permission to try and experience different ways until you find a way that works for you, then you don't have to do it any one way. You're probably getting a theme from my speaking here is that I'm very much about the individual discovering what works for them. So mindfulness or whatever you want to call it, being present, being intuitive in your work, it is about finding the way that works for you.

And so I teach this to people, for example I'll talk about finding a way where you tune into yourself even, how do you listen to yourself, how do you actually even pause for a moment and hear your own self thinking or feeling or knowing because we all get that sense of ourselves in a different way, and it's practising that. It's taking a moment out in, maybe say in this meeting or before this meeting, I'm going to stop for a second and actually pay attention to what's going on inside of me, what am I noticing in me? You might even do that for five minutes, three minutes, even one minute, but that practice of doing that on a regular basis begins to make it a habit for you.

Michael: Absolutely, so start practising, so it's just taking a pause before you step into a meeting, it's taking a pause and saying "what am I looking", I guess it's that concept of intention, setting your intention without being all "woo woo" and visioning, just setting your intention "okay, how do I want to go into this meeting and what's myself", is it paying attention to yourself talk"?

Jenn: Well I don't think the self-talk is the only thing to pay attention to, it could be paying attention to just your breath, it could be paying attention to your body, it could be whatever grabs your attention to keep you in that moment because sometimes our thoughts are quite distracting and that is an area that people might need to manage. But for me thoughts are actually useful, so I might find that actually helpful, what is coming up in my thoughts and what do they mean for me? It's that inner dialogue, that inner experience, that inner knowing that you begin to get an idea of what it feels like for you and checking in with that.

Michael: Yeah, I know for my own practice I've started to take more time over the last 12 months to do that, to pause and reflect and pause and just listen to what my mind is saying. I sit down for 20 minutes in the morning and just listen to my breathing and just hear myself and it's amazing how often an insight comes, I'll just sit back and listen to my breathing and every time my mind jumps away from it I'll pull my mind back to my breathing. I heard a guy on the Art of Charm podcast, Tony Stubblebine, he described it as "that's really good, that's one rep", because everyone thinks that they're really bad at meditation or mindfulness, but actually when you're sitting down and drawing attention to your breath, when your mind wanders and you pull it back, that's a rep. So you can sit down for 10 minutes and do 20 reps in a session and that's really good, that's a good thing, it's a successful process.

So it's been phenomenal, the difference in my life just from doing that, sitting down and listening to myself, and as I say lots of things have come up, lots of insights about what I should do on the podcast. In fact I had an idea this morning about doing a book giveaway, so I've got a stack of books here that I need to put away and I'm going to do a

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book giveaway for the listeners who review the podcast. So that was one that came to me while I was doing that mindfulness.

Jenn: And you know what's so wonderful about that is, and this when I think when you're being mindful or you're being aware, you're being intuitive, you get that quick, easy information that makes sense to you, that resonates within you and you go "oh yeah, that was easy".

Michael: Yeah, subconscious just dredges up all the things, it takes in everything that you've experienced in the last couple of days and just serves up "okay, here's an insight", and it's pretty phenomenal, and you can experience that during the day can't you as well just by stepping back from what you're doing right now and just taking a pause?

Jenn: Yeah, it's almost like there's people who say "don't stop, don't stop" and for me it's about what about that moment where, you could even call it a daydream or just an imaginary moment and you just say "I'm going to step out for a second" and whatever works for you, I mean some people, they go for their run or bike ride and that's their meditation, it could be a swim, whatever it is it's taking you out of that distraction and allowing you to be present with yourself.

Michael: Yeah, just stepping out. I catch myself staring out the window sometimes when I'm deeply thinking and the guys at work all know "oh yeah, you're thinking again, aren't you Michael", "yeah, yeah I'm thinking". I'm staring at the cars going by on the street.

Jenn: Well, you know, I actually like to joke and say "I'm not just thinking, I'm being" and that sounds really lame, but there is a truth in that, in that in this exact moment I'm just going to "be" and I'm going to see what that brings me and that's me speaking out loud the actual description of what is going on. That "okay, let's stop for a second and go what's happening right now", and it could be your body's agitated, it could be that your minds racing, it could be all kinds of things, you feel funny, you might even have a sense of a person in the room that's bugging you and you go "why is that happening". That mindfulness, that sense of awareness you develop is to catch those things quicker and sooner and in that moment, the more you practice that, the more you, with objectivity, have those experiences, the more you can stay present to that.

Michael: Yeah, well call it taking stock or sitting back and smelling the roses.

Jenn: Yeah, and how often do people do that? I do that so you're going to think I'm strange but I am the kind of person that goes for the walk and stops and smells the roses, yes I do. You go "wow, this is pretty amazing" and you just go for a moment "wow" and everything else falls away and you go "that is amazing".

Michael: Awesome, well we've gone on a giant tangent there which is a good thing.

Jenn: Yeah we did, didn't we?

Michael: Talking about mindfulness, it's a really powerful thing. So how can we drag that back to leadership? How does this mindfulness help us develop as leaders?

Jenn: The thing about being a leader is we can get affected by emotions and we can get affected by the challenges in the everyday. And the leader is the one who's carrying the vision, who's carrying the purpose of the organisation, who's carrying the strategy, who's carrying that bigger picture, they're the ones imparting that to an organisation or the team or whoever they're working with. And when they get caught up in the distractions

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of that teams' activity, then I think mindfulness can help them step back into why they're there.

Michael: Yeah, and start imparting that vision. So empowering the team to carry out that vision. How can a leader in, let's take a concrete example of a leader who's in a fast paced restaurant environment, how can they start to delegate more responsibility to their team, what's the right way to start communicating that?

Jenn: The right way is to probably turn it the other way around and this is going to be probably challenging for a lot of your listeners, is to ask the people how they like to work.

Michael: I like that, can you explain that a little more?

Jenn: Okay. One of the things that happens in the hierarchy is we forget the other person has equally as much to contribute as the person with maybe more experience or more authority, and they have a lot of ideas, especially if they've come from a customer facing front end of the business, and they have that valuable aspect to contribute. So if you ask them "so what's happening, how can we make this better", you might get some great input back, but the leader is in the sense helping to guide them by saying "overall, let's take that into consideration and then move that back into how this works with our business". They might say "well that works fine for us but this is where our business is going, we need to do it this way".

Michael: So you're taking their insights from being on the front line and you're I guess improving on it and making it match the mold of where the business is going. I love that question, "how can we make this better?".

Jenn: Yeah, because I look at it from the point of view of like a triangle, it's not about me versus the person I'm leading or the person is working for, it's about the customer and I've been on this path for my whole working career as it's never about "just me" or the person who's in the business, it's about that customer. No matter where you are, whether you're back end or front end of the business, who are we serving, it's always about that and the person who's serving that customer knows firsthand exactly what they like, what they don't like. The person who's farther away from that might forget, or they might think they know, or they might have a "corporate speak" view of what it should be and then in the reality it's not translated at all.

Michael: They've lost touch a little bit. I've just drawn a triangle on my piece of paper, what are the three sides?

Jenn: The employee, the leader and then the customer.

Michael: Employee, the leader and the customer, of course. So there's always three people to consider.

Jenn: Yeah, and that's a team of people working. How many people even ask the customer what they want these days? They might do it in an official survey but how many really say "so what can I do to make this better for you".

Michael: That's a good question as well, "what can I do to make this experience or to make this better for you". I love that, that's another powerful question, you've got some good questions Jenn.

Jenn: That's the coaching part right.

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Michael: I love it, that's awesome.

Jenn: I'm also naturally curious and so I'll always ask questions.

Michael: Me too, me too, that's why I've done this podcast, because I'm curious about leadership and I'm curious about quick service restaurants and I'm curious about marketing and accounting. That's why I've set it up so that I've got an excuse to reach out to experts like yourself and have a conversation.

Jenn: That's fun, it's fun.

Michael: It is fun, hopefully we can help some people along the way as well.

Now, new employees, when I get a new employee, how should I induct them into the culture?

Jenn: That's a good question, I've done my fair share of orientations in the past. First of all you're a representative of that company, you're making the first impression to that employee. That is the most important part, you're an example, you are the one who's showing them what the culture is, so every single behaviour is on show, not just what you say, it's also what you do. So for me, an orientation isn't just the training they go through, it's not just the presentation on workplace safety for example or something else, it's "okay, we're going to have lunch together and you're going to hear about what this place is like". It's sitting them down and talking about that and saying "do you have any questions, how do you feel" and knowing that that very instant, that person is just soaking up everything and probably won't remember everything either.

So there's a few things but most of all it's about you're an example to that new employee from the minute they walk in the door.

Michael: So they're soaking up not only the content of what you're delivering but how you're delivering it and how you treat lunchtime and how you treat other employees.

Jenn: Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, so you have to realise that everything is on show when you bring that new employee in.

Jenn: And so then, to me, the best way to orient anybody is just to still be authentic and true to who you are and true to the culture you're trying to establish and maintain.

Michael: Yeah, so remain authentic and be consistent with your values. So you really want to found your leadership style in what fits you and what fits yourself, don't you? Otherwise you're not coming from a place of authenticity.

Jenn: No, no, no.

Michael: And I guess people's bullshit meters are pretty high.

Jenn: Yeah, I think so.

Michael: They're going to see right through that.

Jenn: Aren't yours, I know mine are.

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Michael: Absolutely. Jenn, what's one characteristic that every leader should possess?

Jenn: That's a good question. The first thing that comes to me is that belief that they don't have all the answers.

Michael: So they need to listen.

Jenn: Yes, absolutely. I think not enough leaders these days have been taught to do that, they may have the inclination or may have wanted to but there's a pressure to say "I need to show you that I know what I'm doing" or impress somebody or whatever, there's an expectation there and when they stop for a second and actually listen or hear what other people on the team want to say, that's a difference.

Michael: Yeah, so they need to stop and listen to what the team is saying. So a belief that they don't have all the answers, that can be a trait for a lot of leaders isn't it, they don't want to seem silly or they don't want to seem like they don't have all the answers, they're afraid to ask questions.

Jenn: Well there's also this, and I've been through lots of leadership programs and myself even when I was trained, there's an experience that happens where we are learning by the book, we get to read lots of books and we think "I have all the answers because I read a book" and often we get caught in that trap of feeling like we need to espouse that knowledge, we need to show that we know this and I've seen that many times where people say "well so-and-so said this and I know this, so therefore I can tell you this", it's like you're just regurgitating, you're not really applying and the person who says "well actually, I'm going to show you how to do this and I'm also going to hear how you're going when you're doing that" is the one who's actually I think leading effectively.

Michael: Yeah, so the key is to take that knowledge that you learn in the books and actually apply it and show people how it works.

Jenn: Yeah, and in a fast, like in a high service environment, anything that's fast-paced, it's about quickly getting on the ground and running and making it work properly. And so there's another thing that I think a leader that's really effective can do, is to instil in others that sense of empowerment, that "if I can trust you in this job to do what I know you're going to do for the customer, then I know I can do my job", and that's also tricky to let go and not micromanage.

Michael: That is tough, not micromanaging, especially in that fast-paced environment but you've got to do it, it's critical otherwise you're going to be overrun with stress.

Jenn: Absolutely.

Michael: So what's a concrete piece of advice that you would give to somebody who's going into a leadership position for the first time?

Jenn: I would first of all say get some help from somebody. Don't do it by yourself. I would say that could be anybody, I'm not trying to promote coaching. I'm trying to promote working with others and not feeling like you're isolated on your own. A lot of times I think a leader in a new position feels like they have to prove themselves and their afraid to go and ask for help because they'll think that's a sign of weakness.

So if there's a mentor in the organisation or a mentor outside or a coach or anybody that can say be an objective sounding board, because sometimes that is all you need is to sound out your idea before you got put it into practice.

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The other thing I think is important is to build rapport with your team, especially if you're somebody who's within the team been promoted, that's a really challenging one where you were once at the same level and now you're in charge of those people, that can be a real tricky one. It's maintaining that rapport and allowing them to still contribute and have a conversation with you about how things should work.

Michael: Yeah, absolutely, that can be a tricky one. Franchisees often promote their store managers from within their store, what's some support that a franchisee or a restaurant operator could give to that store manager and how could they help them through that process of becoming promoted from within?

Jenn: I think there's a real important aspect in that providing assistance by saying "I'm available", not necessarily having it formalised, it probably would be useful to have it formalised because you know your schedules are going to be really tight and people are really busy, so having a check in once a week at least to say "how are you going, what can we talk about" and having an open-ended conversation about anything, not just "these are the things we need to tick off the list, and having that plus a willingness to be available for that person if they do have questions or do need things.

Michael: That's powerful, that's really powerful. So taking that team member out of the environment and sitting down one-on-one and having a meeting with them and say "look, I'm available, how are you going".

Jenn: Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, I love that, that's a really powerful thing to leave everybody with. Jenn, is there anything else you want to get across about leadership?

Jenn: Don't ever underestimate the power of just calling and asking how a person is.

Michael: Yeah, just picking up the phone and saying---

Jenn: Picking up the phone and just saying "I wanted to check and see how things are going", and also knowing how that person's travelling and staying in touch. That small, little investment of time and real genuine concern will far outweigh the once a quarter or once a half year formal assessment.

Michael: Is that the nature of true leadership, is this caring about people who are underneath you or caring about people who are in your team?

Jenn: I think it is. I think it's building a community within a business. Business we keep thinking isn't personal but it is, they're human beings and so I think if you can't get along and care about the people you're working with, well they're not going to care back.

Michael: We're all people right, we all crave connection.

Jenn: Absolutely.

Michael: I love it Jenn. Now if the listeners want to get in touch, tell us a bit about what you do with leaders, how do you develop leaders and tell us about your business and your service.

Jenn: Well the focus right now is coaching leaders who want to create change through business and my main focus is doing coaching programs in different formats that make it

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flexible for people. So I tend to work with people over a longer period of time where they can go through that change themselves within. When we step forward and say "I want to actually create a new way of doing business", it's scary, it's hard and we need someone to maybe guide us or walk alongside us and that's what I do but I do it very carefully and caringly.

Michael: I love it, and your business name and how can we reach out to you?

Jenn: Well I go under the name Jenn Shallvey but I teach intuition skills through Intuition Starter. I coach under the words Change Initiator and I have just launched a community called Shared Destiny. They are three different arms of my business, but if you want to find me the easiest way is to find my website which is jennshallvey.com.

Michael: Perfect, and we will have all of that linked up into the show notes. Before we go, tell us about that community that you've created, is it Destiny?

Jenn: Shared Destiny, I'm just starting it now, launching next year in 2016 and it's a dream I've had for a really long time, like forever, that I really believe passionately that the last place where we can create positive change in this world is through business. I think business has got the resources, the people and the passion and if we can just take that amazing group of people and turn it a little bit more in another direction, we might actually be able to make a bigger impact in this world and make some positive change.

Michael: Solve some of humanity's biggest problems, right?

Jenn: Absolutely, but start with just even the business around the corner, could be anybody anywhere but I really believe that if we bring some leaders together and help each other out and do that in a way that's not about selling to each other but about networking to actually help build the community.

Michael: I love it, and is that a mastermind group or is that an online community?

Jenn: No, no it's going to be part online, part in person and I'm just starting it in Sydney, that will be my first meeting and then there'll be an online forum for discussions that we'll be hosting starting probably around now, but I'd say February.

Michael: Fantastic, that sounds exciting, and its invite only of course, it's very exclusive?

Jenn: No, not at all, I don't do exclusive, I just want people who are really serious and passionate about creating change through business and they would read the website and they'd know. If you read it and you say "yeah, that's me", you know it. I mean I have a few people, I met with a lady this morning, we had the same conversation. I said "you get it, don't you" and she goes "yeah, I get it, this is it", and if you don't, it doesn't matter. We can't please everybody, if it works for you it works for you, I'm not at all attached to whether it's for everybody, but I do believe it's actually a new direction we can take business in.

Michael: I love it, I love it. So if you're listening to this and you're resonating, you're jiving with what we're saying, jump on jennshallvey.com and take a look at Jenn's mission and Jenn's message. If you're jiving with that, jump in and become a part of Shared Destiny, that sounds very, very cool.

Jenn: It's pretty exciting for me.

Michael: I love it, Jenn.

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Jenn: Thanks Michael, I wasn't expecting to talk about that today.

Michael: That's okay, I thought I'd drop you in it. Awesome, thank you so much for your time Jenn, it's fantastic to have talked to you and I know that everyone's going to get a lot out of this chat about leadership.

Jenn: Great, I'm glad to help and I always welcome an email or question and I'm that kind of person, so if anybody's in Sydney and wants to chat they can always drop me a line and I'll catch up for coffee too.

Michael: I love it, thanks Jenn, I'm so grateful for your time.

Jenn: Thank you very much Michael, you're doing a great thing, thank you.

Michael: Thank you.

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