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From Rome, Italy, I'm Suzette Grillot, the dean of the college of international studies at the University of Oklahoma. Welcome to World Views at CIS.

On today's show, we speak to Adam Bryant and Mark Singer about their careers as writers, and how their experiences working with high-profile sources have shaped their perceptions of leadership.

I figured maybe I could make a small contribution and imagine a world in which we just interview female CEOs as CEOs first...

First, I'll speak to Adam Bryant, Managing Director at Merryck & Company, a leadership development and executive mentoring firm. Previously, he created and wrote the Corner Office column at the New York Times. During his many years at the Times, Bryant interviewed more than 500 CEOs from a diverse range of companies and backgrounds. He joins us today to discuss the lessons he's learned from the leaders he's interviewed, and how that leadership can translate across sectors and international boundaries.

Adam Bryant, welcome to World Views.

Thanks Suzette. Thanks for having me.

It's great to have you here. And this is kind of an interesting topic, I think, for us on World Views, but we're gonna make this international connection because I'm a long time reader and appreciator of your work. You wrote The New York Times column Corner Office for about ten years, right? And so this whole notion of workplace culture and the ways in which CEOs come into positions as people, and you got to know them as people, and how that affects workplace culture. Now there's work place culture, all around the world. So we're gonna make that extension but first let's start with-- Just how did you get to talking about this subject and what have you learned through that process?

Sure, I interviewed more than five hundred CEOs for Corner Office. The original idea was pretty simple. It was a simple what-if question which is, What if I sat down with CEOs and literally never asked them a single question about their companies or their business, and instead just asked them really open-ended questions about the leadership lessons they've learned over the course of their lives -- how they lead inside their company as opposed to how they lead in their industry. I always asked them how they hire: What qualities they look for what questions they ask, and what career and life advice they give to new college grads. So that was the original idea. I set myself a couple of guidelines. I was gonna embrace diversity in every sense of the word: Race, gender, nationality, all kinds of companies -- for profits not-for-profits. I also decided I was gonna interview roughly half women. Because I don't think it's just 'cause I'm the father of two daughters, but I've always been puzzled by how few women there are at the top of corporate America, so I just, I was going to interview a lot of women, but I was never going to ask them any gender-specific questions. So, I was always gonna ask them-- interview them as leaders who happen to be women, as opposed to women leaders. Because even to this day, when I see other people interviewing female CEOs, they usually start the same way it's like... So you're a wife, you're a mother, you're a CEO, how do you do it all? And I figured maybe I could make a small contribution and imagine a world in which we just interview female CEOs as CEOs first.

Have you interviewed many people in higher education, and how is it that you've learned-- You

know, what you've learned, how does it apply to higher ed?

Sure, I have interviewed a lot of university presidents. I always ask the leaders I interview, What are the most important lessons you've learned? And a lot of them talk about one of the biggest shifts, if they have an academic background, is in academia. You tell me, but I think the expectation is you write something once and you never say it again, right? Let other people footnote you, but you say, once you publish, you move on. And as a leader you have to understand that you have to constantly repeat the message once you come up with your message. You almost have to be like a politician and repeat it ten times a day, to different audiences. And they've all told me that that was a tough shift because they just realized the importance of communication. And I believe in that expression -- there's no such thing as over-communication and you have to communicate it many different ways. That's 'cause especially huge institutions of higher ed, you've got so many constituencies, so many stakeholders, so you gotta be communicating non-stop. And the job is getting even tougher because what I've heard from a lot of them now is, it used to be one thing to do the internal newsletter, and give speeches on campus, but now if anything happens in the world, as a higher ed leader you're expected to respond on Twitter, on Facebook. And I've heard from a lot of higher ed leaders, that they're kind of wrestling with that, especially if you're kind of a private person, any time anything ever happens in the world you're supposed to have a comment on it.

Well, so the reason why I asked this question, is because what drew me to your article regarding your workplace culture in our interviews, is that, what you were learning from them was very applicable to what we teach our students here. And it isn't so much the substance of the work. You didn't necessarily get into the the specifics of their industry, you talked about them as people in terms of the skills and characteristics that they bring. The things that always stuck out to me, were being curious and being open-minded and accepting of others, and willing to engage in dialog. You mentioned communication just a few minutes ago. So those kinds of characteristics are things that we like to think happen in a college classroom, through that engagement-- Through the process of being educated is that you end up as a more open-minded person and somebody who's really curious. And so that to me was the connection between a lot of what you were doing in business and how it relates to education. But those things are not just American. You mentioned you had some diversity, but those aren't just business-oriented things. Those are global, right? You can extend this even beyond the United States.

Yeah, global and very human. I do find that the way society is moving in business, everything's about spreadsheets and analysis and with technology, we always have devices in our hands. And so much of what I've come to appreciate is that we have to go back to first principles, which is that we are not that far beyond the sort of tribal culture that we all lived in many, many, many years ago, and those core fundamental skills of listening-- I really believe listening is an increasingly rare skill. Just looking somebody in the eye and actually hearing what they're saying. I heard this great expression, that most conversations are serial monologues. So it's, while I'm talking, you might be waiting for me to talk so that you can tell me what you think. And again, the devices aren't helping, but just those basic skills of being a team player -- listening, curious. As I start getting a few gray hairs -- I've managed a lot of people over the years -- there's just a basic quality that some people have of owning their job, right? Like you say, "This is your job and people put that on their shoulders and they take responsibility for it and they figure out how to get it done," where there's a lot of people who start pointing fingers and it's like, "Well you didn't tell me I had to do this" and I just... I really have come to value that quality of owning your job, team player, that sort of get it done quality. And also relevant for higher ed. A lot of people talk about different kinds of

intelligences and I think one of the most important in business or just in life in general, and frankly, the most useful is just to have a kind of high "get it" factor. Like you're put in a new situation. Can you get up to speed quickly? And my own family, the expression we kept hammering with our daughters is read the room. Whatever room you're in, you gotta read. And that is its own kind of intelligence. So I do think there are broader issues that all of this raises for higher ed and just society in general.

So the university sector, and then we've established that it's also maybe something that happens globally, but it just sounds like what you're referring to, it even goes beyond businessmen. You are a business reporter, you're working in a business world, these are CEOs that you're basically talking to but this is beyond business, you're commenting on society in general.

Yeah, and I think in business, what a lot of the people told me, and I've come to appreciate, is that at the end of the day pretty much everything is just about people. Like there is the business, there's the strategy of that company, but everything-- 99 percent of it is just human interactions. And sometimes we forget that. And I spent many years as a business reporter interviewing CEOs, but I did come to appreciate that the world kind of interviewed them almost like football coaches. Like, what's the game plan for this Sunday? And what about the other team? Or watching a lot of tape as opposed to sitting down and saying like, you've learned a lot share your insights and your wisdom. And frankly, most people never ask CEOs those questions. And my favorite interviews were the ones where you could kind of see them connecting dots in real time. Over the years I've tested a lot of different questions to try and get the best insights and did find that the first three questions I asked, I always felt like I had about 80 percent of a person at the end of it. And the first three questions are, tell me about when you were a kid, tell me about your parents, and then the third one is, how do you think your parents have influenced your leadership style? And almost nobody has ever asked these CEOs, that question. And it's amazing. You can see all the gears turning in their brain, it's like, "Oh yeah, that's why I run those meetings that way, because we used to argue as a family at dinner and I was always comfortable with that." So, the older I get, I think a lot of that stuff is just go back to first principles. Yes, a lot of people think of children as young adults, but I'm starting to think more that adults are just older children, and a lot of that concrete starts drying pretty early on in our lives.

Really, what you're emphasizing is a sense of humanity. You're asking about them as human beings. You're asking about their background and their experience with their families or whatever. And I think that sticks out to me, as I travel the world or engage with people from sectors and industries, is that people are just people. And so that's kind of the top lesson, I guess, that I've taken away from your work. What is the top lesson you've taken away from your work?

Yeah, I would say that I'm often asked, what is the one thing that kinda threads through my 500 plus interviews. And I did come up with this label, just because I kept trying to figure out what is it, and the best label I can come up with is what I call applied curiosity. And to me, it just speaks to this kind of relentless habit of mind they have where they're not always just questioning everything and trying to understand the world around them, but they take the extra step of trying to sort of build frameworks for understanding the world and then being able to explain the world. Once you start building those frameworks, then you start seeing gaps and that's what leads to business opportunities. And I do think it's... We can argue through dinner, whether it's something you're born with, or whether it's nurtured, but I do see that habit of mind, and I think a lot of them frankly just can't turn it off. Just a trip to the mall on the weekend becomes them interviewing the manager

about the square footage and their revenue per square foot, and if they move the line five feet, to just sort of like... Could you turn that off once in a while? A lot of people have asked me about if I've spot any difference between leadership styles among men and women. And for a long time, I looked for them at the end of the day, I said, No, there isn't. I think it's much more likely to be affected by whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, or whether you're analytical or creative or frankly, even whether you grew up in a large family when you were a kid or a small family, I think that much more is gonna determine your leadership style. Another insight I had is that leadership to me is probably one of the hardest things to do. You're getting a bunch of people together, as in to set aside all the personal stuff, and join in and drive towards a bigger goal. It's hard for me to imagine anything that's harder than that. And what I came to understand was that every aspect of leadership, you have to think of as a paradox. It's essentially two opposing forces and you have to find a balance point between them and be able to switch a little bit back and forth depending on the circumstance. So let's take one example in-- leaders need to be confident, right? They need to have confidence, they need to be able to make a decision among the ambiguity, but they also have to have humility. Sometimes they need to... Almost compartmentalize that humility in their brain. You talk to enough leaders, some of them say, "I lead from the front and others say lead from the back." I'm not really sure what that means, but there's probably different times you should do one or the other. And again, every aspect of leadership, I think if you just sort of think of it that way, it's clarifying. It helps simplify the complexity without over-simplifying it.

Fascinating commentary there, because it's so applicable. It's so interesting when you meet people, and it's so applicable to a completely different industry. But I wanna push a little bit in the short time we have left on this nature versus nurture business. Because as an educator I like to think that we can program things or experiences that will facilitate these types of things that will grow confidence and grow a sense of humility that doesn't just have to be there to begin with, that it's something that we can cultivate. Everyone has the potential for these types of things?

Yes, I completely agree. And it's a mix of both. I mean, in terms of curiosity about the world I totally think it's an important role that parents and educators can play just or open up people's eyes to things.

Favorite interviews, do you have one favorite interview or interviews? Do you have a top three?

They're sort of like my children, like it's hard to choose among 50-25 of them. I will say that some of the biggest surprises I had were around when I would ask them, What's your favorite job interview question, or how do you interview... There were moments I never expected. And that's probably been one of the biggest surprises I came to appreciate. The CEOs have to be like master psychologists, because by the time somebody gets to them for a job interview that person has all the right answers. My biggest weakness is I care too much, I'm a perfectionist. So, CEOs, out of necessity have to come up with what I call bank shot questions, right? How do you get around that facade that people present? And they just get super creative. I had one CEO read my palm. He told me he reads the palm and looked at the public relations person in the conference room, and she shot me a look like, No, he actually does this. So I had him read my palm. We did a lot of role play. But just sort of fun job interview questions that are actually pretty revealing. I think a really good job interview question -- it's also good for sort of two bottle of wine point in any dinner party -- is if there were no humans on the planet only animals, what kind of animal would you be and why? And the why part is just as important as the animal itself. And I've done this with large and small groups over the years. I have heard some bizarre animals. People get super specific. There's this bird in

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Arizona and it sits on top of the cactus, it's like... Where does this come from? But then the why part is always interesting 'cause then they say, and I'm like that for reasons X, Y, Z. And it gets a self-awareness, and I think self-awareness is just another one of those things that you just have to have if you're gonna be an effective leader.

Alright well, Adam, thank you so much for this, thank you for those years of columns. Wish you well as you move on to the next place. Thank you so much.

Thanks so much, Suzette.

You have been listening to my conversation with Adam Bryant, former editor for the New York Times and author of the Corner Office column. He is now Managing Director at Merryck & Company, and the author of two books: *Quick and Nimble; Lessons from Leading CEOs on How to Create a Culture of Innovation*, and *The Corner Office; Indispensable and Unexpected Lessons from CEOs on How to Lead and Succeed*.

For more information about Adam Bryant, or to leave a comment or question about this conversation, you can visit our website at cisworldviews.com.

Next, my colleague Rebecca Cruise speaks to writer Mark Singer. Singer, who was born and raised in Tulsa, has been a writer at the New Yorker since 1974. He joins us today to discuss the role of media in the United States, why today could still be a “golden age in journalism,” and how Trump has changed since Singer’s 1997 profile on the then-bankrupt real estate magnate.

Mark Singer, welcome to World Views.

Nice to be here.

Well, you are originally from Tulsa but to have made your way or made your way, a couple of decades ago, to New York and you have been a reporter for many years, a columnist as well. Let's start with talking about this interesting juxtaposition or the role that the media plays in our society and I'm sure that you've seen this... Change significantly in the decades that you've been involved, but it seems that there is this interesting love-hate relationship with the media that we both need the media to be the voice of the masses in some regards, but they're also an easy target for our ire and our hate. What is that relationship and what should it be in a democratic system, do you suppose?

I think in a democratic system, the media's job is to report. It's not to exist in opposition to the powers that be, it's simply to inform the public. Things are much more complicated than that simple, you know, paradigm. And what's happened? I can't put my finger on it because there's always been an adversarial relationship between the presidency, whatever administration is in power and the media. That without exception, that happens and you want that to be kind of a give and take there, it's in the nature of it and it depends on how thin-skinned the politician in question is. But I think what's happened is, is that there has been a polarization within the media in the same way that if there's been a political polarization. And I think it's not that difficult to distinguish between objective reporting and propaganda. I feel pretty strongly about the role that particularly far right-wing media has played in-- The media's job is not to retail conspiracy theories, it's to adhere to the facts and report the world as it is and that I don't know that that has changed. I think what's happened definitely, since the election in 2016 is that I think this is a golden age of

journalism actually. There's a lot of adversarial commentary on social media and we're not gonna get away from that. I don't think as long as it's there, and the truth gets obscure because conspiracy theories arise, but I don't think that whatever people derisively even referred to as a mainstream media is engaged in that sort of anger. The people are doing their jobs reporting.

It seems particularly with the growth of social media in the last decade or so, that there is even more of a tendency than prior to pick that media that you want to believe or that source that you wanna believe, be it mainstream, or be it some of these other media sources.

Well, there is confirmation bias, and that that is something that I think we should try to get around. It's an individual responsibility I've taken in the last year and a half, perhaps longer, to pay more attention to voices that I perhaps politically wasn't inclined to listen to. In my case, I follow on Twitter, for example, and wherever else I find them in the Washington Post, or online versions of a lot of conservative publications. Because I think there is there are a lot of really interesting voices that have emerged, especially since Trump has been elected, people who were, I think Orthodox conservative people who are intellectually honest and maybe I wasn't paying proper attention, or giving proper credence to before but I'm very grateful for them now. And that has been in my own life, a refreshing experience, and enlightening. I think we have to get out of our bubbles, and... I know it's a cliché, but it's a real fact.

Well, you mentioned Trump, and this is a politician that in many ways seems to have made at least his current career as an anti-media advocate, or I don't know what term you wanna use, but he has been very much against the media and has gotten a lot of support for his statements as such. And possibly, I'm not sure he's the one that coined this idea of fake news, but we do associate it a great deal with him and some have taken it not to mean inaccurate news, but news again that they don't like... What has done Trump done to this relationship?

Well, I think Donald Trump has exploited a mistrust of elites. Let's say if the New York Times and the Washington Post are elites. I'm not quite sure where that perception comes from-- They're thought leaders, I'm not quite sure that it's populism, but it certainly has been identified as that. And he used that as a weapon. I don't think the fake news is coming from mainstream media. There's a great deal of that is out there, but it's-- Donald Trump, when he attacks someone or criticizes organisations or behaviors of people, very often, it's a projection of what he subconsciously knows himself to be guilty of, or responsible for. And I think that it's not at all helpful, but it's really just a hobby horse that he keeps riding and I think that we're stuck with that for as long as he is empowered. But it's substance-free. He's a person who acts on impulse. He's really kind of the most unrestrained id we've ever seen in the White House. And I think that it would be really good if people would not take the bait, especially the media itself, if you could just sort of not be distracted by the shiny object. And this is what he's a master of-- it's indirection. Distracting people because today's headline is not good news for him. So, this eruption, or that eruption, is an attempt to change the narrative.

Now, these are observations that you're making that are not casual observations. You've actually recently written a book, *Trump and Me* about Donald Trump. But you wrote a book about him previous to that, and your detailed observations about the person that you saw with the first book and the person that you were exploring here with the 2016 book how, how did he change?

Well, let me give the chronology of this. So I've been a staff writer with the New Yorker since 1974,

and in 1996 I was assigned to write a profile of Trump. It wasn't my idea, but I went ahead and did it, and I spent many months, nonstop, with him, but in it out--

He gave you some access.

That gave me a great deal of access because his hope was at a time after a spate of bankruptcies when nobody was particularly paying attention to him, he was very accessible. I travelled with him. I went various places and was also very, uh... Did a lot of independent reporting to try to determine how his business is actually functioned to understand the phenomenon of Donald Trump and how he had very ingenious-ly branded himself in a way that no one had ever quite done. Certainly in real estate. So I published that profile with 1997 and then I published that piece in a book in around 2005. So this most recent book, *Trump and Me*, it just came upon me during the campaign in the spring of 2016-- You know, I need to say something. I'd written occasionally about him in the meanwhile, especially in 2011, when he was... Emerges as the birther-in-chief. And so I added a couple of chapters to that original piece.

So this is-- some of it is recycled. I haven't spent any time with him, I've just been observing him the way anybody who sort of politically--

His access has changed a little bit, I'm sure.

It's access, and I think he's the most transparent person I've ever encountered as a reporter. He is very easy to read, in a way that I'm not sure he's even aware of. He exposes what his underlying message and motive is, but something has changed very distinctively and that is his verbal expression, he's much more bombastic. The stakes when I was writing by him in the late 90s, were of course, very low and how he has sort of reinvented himself as this darling of the right-wing-- He's not a man who has any ideology, he has no core beliefs that I'm aware of. He believes in Donald Trump. So most of the what we're seeing is defensive behavior with him, but he had a lot of people who have fallen in step with his message, especially the fake news, anti-media narrative. And so now there's a a feedback loop, I think, between him and his base, but in the meanwhile, he's become less articulate and he hasn't really tried to be informed on issues. All along, he's been much more of a figurehead president than people appreciate, I think.

Will you talk about some of these changes and being bombastic, the fake news, the figurehead president? Let's take this out of the US context a little bit. What are the consequences of him as a president that is acting in this manner? I'm thinking particularly about fake news, a mantra that's been taken up by societies or around the world. Freedom of the press, is by many accounts at a very significant low at least in the post-Cold War era and some are pointing a finger at Donald Trump and his blaming of the media.

I think authoritarian leaders in in many places have literally adopted that label and are weaponizing that against their opposition. So that is an innovation that they have Trump to thank for. But as far as in basically constitutional countries where there aren't authoritarian leaders, I think it's very difficult for them to make heads or tails of American policy now.

And Trump himself, I don't believe has high credibility, so that it really falls upon cabinet secretaries and then the foreign service, the people that one encounters on a routine basis in various countries around the world, to really represent the United States interest. And of course there's a

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disconnect between Trump's rhetoric, and the sort of ongoing mission of the diplomatic corps throughout the country and there's a great confusion and, I think, disillusionment, certainly within the State Department.

Absolutely and... As we wrap up here, I do wanna ask if you think that this is a trend-- That we're going to continue to see a trend where the... Whoever it is sitting in the White House is this antagonistic and this distrustful. Or is this something that can kind of be scaled back or maybe to see a pendulum were that the media may not be the villain or quite the villain that they are currently being betrayed by some?

I really do believe that the pendulum is swinging constantly and we will not, I don't believe, have another president any time who I hope who is this combative and this really disrespectful of American institutions-- Disrespectful of the separation of powers. And for one thing, and I'm really more focused on propaganda and an adversarial relations with the press, as I say, there's always been this adversarial relationship, not necessarily hostility between the press and the White House.

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. You've given us a lot to think about, and the least of which is our own responsibility to think about the media that we are taking in and to broaden our own horizons and get out of our bubbles. Thank you so much for joining us.

You have been listening to Rebecca Cruise's conversation with New Yorker columnist and author Mark Singer. His most recent book, *Trump and Me*, was released in 2016.

For more information about Mark Singer, or to leave a comment or question about this conversation, you can visit our website at cisworldviews.com.

We would always love to hear your thoughts and comments about this show. You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter @CISWorldViews – and you can follow me @suzettegrillot.

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