



Showing Up in the Lives of Those You Lead | A How I Lead Interview with Kent Jordan

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Kurt Francom:

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and obviously the host of the Leading Saints podcast. Now, I started Leading Saints back in 2010. It was just a hobby blog, and it grew from there. By the time 2014 came around, we started the podcast, and that's really when it got some traction and took off. In 2016, we became a 501c3 nonprofit organization. and we've been growing ever since. And now I get the opportunity of interviewing and talking with remarkable people all over the world. Now, this is a segment we do on the Leading Saints podcast called How I Lead, and we reach out to everyday leaders. They're not experts, gurus, authors, PhDs. They're just everyday leaders who've been asked to serve in a specific leadership calling, and we simply ask them, How is it that you lead? And they go through some remarkable principles that should be in a book, that should be behind a PhD. They're usually that good. And we just talk about sharing what the other guy's doing. And I remember being a leader, just simply wanting to know, okay, I know what I'm trying to do, but what's the other guy doing? What's working for him? And so that's why every Wednesday or so, we publish these how I lead segments to share. All right, this may be my first ever interview with someone from the great state of Delaware. Here I am with Kent Jordan. How are you? I'm good. Good. Thank you, Kurt. Awesome. Now, you were recommended to me. Was it Buck Hamill that that recommended we chat? Does that name sound familiar?

Kent Jordan:

Yes. Buck was serving as an elders quorum president while I was the stake president here in the Wilmington, Delaware stake.

Kurt Francom:

Wow, awesome. And how long ago were you released as stake president?

Kent Jordan:

This past June. It wasn't soon enough for the members of the Delaware Stake, Wilmington Delaware Stake, I'm sure. But it was it was, yeah, a nine year run and ended this past June.

Kurt Francom:

Now, I'm curious, maybe we'll just start there. You know, that's nine years of your life. You kind of forget what life was like not being the stake president or having that calling or identity. And so what's it been like the last few months, just reorienting yourself to the world and the church and your stake? Has it been easy or tough or what comes to mind?

Kent Jordan:

Well, you know, I, I think like a lot of people who've had the blessing of a leadership calling, it's a set of mixed emotions when you're released. On the one hand, It's nice to get your evenings back and, and to not feel like you're kind of on the run all the time. But there's, it's such a wonderful, wonderful opportunity to get to know the saints across a congregation or set of congregations and to be with them and hear their stories and, you know, you fall in love with them. And it's hard when you realize, well, I'm not going to have a reason to go to all those congregations anymore when you're a stake president. Or at least I felt like I need to be visiting each of those congregations regularly. Now, if I show up, you know, they'll say, well, why are you here? I don't just show up and I miss them. I miss them because I love them. So I have mixed emotions.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And what was the general makeup of your of your stake as far as how many wards did the geographic layout of it all?

Kent Jordan:

Yeah. We had eight units. This the stake had been one of the larger geographic ones, I think, in the country for a while. It was almost the whole Delmarva Peninsula while I was a high counselor. And then they split the stake several years ago, and it became a good deal more manageable to get across it, but it was still sizable. It takes in a part of Southeast Pennsylvania, a part of Northeast Maryland, and the northern part of Delaware, the part we call above the canal. three buildings, eight congregations meeting in those buildings. And that's about the size of it.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So on a busy Sunday, are you driving several hours to get from one place to the other? Or is it not quite that big?

Kent Jordan:

It's not, you know, from if I were if I were going from visiting people up in the north down to the southern part of the stake, you know, it might take me as close to an hour, but usually you could plan out your day. So a typical Sunday would involve an hour and a half or two of driving to get to different buildings and meet different people in different places.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Interesting. And what were you doing prior to your time as a stake president?

Kent Jordan:

I served on the stake council for many, many years. I don't I think they were kind of wondering what to do with me. So I was on the Stake High Council. You can't do much damage there. I served in a couple of bishoprics, in elders quorum presidencies. I was a seminary teacher for five years in total, split between two different times when I was in that calling, early morning seminary teacher, and at one point a home study teacher. And always, you know, with a home teaching and a visiting teaching assignment that my, you know, I was trying to help a spouse out or ministering. So those were, yeah, those are the things.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, yeah, awesome. Now, I'm curious, you know, after nine years of this, you know, year after year, stake conference at a stake conference, I'm curious, is there anything that comes to mind that you learned from just as far as organizing a stake conference, you know, by the end of it, did you have a certain routine? Obviously, you're very prayerful and maybe directions and themes and but what comes to mind if you were to talk to a maybe a brand new stake president about the concept of stake conference?

Kent Jordan:

Well, you know, you get you preside at one a year and the other is always got a visiting authority. And when the visiting authority comes. You just kind of say, OK, whatever, whatever the visiting authority wants, that's the way that's going to be organized. And usually they're, you know, virtually always they're in touch with you and coordinating with you. But often they have an idea about how they want that to run. So one of those stake conferences, you're kind of along for the ride and you're learning, which is a great thing. The one where you as stake president are presiding, that's just a lot of prayer, right? And you pray with your counselors and you confer with the stake council and ask the stake council what they think the saints need to

encouragement or teaching or some extra, hopefully, inspiration on. And we always do an after general conference discussion and say, Okay, well, how do these things that we've learned from the prophets and apostles and other leaders apply in our stake? Like, where can we amplify and echo and strengthen the Saints and their desire to follow the prophet from these conferences. And usually our stake conference would be a couple of months after the April and the October general conference. So we always had some, some new and inspiring and fresh material to try to be looking at. And between those things, and the unique circumstances of the stake, it wasn't hard to figure out what to talk about, it was hard to figure out what to leave out, right? What was the what was most important, picking the most important and running with that.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. And I'm curious about these, these sort of gatherings or discussions after General Conference. Was that done just primarily with your stake presidency? Or did you include others in that that conversation?

Kent Jordan:

Well, we, we would talk about it in stake but also in stake council, you know, you get those brothers and sisters together, and, and the Holy Ghost descends, then you learn a lot. So those discussions helped. Those discussions helped a lot in shaping the things that we wanted to teach in a leadership meeting and the things we wanted to teach in Bishopric training and the things we wanted to discuss with the members in the adult session, the evening, Saturday evening session and the general session.

Kurt Francom:

Awesome, really helpful. You know, you sent over some some general principles that as I always do, setting up these interviews, just ask what are two or three principles of leadership that really served you well in your time as a leader and jumping into those first one being love and respect the people within your stewardship. But what did that look like on a day to day week to week basis?

Kent Jordan:

Uh, trying to be with the saints, trying to get an opportunity to visit with them. It's, you know, this is, I'm, I'll bet this is a challenging job for you because you have, as you interview people, you're probably hearing the same sorts of things again and again. But for me, you'd be surprised, but

yeah, sure. Didn't, didn't get much, more complicated than wanting to know who they were, right? Like finding out about these people. I, I remember when I was set apart, Elder Robert Gay extended the call. And that was a story all by itself.

Kurt Francom:

I was on the well, let's hear it. What's the story?

Kent Jordan:

I would say. an officer in a national lawyers and judges organization called the American Inns of Court. And I was running a meeting on the West Coast. We had a conference in Anaheim, California. And so I couldn't be there for the weekend that they were reorganizing the stakes. So they said, well, you can do this by remote, by phone. And these were these were the days pre COVID before everybody knew how to manage Zoom or something like that. Yeah, sure. So I spoke with Elder Gay and the Area 70 who was attending with him on the phone, and I thought this is going to be easy. I thought I knew who the stake president should be. It should be this one brother in the stake who I knew well professionally. He'd been the CEO of a company where I had worked. He was just as thoughtful and kind and good, spiritual. He was a return mission president. He's just everything you would want in a stake president. the kind of guy I would crawl over cut glass for. And so they said, so who do you, and he was a counselor in the stake presidency at the time. I said, well, it ought to be brother so and so. And, and they said, well, anybody else? And I named two or three other brothers. And I thought that's it for that. And then I got a call in the middle of this meeting, like, and we were doing strategic planning for the next X years. So I had to excuse myself, step out. And they said, well, what about this? I thought, oh, maybe I'm getting called to council. Well, I got called out three or four times during the meeting. And then the call center was like, well, can you be on a plane back here tomorrow? I said, well, yeah, I can do that. Oh, I get it. And yeah, so I caught the red eye and got back. And I think the I think the members of the stake were nearly as shocked as I was when the, you know, when they called for the sustaining vote. It was, it was, it was a pretty big surprise for all of us. But in the blessing that Elder Gay gave me, as he set me apart, he said that you will see the people as the Savior does, which is one of the most beautiful things I'd ever heard. That was a remarkable thing to hear that. And, and it actually came true on many occasions, which was a surprise to me, I didn't, I always felt like President Monson got, you know, more than his share of spiritually, I thought he'd, you know, we'd like rattle off the spiritual experience, I'd say, I don't get any of those things. He's getting lines. He's like, who these general authorities are getting. I don't have experiences like that. So I wasn't used to, I wasn't used to the power of spiritual insight that came from time to time, associated with the mantle of the calling. I just, it's an extraordinarily humbling thing. Emotionally quite powerful to get just a little bit of a taste of how Heavenly Father and Christ feel about the people in your stewardship.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, that's powerful. That's powerful. I'm curious, just what do you remember from those first few months or just that first year of finding your footing in this calling? Is there anything specific you tried or new direction or things that worked that you thought would work but didn't? Or what comes to mind that sort of getting started in the calling?

Kent Jordan:

Well, I had great counselors, including that one brother who I said should be the stake president. And he was like training wheels. He was holding that brother in reserve to be the first temple president of the Philadelphia temple. And, but I got a few months with him before that call came. And I learned a lot from him. And I learned a lot from my second counselor, another wonderful man, a great leader. They're experienced brothers and sisters on the stake council. So a lot of it was a lot of it was trying to understand what the what the stake needed at a level where I hadn't had to really. I mean, like I say, I'd been on the high council. I'd been in discussions about the needs of the stake, but I hadn't I hadn't had to think myself, oh, this is the direction that that we this is where the focus of resources really ought to be. So I hope I was listening. I was trying to listen. Then I I got the sort of strong impression that we we really needed to do some reaping and rescuing work. The communities in and around Wilmington had had some difficult financial and economic times. When much of the country was coming out of the 2008 Great Recession, Wilmington had a little tougher time coming out than some other places. And that meant that people could find better opportunities elsewhere, often did. But there was always a core of wonderful saints who were sticking with it here and trying to lift them up and encourage them and then get us all feeling a little bit of the fire to go out and reap and rescue. And then, you know, regardless of what the circumstances were out there, whether it was a great season for it or a bad season for it, just like keep at it, then return, report, repeat. That was sort of the the mantra that came into my mind and that I tried to encourage us as leaders in the stake to work with the wards and branches to move forward with.

Kurt Francom:

Interesting. I'm curious, obviously, with the bishops in your stake, they're, you know, focusing on different maybe welfare requests or issues, you know, in conjunction with the Relief Society president, elders quorum president, those types of things. Does anything come to mind as far as your interaction or encouraging encouragement they received or your involvement with their welfare efforts or what you saw there? Anything come to mind?

Kent Jordan:

Well, I learned a lot about how different how different leaders respond to their responsibilities. You know, there were and and not in ways where you would say, Oh, that's right. And that's wrong, just different, just how one bishop would take a certain approach to the welfare needs of people who would come to him and another would take a slightly different approach. And there's a there's a relatively broad spectrum within which you'd say, well, that's perfectly acceptable. And I never had a bishop get where I thought, well, they're outside that I had one or two where I, you know, I say to him, well, you know, you might want to talk to brother or sister, so and so about X, before there's more assistance there, or, or, or maybe you should not be quite as. Because sometimes you'll have people contact you and say, Bishop Soto's not giving me what I need. And the former bishop was always blah, blah, blah. I would say, well, you have a wonderful bishop. You have a wonderful bishop, and he loves you. I know he loves you. You should be listening to what he says. He's got the priesthood keys. And if you pay attention and you follow what he's asking you to do, you're going to find it's going to work out well for you. But some people don't want to hear that. But it did give me an insight from the person's perspective, and that gave me an opportunity when talking to the bishop to say, I'm sure this is not a surprise to you, but this is how Sister X feels or Brother Y feels. And then, you know, I would hear the bishop's perspective on it. And in those circumstances, it was, again, a remarkable thing to see how good the people are, like the person on the receiving end, they're, they're dear, sweet people. And sometimes life has dealt them a very rough hand. And the bishops in the Relief Society presidency and Elders Quorum presidency oh my gosh, they're so wonderful, like really, really, really trying to do the right things. Even when they're getting pushback from the person they're trying to help. So that would like that was an education. It was an education almost from the start.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. That's helpful. And did you feel any extra pressure during that, you know, as they're focusing on welfare to provide, you know, more specific training or resources or getting the new bishops up to speed? Or did you sort of allow that to unfold naturally?

Kent Jordan:

No, you know, I got one piece of advice from a former stake president who moved out to Utah but stayed in touch with me. And he said to me something like, just remember the It's the it's the bishop's storehouse. I think he was trying to say, like, gently, don't you get in there and mess around because you got to let those brothers handle it. They're on the front line. Remember, it's the bishop's storehouse. And I always tried to keep that in mind. It's not the stake president's storehouse. It's the bishop's storehouse. Trust them, encourage them and just make sure that the that the foundational principles are being reinforced regularly enough that everybody knows

what they are, because there's always a rollover in bishopric members. And, you know, so you're constantly going back and showing them the video about how to handle the tithes and offerings properly and the basic, you know, extending assistance in the Lord's way of training. But most of the time, not only they didn't need my help, I would look at how they were handling their responsibilities and think, oh my gosh, they're inspired and they're really terrific men.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's really helpful advice because there is, you know, the, the, the bishops are already sort of losing sleep over the, whether they're making the right decision or if they're helping the right ways and then to have sort of this other authoritative figure, like leaning over their shoulder and, you know, getting into the details can be that just that one extra layer of pressure when instead to hear sort of that encouragement or, the communication of trust to the bishop, saying, hey, I'm sure you're doing a great job. You're being thoughtful about these decisions. Just move forward in confidence. And that can be very encouraging.

Kent Jordan:

And they were to a man and their Relief Society presidents, you know, just astoundingly faithful, wise women. And with the shift in greater responsibility to elders quorum presidents, you know, watching them step up and move from being the guy who coordinated moves to being the person managing frontline, very difficult temporal needs in coordination with the bishop.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, really helpful. The next principle is really, coordinates well with the concept that Buck mentioned when he recommended that I reach out and do an interview, because he had mentioned that, what do you say here, that he's my first priesthood leader I've ever had conduct PPIs with me, and they were each unique and amazing. And you mentioned sort of this, like showing love to those that you lead by showing up in their lives, either personal interviews, worship together, side-by-side services. So I'm curious in that context of the personal priesthood interviews when you're following up with the Elders Quorum Presidents and things, is there any like approach or strategy or tactic you had going in there? Or how would you unpack how you handled those things?

Kent Jordan:

I can only remember one priesthood leader in my life who was really consistent with having priesthood interviews with me and I never felt like he was being hectoring or nagging me. It just felt like he loved me and he wanted to know how I was doing and he wanted to know how I was doing with my responsibilities in the church as well as with my family. So I really tremendously respected that man for that and And to the extent I felt, you know, inspiration on anything, I felt this urge to actually meet with the people I had some stewardship over. And so I just tried to make sure we were on a regular schedule. As often as I could, I would try to meet with them in person. At first, I was doing that you know, at the stake president's office, but pretty soon that felt like it worked so well. So I was trying to get into them, see if I could see them in their homes. COVID kind of threw a wrench into that for a while. We all got comfortable with Zoom, maybe too comfortable because then it was easy to stack stuff up and just like knock out four in a night or five in a night, doing back to back on Zoom. And I did that pretty often. But I still felt like, you know, you had to go out with them. And so I think that some of the most productive ones were where I'd say, look, why don't you come up with two or three people, you know, no more than that, maybe just a couple of people that you think we could visit together, somebody in your quorum who could really use some loving encouragement and and let's go see him together. And then I'd go pick him up, or we'd meet at the church and get in the same vehicle and then go and then we'd have time to talk together in the car. And we would go see people and we would minister together. And I would watch how they did that, not because they needed help from me, but because I wanted to see how they did it. And I felt like I learned a lot from my elders quorum presidents there. They did a beautiful job, and they love the people and I think it helped them I hope it helped them that I was along for the ride. So that's, that's how we did it. And I tried to do it on a on a frequent enough basis that they knew it was not window dressing. When I said I love you, I mean it. And that they were persuaded, I was in earnest about serving their their flock as much as they were earnest about it.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah. So just going back to the, you know, having the regular interviews and I appreciate just the simple advice of just, just do it, you know, because it can get out of routine or you feel like, ah, I feel like I just met with that elders quorum president. What, what would we even talk about? Maybe we can just skip that one. But even if it's a short meeting, you both walk away sort of edified, more connected and, and feeling that mutual support for one another and in these roles. Is there anything like, did you have any go-to questions as you met with elders quorum presidents or oThers?

Kent Jordan:

It doesn't feel like, I don't want this to sound trite, but when you really like the people, when you really love them, then you're talking to your friends and you're happy to be with them. And it doesn't feel like, oh, this is a chore. It's a great thing to visit and say, how are things going?

How's the family house work? Tell me about the quorum. What can I help with? Where are the places where you think we could be of assistance? And then, you know, that's more the tenor of it. And once in a while, you do need to say, well, how is it going doing your ministering interviews? That'll help if you do, you know, sometimes you got to be giving them a direction and encouragement, but mostly you're just talking to them about life and helping them know that the church has got their back. They're not in this. They're not in this alone.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, that's great. That's really helpful. And just that general encouragement and keeping them going. So awesome. The last principle you put here is build faith in Christ by seeing and sharing the manifold and merciful blessings that the saints experience. Tell me more about that.

Kent Jordan:

Well, this kind of goes hand in hand with those last two things, which is The members of the church are amazing. They really are amazing. And when you get to know them, it's so inspiring. And you've talked to people from all over the world. What a cool job you have. And here's the thing. It's not just people with fancy titles or leadership positions in the world or in the church. It's all the saints. You get to know them, you get to sit down and visit with them and you realize, you really do get a sense of why God loves them, right? You see the goodness in them and the sacrifices that they've made, the changes in their lives, and you get to understand, sometimes just by asking them straight up, what does the atonement mean for you? you get a testimony that just moves you to tears, and you got to say, other people have to hear this. I can't be the only one who hears this. Can I share some of this in stake conference or in a talk, in a word conference? And usually they'll say, sure. Almost always they'll say, sure. And then you're out there making sure other people hear those things, and they realize Well, Sister So-and-so, I've seen her at stake meetings. I had no idea that this happened, or that they have this testimony, or that this experience changed their life. Brother So-and-so, I didn't know he was a convert, and I didn't know how he found the church, or the church found him, or how the Holy Ghost moved in his life. When you share those things, it builds faith across the stake. And then the sense of community in the stake is strengthened. And there's a lot of, a lot of love and appreciation that gets built that way, I think.

Kurt Francom:

Yeah, that's inspiring. I'm curious, what's any, any other future plans now that you're released? Or they got a new calling or anything like that?

Kent Jordan:

Well, yeah, I'm, you know, we're doing I get to do that with my wife now. They're a little more like, oh, you two go together. So we're doing both those things. And that's a lot of fun. I'm teaching. I'm teaching Elders Quorum. And then I've got, you know, I'm retiring after 22 years in my day job. And that's, so there's a lot of change. We've got four new grandbabies this year. So there's excitement on the family front. So I'm, you know, 2025 is going to be a big year. Going to be a year of new challenges and excitement.

Kurt Francom:

Awesome. I wish you the best and you deserve it. And I really appreciate our conversation. All we've learned is from your experience. Last question I have for you is, as you think back on your time as a stake president, as a leader, how has being a leader helped you become a better follower of Jesus Christ?

Kent Jordan:

Well, that's actually, A pretty easy question to answer. I have appreciation, a new appreciation for, I mean, I always felt like my leaders were well motivated and good people. But I didn't know how much they prayed for the members until I was praying for the members. And when they would say, I love you, I would sometimes think, you don't even know me. But I don't think that anymore. I think that person probably really does love me. They're getting that same kind of remarkable experience I got, and it helps me want to follow Them.

Kurt Francom:

And that concludes this how I lead interview. I hope you enjoyed it. And I would ask you, could you take a minute and drop this link in an email, on social media, in a text, wherever it makes the most sense and share it with somebody who could relate to this experience. And this is how we develop as leaders, just hearing what the other guy is doing, trying some things out, testing, adjusting for your area. And that's where great leadership is discovered. So we would love to have you share this with somebody in this calling or a related calling, and that would be great. And also, if you know somebody, any type of leader, who would be a fantastic guest on the How I Lead segment, reach out to us. Go to leadingsaints.org contact. Maybe send this individual an email letting them know that you're going to be suggesting their name for this interview. We'll reach out to them. and see if we can line them up. So again, go to leadingsaints.org slash contact and there you can submit all the information and let us know. And maybe they will be on a future How I Lead segment on the Leading Saints podcast. Remember, solve the burden of

meetings by visiting leadingsaints.org slash 14 and getting 14 days access to the Meetings with Saints virtual library.

Gordon B. Hinckley:

It came as a result of the position of leadership which was imposed upon us by the God of heaven who brought forth a restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And when the declaration was made concerning the only true and living church upon the face of the earth, we were immediately put in a position of loneliness. The loneliness of leadership from which we cannot shrink nor run away, and to which we must face up with boldness and courage and ability.