Leadership Insights with Frank Jannuzi
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In the episode, Abe interviews Frank Jannuzi, CEO and President of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, about his insights into working with all three branches of government. Additionally, Jannuzi shares a few stories of his days at Amnesty International, the State Department, and advising Joseph Biden and John Kerry.

Allen: Welcome everyone to the Mansfield Global Leadership Podcast. I’m Allen Sangster. Dr. Kim is currently traveling through Asia, so I’m going to kick this one off by myself. I’m excited for today’s interview because it’s probably one of my favorite ones that we’ve done so far. Today’s guest, Frank Jannuzi, is the President and CEO of the Mansfield Foundation. But before that he served as the Deputy Director for Amnesty International. He also served as the Policy Director for East Asian and Public Affairs for the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, where he advised Committee Chairmen Joe Biden and John Kerry. Dr. Januzzi was also a Hitachi Fellow for the Council on Foreign Relations. Early in his career he served for nine years as an analyst for the U.S. Department of State. When Dr. Januzzi sat down with us not too long ago at the University of Montana, Abe asked him, what’re his big concerns in the Asia Pacific Region? What’re the sorts of things that keep him up at night? This is his response.

Frank: You know the main thing that keeps me up at night, Abe, is the question of whether Northeast Asia can successfully adapt to the rise of China. Because this is an event that you and I probably won’t see again, an event of this scale, in our lifetimes. It’s not surprising that the region and the world is having to sort of gulp and adapt to what this really means. I worry at night that sometimes the systems in place in Northeast Asia, the relationships, might not be resilient enough, or flexible enough, to accommodate China’s transformation.

Abe: Are there any recent events or any issues that particularly concern you?

Frank: The re-imagining of the history question. The troubled history between Japan and China, these two great powers in East Asia, and the fact that they have never really, as two peoples, fully reconciled some of the hardships and the difficulties that they experienced in conflicts. I think there’s an urgent need for bridge building and a more genuine reconciliation. Not just between China and Japan but also between Japan and Korea, and Japan and some of their other neighbors. There are territorial disputes and these lingering questions of history that continue to bedevil these relationships.

Abe: You started as Mansfield Foundation President back in April so you’ve been on the job for a couple of months now. Tell me about what your vision and hopes are for the Foundation as its new leader.
Frank: Well you know Abe, with the troubles that I just talked about, I really feel like the Mansfield Foundation’s role can be to be a bridge builder and to weave a fabric of community across the pacific. To strengthen those bonds among the peoples of Asia and between the people of Asia and the United States. I think it’s a people centered approach and that the Foundation—by convening working groups, by promoting exchanges, and by deepening understanding—can contribute, maybe in a modest way, to the search for lasting peace and stability and reconciliation in Asia.

Abe: Before you came to the Mansfield Foundation you had a really rich and fascinating career. You worked as the Deputy Policy Director for Amnesty International; you also served as Policy Director on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee and advised chairmen such as Joseph Biden and also Secretary John Kerry. You also had a very distinguished career in the State Department as well. Given your experience with different branches of the government and in foreign policy making, could you tell us a little bit about how foreign policy making is different in the executive branch versus the legislative branch?

Frank: I like to think, Abe, that in Washington, foreign policy can be thought of a little bit like a solar system. In the middle of that solar system, the sun is the White House and the Oval Office. It’s the place where really the foreign policies of the United States get made. Then there are a lot of planets in orbit around that sun. The inner planets include the legislative branch and the executive branch of the federal government. The executive branch of the State Department, where I worked, they like to think they make foreign policy there. The truth is they’re more implementers than crafters. Especially in the field, there’s some decisions they have to make on the fly that give them a certain amount of autonomy. The big direction is coming from the top; it’s coming from the President and his team. When I was at the State Department I had an analytic role so it was my job just to help people understand what was happening and not to tell them what to do about it.

The legislative branch, they like to think they’re in charge of foreign policy too. There are 535 members of congress which means that there are 535 Secretaries of State in waiting. They all have an idea, but the fact is that Congress can’t manage foreign policy because they’re not a day to day management place. What I learned by working in the Senate all of those years with Joe Biden and John Kerry, is that basically Congress can set the parameters, they can set limits on foreign policy and budget, they can give some general guidance. But if they’re trying to drive foreign policy it’s like trying to push a cooked spaghetti noodle across the table, it just curls up and it’s not going to slide across the table.

Then the outer planets are the NGOs, the think tanks, and the universities. They have some impact on foreign policy. Those are places where ideas can get generated, but in order for them to have a real decisive influence on foreign policy, they have to be massive. Because gravity varies over the square of the distance and they are pretty far away from the White House. Unless they are something maybe like Amnesty International, with three million members worldwide,
it’s pretty hard for them to have a decisive impact on foreign policy. So I think about foreign policy that way. It is a compilation of forces but at the core the direction requires leadership from the president and his team.

Abe: You worked quite a few years on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. As I mentioned before you served under different chairmen of the committee. I’m sure you have some interesting and differing experience between say Chairman Biden as opposed to Chairman Kerry. Do you have any interesting stories to share with us?

Frank: The most interesting ones will have to wait for my memoir which will be published after my death. But I think to be honest there could not be two more different people who none the less share a lot of political values. Joe Biden and John Kerry are very different people. They share political values, they share a world view, but they could not be more different in some of their styles.

Senator Biden was always be Senator Biden to me and he’ll always be Senator Biden, never Joe. He’s an old school senator, believes in deference and respect and a certain amount of formality. He’s also one of the most curious people I know and one of the people who provided the greatest access to his advisers and staff. When he first interviewed me for the job, I’ll never forget, he asked me, “What are the three most important words that you will ever say to me?” I said, “I don’t know.” He said, “Exactly. Don’t BS me. If you don’t know something, tell me and the next thing you’ll do is you’ll go find out what I need to know. But don’t pretend to know something that you don’t know.” I think he sensed that I was coming out of the intel community at the State Department and I probably thought it was my job to know everything. He wanted to remind me that I didn’t and that that was okay.

John Kerry, I think one of my greatest memories of him is traveling with him to China, because John Kerry is a guy of enormous intellect and enormous energy who believes in the power of individuals to make a difference in foreign policy. For him and working for him, it was about finding ways that we could deploy him, use his influence as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, use his smarts to try to address real problems out there whether it was what was happening in North Korea or with relations with China. So very different people, but both terrific bosses.

Abe: Given your experiences on the Hill and working with these two very influential chairmen, is it difficult to lead or affect change in Washington, particularly in Congress? I mean today many people criticize it for being so polarized and also gridlocked, but what’s your sense?

Frank: I think it’s gotten harder and harder, Abe, over time for Congress to lead almost on any issue because it has become somewhat dysfunctional. Both Senator Biden and Senator Kerry had a very bipartisan approach on the issues that mattered most to them. So when Senator Biden wanted to help lead the ratification effort for the Chemical Weapons Convention he did it with Senator Dick Lugar of Indiana, and it was a bipartisan effort. When John Kerry wanted to try to
promote approaches to things like food aid for North Korea, he would always do it on a bipartisan basis, reaching out even to people very different on the political spectrum, like Senator Stan Brownback or others to try to work with them to find common ground. I guess I count myself fortunate that over the course of my career in the Senate on the staff of the Foreign Relations Committee, I had excellent Republican counterparts with whom I forged close friendships, traveling with them to hotspots, to Mindanao in the Philippines, or to North Korea, or to Burma during Burma’s civil war, and always on a bipartisan basis. In fact, I laugh when I think back on it. My counterpart initially with Senator Helms was a very talented staff person, Ellen Bork. She happened to be the daughter of Judge Robert Bork, who Senator Biden had blocked from becoming a Supreme Court Justice. So you can imagine I was a little bit nervous when I discovered that Ellen was going to be my counterpart and I worried about what kind of a relationship we could forge together to work on East Asian policy together. We turned out to be really close friends and associates and partners on a lot of legislation on issues in East Asia, including the Hong Kong reversion to China.

Abe: Do you think that these bipartisan relationships and comradery still exists in Congress today?

Frank: It does. It does exist beneath the surface and all the carping. But I think it’s a lot harder for the politicians today to make some of the tough choices in terms of compromise because it’s not clear that the electorate will reward them for those choices. At the end of the day, politicians need to get reelected. Biden used to tell me that the most important area code that I would ever get a phone call from was 302, that was Delaware. He told me in no uncertain terms that when the phone rings from 302 I darn well better pick it up quick. Politicians have to get reelected and if the electorate doesn’t accept compromised solutions to the complex problems, then people will prefer gridlock to compromise.

Abe: After serving in Congress you moved to Amnesty International. Quite frankly this is an interesting career move from Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Why did you choose to focus your next step in your career on human rights?

Frank: It’s a little bit strange, you’re right Abe, to go from a political insider to an organization that is very much temperamentally inclined to be skeptical about governments and governmental power and worried about the ways in which governments fail to uphold a commitment to international human rights. But for me it made perfect sense. Because from the moment I’d entered federal service it was with the idea that somehow my work should try to contribute to peacemaking, to advance of human rights, and stability, and conflict resolution. That’s why I studied political military affairs and security issues. It’s why I was intellectually drawn to problems like Mindanao in the Philippines, or Southern Thailand, or the Burma Civil War, or human rights in China and Tibet. So for me the transition to Amnesty was almost seamless. The big difference was that for twenty years in government, almost twenty-five years, I had to
balance all the different interests of the United States, security interests, economic interests, human rights interests, in order to try to provide good advice to policy makers or legislators.

At Amnesty I was kind of liberated from that need to be balanced. I could elevate the human rights issues to the top shelf, top priority, and be a champion for those rights every day. That was sort of liberating. To view the world, not black and white, but to view the imperative of advancing human rights as the most important objective that I had at that time. So it was great, and to do that work with other people around the world and to know that you’re part of a global movement is very exciting.

Abe: Amnesty International’s motto is, “It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.” What does this motto mean, and what does it mean to you?

Frank: To me it means that advancing human rights has to be about more than just naming and shaming. The illumination is first to educate and inform people about what’s happening but then also to illuminate with that candle the path forward both for the governments or organizations that may be misbehaving, but also for the people who are going to carry forth the human rights struggle, the human rights defenders around the world. So lighting that candle is a symbol of never losing hope, it’s a symbol of the illumination that can occur when enough people join forces to light those candles. You may remember, Abe, the Amnesty concerts from the eighties, Conspiracy of Hope tour around the world. Looking out at those stadiums full of 100,000 people with lighters lit symbolizing their inner flame and their commitment to human rights. I think Amnesty is an organization based on hope, not on despair.

Abe: You mentioned that Amnesty has three million members. From the group of three million members, for the average person, the one person, what can they do today to really make a difference in these struggles for human rights violations, human trafficking, or extreme poverty? What would you say to that average person?

Frank: They should know, everyone should know, that individual actions matter, especially when they are aggregated as part of a movement. I had the privilege of discussing with Chen Guangcheng, the Chinese blind human rights attorney, his imprisonment and what happened to him when he got out and for the first time his wife read to him some of the hundreds of letters that had been written by Amnesty supporters around the world on his behalf. He broke down in tears even just telling me the story years later. It meant so much to him to know that people who had never met him and who had no first hand stake in his freedom would have taken such an interest. And we know at Amnesty International, we’ve seen what happens when the world mobilizes that way. Prisoners are released, conditions are improved, governments are convinced that they are under scrutiny and they modify their behavior. The first thing to do is believe that you can make a difference even by the simple act of putting a postcard in the mail or sending an email. I think the larger commitment is to be an informed citizen of the world. To appreciate that in this age of technology we are becoming super empowered as individuals. Individuals
assembled can have as much or more impact as governments in shaping the behavior of foreign
governments abroad. I’ve seen that happen too, in places like Vietnam, where just enough people
gathering online, and talking and blogging, and commenting on an issue can affect the
government of Vietnam’s performance.

Abe: Many of our listeners are students across our state here. I’m sure many of them would like
someday to have a career in Washington D.C. or international affairs. What would you tell that
young person about how to start a career in international relations or how to get to work in a
place like Washington D.C. How would you mentor them?

Frank: I do a lot of work with young people in Washington. I always tell them, Abe, that first
you need to know yourself, and know your own national history and system. It’s like before you
learn a foreign language you need to master your own native tongue. But then, if you’re
interested in making a contribution on the international front, foreign language, understanding a
foreign culture, attempting to put yourself into those shoes by traveling to foreign countries and
experiencing them with your own eyes. To me language is a window into understanding, so I
think the study of foreign languages is an essential part of being a successful policy advisor, or
analyst, or academic, or aid worker, or business person in the foreign environment, in the
international environment. I think communication is at the core of so much, whether it’s
business, or journalism, or policy making in governance. So practicing writing and practicing
speaking, you get better at those things over time through doing. That’s very important. When
I’m looking to hire someone at the Mansfield Foundation, the first thing I look for is can they
communicate? Can they communicate in writing, can they communicate orally? Because if they
can’t communicate they might be good for some functions but they’re not going to be the kind of
person who’s going to make the maximum impact. So I think those are skills that you can
acquire through effort.

Abe: So the importance of learning how to communicate effectively, think critically about
issues, as well as being able to I guess persuade others about your point of view or at least be
able to share effectively your points of view. In addition to learning these tools of developing a
career, are there any other areas you think are key to a successful career in international affairs?

Frank: I think for most of us who are drawn to global issues, it’s important that we began with a
certain curiosity about the world and an open mind, so approaching the world with a sense of
wonder and a certain sense of humility, that there’s a lot that you don’t know and no matter how
hard you study, there will still be a lot that you don’t know. I think that’s very important. The
people who I see who get into trouble are the ones who start to think they know it all or who
approach the world with a closed mind and without an adequate sense of curiosity and tolerance
for differences. The most successful are those who are able to adapt, study, learn, and absorb
about a foreign culture because they go in with an almost child-like sense of wonder at the
newness of it all. If you can try to sustain that sense of wonder through your life and avoid
getting in a rut where you think you got it all figured out, that will also be part of the key to
having a longer, more successful career in international affairs because things change all the time.

**Abe:** Final question is, what would you like your legacy to be? What would you like to be remembered for?

**Frank:** Apart from having a couple of daughters whose lives I hope will be full of opportunity and richness, Abe, the longer I’ve been in international affairs, the more humble I have become about the ability of any one of us of the seven billion on the planet to have any measurable impact on it. I think to be honest the greatest legacy that I would want would be for people to believe that while I was on the planet I struggled, struggled against human rights violations, worked to try to forge friendships, and partnerships, and understanding. I think we just do that even if we don’t know what the outcome will be. It doesn’t really matter to me whether a particular challenge is winnable or resolvable. To me I enjoy the puzzles intellectually and I enjoy the struggle. I would want people to look at the Mansfield Foundation and my leadership there and say, oh they didn’t shy away from tough problems, they tried to contribute to understanding and problem solving and they took on issues that mattered.

**Allen:** So that’s where the formal interview ended. But we kept the tapes rolling and we captured an exchange between Abe and Dr. Jannuzzi that I think is worth listening to. Dr. Januzzi is going to go back and re-answer the question that Abe asked him about his legacy in a slightly different way.

**Frank:** I should be thinking about what kind of a legacy I want at the Mansfield Foundation; I’m not planning to depart; I just arrived. I thought about it when I joined Amnesty. I thought maybe I’d be there longer, but I was there for two years. I thought about well, what do I want to do? I was sort of lucky because my boss, Suzanne Nossel, asked me that sort of question at a job interview, “What would you like your legacy to be as Deputy at Amnesty?” I sort of thought about it and said, “Well that’s a really big question.” She said, “Well what would you want to accomplish in your first couple of years here?” The first words out of my mouth were, “Well I’d really love to get Aung Song Suu Kyi out of Burma to Washington D.C. in front an Amnesty podium to inspire young people about the fight for human rights.” I was hired and began work in April of 2012 and in September of 2012, Aung Song Suu Kyi appeared at the museum in front of an Amnesty podium to inspire an audience of 600 high school students about human rights. We had Pussy Riot band member family members in the audience, and a 4 year old girl, daughter of one of the jailed Russian activists, giving flowers to Aung Song Suu Kyi, and I thought, okay I can retire. It was a great feeling.

**Abe:** That’s great.

**Allen:** That was Frank Jannuzzi, President and CEO of the Mansfield Foundation. We’d like to thank you for listening today. We appreciate your support. If you liked what you’ve heard please give us a 5 star rating on iTunes and help others discover the show. The Mansfield Global
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