



# 2026 GLOBAL CONFERENCE

## LEADING IN A NEW ERA



## PART 2: A CONVERSATION WITH LIONEL RICHIE, AUTHOR, "TRULY"

**Michael Milken 00:02**

That was your stretching time. So, before we get into the rest of the program today, which is related to the American dream, I want to give you a few minutes about a lifelong friend who embodied the American dream. He passed away this morning. His name is Ted Turner.

[Applause]

**Michael Milken 00:39**

You might remember Ted from the Turner Broadcasting System, Cable News, the MGM Library, Turner Network Television, Turner Classic Movies, bringing the cartoons back to life, sports, the Atlanta Braves, the Atlanta Hawks. Ted was bigger than life. He often said if it wasn't for his outrageousness, he would be a perfect human being. A winner of the America's Cup, bringing it back to the United States. A protector of Montana ranch lands, became the largest owner of land in America. A life of purpose. We gave him a budget of \$40 million every few years to do the Goodwill Games. He donated \$1 billion to a program at the UN to try to eliminate nuclear arms. Man of the Year at *Time*. A big gamble. He has taken me, the country mouse, on some unusual trips in my lifetime. We went to Tallahassee to discuss the future of his company. But before we could, he told me we had to go fishing, and there was this little rickety metal boat that his dog was on, and two seats. I said, "Ted, is your dog going with us?" He said, "No, he's too smart. There's alligators. There's water moccasins in the water." Now, I don't know if there was really alligators or water moccasins in the water, but I didn't let go of my seat. I went to Montana, and he tried to teach me how to do trout fishing and casting and fly fishing. I never succeeded. His son told me we could not go back until I caught a fish. I told his son, "We're going to go to the grocery store. We're going to buy a fish, and I will bring it back." And the fish you see in this picture is the one I bought in the grocery store. The next day, it was time for duck hunting. I had never shot a gun then, and I've never shot a gun today. We got up at 4:30 in the morning. We put on our waders. I had never been in waders before. When the sun

came up, he told me, "It's time to put out the decoys. Go put out the decoys." Well, you might remember the former Vice President of the United States had shot a person that put out the decoys in the back. So, I told him, "I have this unbelievable cramp in my leg, and I cannot move." There's unbelievable memories, and to understand a man who's changed the world in so many ways, I have a video of his numerous appearances at our investment conferences in the late 70s and the 80s. Here is some of Ted.

**Ted Turner [video clip] 04:42**

We're going to cover business the way *The Wall Street Journal* does, honestly and fairly. And one of the things I liked about sailing as opposed to war, when you fight a war, you die if you lose. If you lose a sailboat race, there's one the next weekend. It's like baseball. If you don't win this season, there's always next season. I really do honestly believe that we really should stop the arms race, or at least get it at a lower level. I'm not saying that we should disband the Army and Navy. On Veterans Day, you got to have parades and so forth. A nuclear war would really wreck everybody's bond portfolios. That's the truth. Poland has always been in a bad spot between Russia and Germany. It's not a good spot to—it's location, location, location. It's great. It's a great place to be if you like to have front-row seats to the wars. And we've done away with a foreign desk at CNN. We don't call them foreign bureaus anymore, because who wants to do business with somebody that calls you a foreigner? You're going to do a hell of a lot more business with your customers. You don't say, "You damn foreign customer." You say, "Hi, you're a customer." When he's doing business with you, he doesn't look so foreign, does he? Our losses were really greater than all the other top companies put together. So at least we're number one in something. I wish I had more movies. I wish I had all the movies. If I had all the movies, I'd be in good shape, and I wish I had all the television networks. And I wish I had the cable systems. And I really wish I had all the investment banking companies, too. Is there anybody here that wouldn't like to have everything? I'd like to own the whole damn country, wouldn't you? In fact, I'd like to own the whole free world and make a down payment on the socialist world. It's small.

**Michael Milken 06:44**

So let's bring back up that quote, that last little clip of Ted. "If I only had a little bit of humility, I'd be perfect." Ted Turner, a true American dream. Rest in peace, Ted.

*[Applause]*

**Announcer 07:19**

He is an international superstar, one of the most beloved entertainers of our time. Born, raised, and educated on the campus of Alabama's historic Tuskegee University, Lionel Richie formed a band there in 1968 with a few classmates. The Commodores went on to sell over 75 million records. He turned solo in 1982 and was soon recording hit after hit. His Grammy-winning album, "Can't Slow Down," yielded five

top 10 singles. He co-wrote with Michael Jackson the anthem, "We Are the World," selling over 20 million singles to benefit famine victims in Ethiopia. In 2012, Richie's tenth studio album, "Tuskegee," featured duets of his biggest hits with some of country music's biggest stars. It was his third number one album and achieved platinum status. After selling more than 125 million records worldwide, earning four Grammys, an Oscar, and full Kennedy Center Honors, he has become a cultural icon. No stranger to international audiences, Richie performed at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics as well as the coronation of King Charles. And of course, global conference audiences will remember him from his many appearances on our stage at Late Night. Whether he's judging on *American Idol*, launching a home decor line, or a fragrance, Lionel Richie shows no signs of slowing down. This summer, he will headline a 26-city tour with Earth, Wind & Fire. And for those who want to know more about the man behind the legend, he has just published his memoir.

**Lionel Richie [voiceover] 09:30**

The amazing highs and the amazing lows. It's all here. You ready? Let's go.

**Michael Milken 09:52**

Well, Lionel, it's not just the two of us sitting around in your living room here.

**Lionel Richie 09:56**

You know, we've come a long way. So, I got to tell you something just before we get started. Argentina—just to make my announcement here—I have a great contribution I gave to Argentina. My son, Lionel Messi, was... [Laughter] Now, let me just give you a tip. When I first found out that his parents named their son after me, the first thing I said was, "Well, that's a lie. That's not my son." And then I realized he's the most popular, most exciting, most explosive soccer player in the world, and I claimed him right away as my son. So, I want to let you know, I take full responsibility for that. Thank you. [Laughter and applause]

**Michael Milken 10:53**

So Lionel, here's a picture. We're going to show you the Tuskegee Airmen. And here is a picture of some of them that we gathered about a decade ago, those that were still with us, living. Unlike most people, you kind of grew up in a college town on a college campus. What was that like?

**Lionel Richie 11:18**

College town, college campus, military base. We did not know at the time how special it was. It was called "the bubble" to us growing up. The weirdest thing that we could not comprehend was we had PhDs,

doctors, lawyers, you name it, pilots. Every other guy in town had an airplane. So, there's Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Air Explorer Scouts, and these guys had medals, big medals. And so, academics was the call of the day. That was the richness. What I didn't realize was, when you ran into these guys and ladies every day, they would ask one question to us: "What's on your mind?" And the worst thing you could say was, "Nothing." So they said, "From now on, when you run into us, have something on your mind." But the funny thing about growing up in Tuskegee was these guys and ladies were so famous, but they couldn't vote. The irony of our growing up was we thought we were the only place in the world where it was just special, and it was, except exactly 15 minutes outside of town, segregation and Jim Crow were all in place. So it was a very special place growing up.

**Michael Milken 12:46**

So that's why you called it "the bubble", from that standpoint. Now, when you were in Tuskegee, you decided to join a music group. As a saxophone holder or player.

**Lionel Richie 13:02**

Yes. I'm the greatest saxophone holder that ever lived. *[Laughter]*

**Michael Milken 13:06**

Now, when I read your book here that my wife Laurie bought—it was actually her book. I've taken it from her. You had told me a new different story that I didn't really see in the book, and that was you noticed that when you're in music groups, it really attracts women.

**Lionel Richie 13:25**

Did I say that?

**Michael Milken 13:26**

Yeah, to me.

**Lionel Richie 13:27**

My God.

**Michael Milken 13:29**

So why did you really join The Commodores?

**Lionel Richie 13:33**

Girls. *[Laughter]* Well, you have to understand where we're coming from. I'm too small to play football, too short to play basketball, too slow to run track. Wrestling was out of the question. I could play tennis, but no girls were near the tennis court. And then I found out something. You just hold the horn and the girls go, "Are you in the band?" "Yes, I'm in the band." And I remember singing one song, and the greatest words I ever heard in my whole life was, "Sing it, baby." And I was hooked. Done.

**Michael Milken 14:13**

What was your favorite song? Was it "Brick House?" What was it from The Commodores in the early years?

**Lionel Richie 14:21**

Boy, you're really putting me on the spot here, you know that, right? "Brick House" was The Commodore theme song. Now let me give you why. Even though there's "Easy," we had other songs, "Three Times a Lady," can you imagine college guys with a song called "Brick House," and our job was to go around the world judging Miss Brick House contests? We suffered, Mike. We suffered.

**Michael Milken 14:49**

What is a brick house? *[Laughter and applause]*

**Lionel Richie 14:56**

I came here to speak of economic things, and I was trying to—I was trying to be able to—okay, so—all right, let me just tell you. 36-24-36. *[Laughter and applause]* All right, you understand. All right. And in certain cases, we'll allow for some measurement changes, but it's all right. That was the basics. And then after that, it just kind of went into, "Did you see that? Oh my God."

**Michael Milken 15:20**

All right, let's go fast-forward.

**Lionel Richie 15:24**

Thank you, Mike.

**Michael Milken 15:26**

It's 1984. And you write, "How does a kid who was so scared of being on stage walk out and perform in front of 2.6 billion people? It makes no sense. Somebody in the Bureau of Fate must have switched scripts. Yet there I was in my white pants and my blue spangled jacket over a white shirt, taking it all in and figuring I might as well get it over with or miss out."

**Lionel Richie 16:18**

It's almost like the imposter syndrome. You wake up one morning and—I had a problem with the Commodores just standing on stage. I cannot tell you how many times I've had panic attacks walking on stage because of the fact it's 30,000 people looking this way. I didn't realize that—how do you navigate these accolades and stuff. And then I realized as time went on that if you write a record, that's one thing, but you have to show up to play it. Now, we didn't have social media. When I say two-point-billion people, at that time, it was only ABC, NBC, CBS, and this new station called CNN, and then the BBC. So when I say the whole world was watching, the whole world was watching. And so it was really overwhelming to walk on stage, and that's one time in life you sing "All Night Long," and the very next day I'm in traffic, I'm at the light, and people are walking two cars in front of me, and, "Lionel Richie, All Night Long." "Lionel Richie, All Night Long." "Lionel Richie, All Night"—and cars, people stepping out of cars, and I realized at that moment I was now no longer invisible. The whole world saw it. And it was—[Applause] I'm used to it now 100 years later. But at the time, it was absolutely terrifying because you just never thought that you would have that kind of visibility.

**Michael Milken 18:09**

"So a month or so"—I'm reading from your book—"after we released 'We Are the World,'" you got a letter and the return address was Tuskegee, Alabama. "And to the best of my recollection, the sender's name was Father Vernon Jones. How many years earlier had I gone to him to say that I didn't think the priesthood was for me? A brief note was enclosed in this message: 'Lionel, there are two types of ministers: those that preach on the corner of every street and in every community across the nation and around the world, and those that preach to the masses. After 'We Are the World,' I believe your ministry is doing quite well.'" What was your reaction to that note?

**Lionel Richie 19:10**

Well, honestly, I can give you a little background quickly. So, I went back through all the things my friends were doing at the time. Some guys wanted to be fighter pilots. That was out. Somebody wanted to be a doctor. I don't like blood. It got to the point where I'm trying to figure out where do I fit in with all of this sensitivity. And a lot of my, should I say, influences, my mentors, were clergy. So, I thought maybe I would be, for a brief moment, consider the idea of being a priest, an Episcopal priest. Well, I will tell you the backstory of this. That's true, he wrote me a letter, and he said, "Your ministry is doing quite well." But I'll tell you what I did to him, to Father Jones. When I realized that I was not going to be a priest, was—I told you about that girl that screamed on the front row? "Sing it, baby." Now, "Sing it, baby" had the greatest effect on me in my life because it revealed something very clear to me. And I went back to Father Jones to tell him, "I don't think I'm going to be priest material." You see, I never had a girl scream at me ever up to that point, so I realized, maybe the priesthood we'll put over here, and maybe my songwriting will work over there.

**Michael Milken 20:33**

So, Lionel, the "We Are the World" album that you wrote with Michael, the song—that is what we've tried to point out here at Global Conferences, and Lionel probably has 10 years of performing at the Global Conference over the years. But we are a world. We have our largest group here that's ever come from Latin America. We have our largest group here that's ever come from Europe and Asia, etc., and the Middle East. And that song "We Are the World" changed the world. When we took MTV public and financed MTV—

**Lionel Richie 21:20**

I love the way he says that. Just casually.

**Michael Milken 21:25**

—the very first commercials of MTV—and I'm sure no one remembers—were a blank screen and said, "First, there's the music." And so when you listen to music, by having a blank screen, each of us has a different memory of where we were and who we are when we first heard that song. So I want to take you back to a brief movie you might have seen, "Rio," where they were trying to mate these two rare birds. And people of my generation, many children were essentially conceived to Johnny Mathis. But people of a later generation have mainly been conceived to Lionel Richie. *[Laughter]*

**Lionel Richie 22:17**

Yikes.

**Michael Milken 22:18**

So, let's look at this video.

**Lionel Richie 22:21**

You're setting up trouble, Mike.

**Michael Milken 22:26**

So, let's look at this video from *Rio*.

**[Female parrot from *Rio*] 22:29**

Are you ready?

**[Male parrot from *Rio*] 22:30**

For what? Oh, wow. Uh, okay. Confidence. Crazy love hawk.

**[Female parrot] 22:38**

All right. Whoa. Hi. What are you doing?

**[Male parrot] 22:41**

What? What you wanted me to. But just for argument's sake, what are you doing?

**[Female parrot] 22:46**

I'm trying to escape.

**[Male parrot] 22:48**

Oh, yeah, escape. That's where I was going with that thing I just did.

**[Female parrot] 22:52**

Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Did you actually think we were going to kiss?

**[Male parrot] 22:56**

No. No, no, no, no, no.

**[Female parrot] 22:57**

We just met.

**[Female scientist] 22:58**

Oh, my.

**[Male scientist] 22:58**

I think they need a little help.

**[Male parrot] 23:01**

I mean, I know how my feathers look, but I'm not that kind of bird.

**[Lionel Richie singing] 23:04**

Say you, say me.

**[Male parrot] 23:06**

Okay, I had nothing to do with that. But, huh, I have to admit, it's actually a pretty good song. 'Naturally.' Sing it, Lionel.

**[Female scientist] 23:19**

Wow. That was fast.

**[Male scientist] 23:23**

Lionel Richie. Works every time.

**Michael Milken 23:37**

So when you read the book, Lionel, after "We Are the World,"—and what an unbelievable assemblance. Maybe never created before. Will never be created again. We threw up that slide of just who was the singers that were part of making "We Are the World" and that effort here. And so after that, as the years passed, there are many stories. The one I love was when you were in Jordan and you came up to this tank and people in military garb, and they wanted to know, where are your passes? And no one in your group had a pass, and no one was going to get in without a pass. What happened?

**Lionel Richie 24:33**

Well, that was a terrifying moment in my life. We're playing the World Economic Forum in Jordan, and we get off the plane, we get into our cars, and we proceed to the hotel. Now, along the way, we have checkpoints that you have to show papers and stuff. Well, so we pulled up to the checkpoint. Now, let me set the stage for you. There's a tank right here in front of us, and it turns around and locks in, and this guy walks around with this little whip, little thing, and he taps on the driver's window, and he says, "Papers. I want to see your papers." The driver looks at me and says, "You got papers?" I said, "I don't have any papers. They didn't give us any papers." And he says, "We don't have any papers." The guy walks around to the other side of the window and taps on the window. "Lower the window, please." The window comes down. He looks at me and he says, "Hello. Is it me you're looking for?" And he says, "It's Lionel Richie! It's Lionel Richie!" And all of a sudden, everybody now—the guy comes off the tank. He puts his helmet on the tank. The tank comes down. All the guards come out. We're taking pictures, and the guy says, "We have a break in security." "No, no we're fine. We're fine. This is good." And they escort us from there straight to the hotel. No problem at all.

**Michael Milken 26:08**

I don't think we realize just how far it goes. People that don't speak English start singing the songs. Talk a little about your experience in Iraq.

**Lionel Richie 26:19**

Ah, that's interesting. Well, I'm going to tell you how it works on both sides. So, I ran into a commander who said, "You're not going to believe"—this is now from the Iraqi side—"we wanted to make sure that the troops knew we were friendlies. So, we played 'All Night Long' as they were coming in to take over in Iraq." And they said, "We played 'All Night Long.'" So, as they were coming in, 'All Night Long' was on every shop that was coming into town. And I thought that was amazing, until I ran into one of the guys—commanders from the military side, and he said, "The troops came to us and said, 'We need to let the locals know that we're friendly.'" And I said, "Yes." He said, "So if we could put some speakers on top of Humvees and play 'Dancing on the Ceiling' as we come into town." So, I had "All Night Long" in town and "Dancing on the Ceiling" on the Humvees, and I thought that was pretty darn good.

**Michael Milken 27:27**

That was pretty good. I had not heard that before. So, Lionel, in the book, I thought it was unbelievably moving when your dad said he wanted to talk to you. And he was concerned that you had been so successful and hadn't faced the five Ds. Death, disgrace, divorce, disease, disaster. And he was concerned you were not capable of dealing with those. Take us back to that moment.

**Lionel Richie 28:09**

My dad was a military guy, so you have to understand, everything was real to him, and this bubble had created this soft kind of kid, and he just wanted to remind me... Of course, it scared me to death when he started talking like this because I kept thinking, "Dad, I got the hit record." And he goes, "No, let me talk to you for a minute." And he gave me this line over and over again. He said, "A fighter is not determined by how many punches he can throw, but how many punches he can take. You haven't been tested. You haven't been hit by life, and I'm worried about you because I don't think you can handle this." And he gave me the five Ds, and he said, "Now, before you end up at the cornerstone of life, at the end of life," he said, "you're going to experience the five Ds. Now, how are you going to hold up surviving through this?" And of course, I went through my first major, major test, which was divorce, and of course, the humiliation and the devastation of that. And the first person that called me on the phone was my dad. And he said, "Are you sitting down? Are you outside in the yard waving at people, or are you hiding behind the sofa?" And I said, "I'm hiding behind the sofa." He said, "Get up and walk out the front door." And of course, that was my first test as to can I take some of these punches that life is going to throw me, but he was a practical guy. In other words, he wanted to make sure I could survive this thing called life.

**Michael Milken 29:52**

I think if you get a chance to read the book, Lionel talks about highs, he talks about lows, he talks about life. And not all of us realize what it means to be a public figure, and it was somewhat telling after the "All Night Long" at the Olympics that he could no longer walk out of his house and have the same experience. And I thought maybe we could comment on the end of the book. "All the other stuff, the awards, the accolades, they're important, but they're not the measure of who we are. In the end, there is nothing that can top making my family proud, and that knowing friends and colleagues who are part of the journey share in that pride."

**Lionel Richie 30:48**

There's a feeling that you have. What did you like the most? The touchdown or going back to the huddle and going to the locker room and having your mates have the celebration? I call that family and friends. It's one thing to have the whole world to love you. It's another thing when your family loves you and your kids. I'll say this in a joking way. It takes a lot for your kids to figure out who the heck you are. But you could tell that they're proud of you, and the greatest part about it is when you go back home and you hear your kids say, "That's my dad." Or you hear your friends say, "That's my friend, Lionel." It means a lot that you have the respect of your community, your family, your friends. And to me, at the end, all you have is your worth, and that's called your integrity. Who you are is a handshake, a smile, a greeting. And so with all of this, I think I feel great when I can go around the world and people say to me in every language, "Welcome home." And I think between that and going home to my family is probably the greatest thing that has ever happened to me in my life.

**Michael Milken 32:17**

Well, thank you my dear friend.

**Lionel Richie 32:18**

Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

**Announcer 32:27**

Thank you for joining us. The session will begin momentarily. Thank you for your patience.

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