

Transcript

Anatomy Of Leadership

“Mission with Shane Snow”

00:02 - Melody King (Announcement)

Everything rises and falls on leadership. The ability to lead well is fueled by living your cause and purpose. This podcast will equip you with the tools to do just that Live and lead with cause and purpose. And now author of the book the Anatomy of Leadership and our host, Chris Comeaux.

00:24 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Hello and welcome to the Anatomy of Leadership. I'm so excited. Today Our guest is Shane Snow. Welcome, Shane.

00:31 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Thanks for having me.

00:32 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Yeah, it's really good to have you. I'm looking forward to this conversation. Well, Shane is an acclaimed journalist. He's a global explorer and his award-winning tech and media entrepreneur. He has performed comedy on Broadway and has been in the running for the Pulitzer Prize for investigative journalism. He is the best-selling author of three books on the science of human behavior Dream Team, smart Cuts and the Storytelling Edge. His writing has appeared in GQ, fast Company, wired and the New Yorker and more. Shane uses his groundbreaking research and education company, the Snow Academy, to teach millions of people of how to work better Things I want to read here from his bio From the prehistoric days when we sat around campfires to our modern world of newspapers and Netflix, storytelling has always been a core part of our lives.

01:19

Indeed, telling stories is part of what it means to be human. We even tell ourselves stories when we dream at night. I had a really funny one last night. Actually, it turns out there's a lot of fascinating science behind this. Science that explains both why stories are so good at helping us to remember and care about things, as well as how stories can impact our organizations, from leadership to marketing, to

creativity. This is why I'm so excited to introduce Shane Snow. He's a Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist and author of the books I mentioned earlier, but he's also the co-founder and former chief strategy officer of the award-winning technology company Contently, which helps Fortune 500 companies build relationships with customers and employees through content and marketing. So what exactly is the Storytelling Edge? Well, Shane's going to help us become better storytellers how we can harness the power of stories to make our lives and our work better tomorrow and he's going to help us also learn how to think differently about all of that. So again, welcome Shane.

02:22 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Thank you. It's great to be here and I want to know about your dream now. I don't know if that's on the agenda or not, but you sounded excited about it.

02:31 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

I'm still unpacking it. I was actually my wife. The punchline of the dream actually is this is the bad part of the dream is there was someone in my vehicle and they grabbed me from behind and my poor wife actually grabbed me, so like it became real in the dream. So I didn't get a whole bunch of sleep last night and so she was like you have to tell me more what that dream was all about. So that was the bad part. There's some interesting stuff before that. But, Shane, is there anything I left out? That's an incredible bio and it's so good to have you, but is there anything I left out that you would just want the audience to know about you?

03:03 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Well, I mean, it's very flattering to have you say all of that. Right now. My current job is I'm the CEO of another company that is in the storytelling world, where we make tools for filmmakers and we make TV shows and films with those tools so telling stories for the screen. Nowadays, a company is called showrunner and, uh, and I think the most important part of my bio now, uh, is I have a one-year-old son who is the coolest thing that has ever happened and, uh, I don't even care about any of that other stuff, uh, when I'm hanging out with him because it is the best.

03:41 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

That's so cool and that that is you're in the front end of many, many future stories, and so I've shared with you the beginning. We have five kids, and our three boys were first, and, man, I can't wait to see all the different stories that you'll be telling and harvesting in that important part of your life. Well, Shane, there's a really cool thing. I bumped into it in our very first podcast and then I left it off after a couple,

and then the audience said you need to start asking that. Which is what is your superpower? And I know it may sound like a weird question, but my guess is you probably have a good answer for that.

04:13 - Shane Snow (Guest)

So I, I there's actually this great kind of nerdy card game that this consulting company called SY partners has that I've, I've bought.

04:24

That is called what is your Superpower that I like to actually give to clients and it's a card game where you have to pick between which scenario describes you best and it's super fun and they're really smart about culture and all of that.

04:36

And the superpower that I got in that card game felt like exactly dead on, which is connecting dots, so you might call it something adjacent to systems thinking, which we talked about very recently, Chris. But being able to look at things and see how they're connected, even the unintuitive connections, and being able to take ideas from one place and connect them to another place or find principles and actionability inside of something complex, those are the kinds of things that I think I'm uniquely maybe not uniquely good at, but that I'm better at than other things that I'm not as good at and then really it's writing about what I've learned and using storytelling to make that stick. That's what I'm all about, and you know lots of people love learning and researching and exploring. I just do it in so many different directions that it seems a little bit crazy, but I like connecting dots because I think everything is connected, and then writing about what I learned from those disparate efforts.

05:44 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Oh my gosh, and I love that. We're going to have to hang out with each other a whole lot more. And now I really I'm glad I asked you this question, because I can see why it makes you then such a. It's almost like the storytelling is more the vehicle, but the superpower within the vehicle is having those superpowers you just named, which to me then makes your game a whole lot different than and I wouldn't say, even today's day and age. There's like a just a lower level storytelling, because I do think it's been a little bit of a lost art. Would that feel accurate as far as the time that we live?

06:16 - Shane Snow (Guest)

you know, I think the lost art is actually a good way to frame it. It's not a lost ability. Everyone has the power. You know, like you mentioned right from the opening sequence there, we all tell stories. We tell ourselves stories, any situation we encounter. Our brains make up meaning about what this must mean, what must have happened for this to have happened. That's part of just how we roll and we all share stories to connect with people. You sit down at lunch or on a date or with your family at the dinner table and you talk about your day or you talk about things that happen. That's sharing stories. So we might not be as artistic or as uh, as powerful of storytellers as in eras before we had so many distractions and other things to do but we all have that power and that sort of natural instinct to tell stories and I think that's a good starting point for if you want to develop the power, we all have the kernel inside of us.

07:16 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Oh man, we're going to go there in just a second, but you're just dredging up some really cool things that just haven't thought about till you brought it up. So I grew up in South Louisiana things I just haven't thought about till you brought it up. So I grew up in South Louisiana. One of my great uncles was a Cajun storyteller. He was a professional Cajun storyteller and I can still remember sitting in grandparents' homes and just listening to them tell stories, which you know today with technology and all that. So I think I could look back through even my past and it was very much a part of the culture that I grew up in and generally as a leader, I do rely a lot on storytelling and maybe I wouldn't say I'm great at it, but it is something I have in my toolbox. But then that's when, whenever Tina told us about you, Tina Gentry, our chief administrative and operating officer, I'm like we have got to talk to Shane, because I've been thinking about this being so critical to the future and especially so this will be a good segue. So, Shane, we sent you a copy of the book.

08:12

The Anatomy of Leadership podcast is called the Anatomy of Leadership and I wrote the book. I'm an accountant by trade, so I want to organize things and put them in categories. And I would constantly see myself frustrating people because people say hey, Chris, you're reading all the time about leadership, where should I start? I would give them five books and you just see the look on their face and like they're not even going to go read one of those books because I overwhelmed them. So I kind of wrote this book as my offering to say here's a table of contents, a meta framework. It's a good place to start. It is nowhere near the know-all, end-all at all, but it is kind of a table of contents.

08:46

And then around Christmas time, after we released the book, we thought wait a minute, this is going 10 miles wide but only two inches deep. What if we took the themes of the actual chapters and then brought in guests like yourself and we can start going deeper? So beginning of the year we did self-mastery, we did caring for others, fluence, intention, cause and purpose, which is the first part of the

book. The second part of the book is the seven M's trying to be sticky in people's brains, and the first M is mission, and I was.

09:16

You had just done an incredible job, talking to all of our Tilios network and all these different marketing leaders about storytelling and I was kind of like a dull moment going, oh my gosh, this is the perfect person to talk to about mission and there's so many stories in hospice and, as you can imagine, the potency and power of the stories of people dealing with the end of their lives and us walking on the sacred grounds of that, and so there's just so many incredible stories. But I also find sometimes, because we're so close to it as hospice providers, we don't realize these treasures that are sitting all around us. Does that resonate with you at all?

09:59 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Absolutely. I think you're in a particularly, I think, dramatic industry in that way where your customers, your partners, your patients are all collaborating around this very serious thing where, to put it candidly, it's the end of a lot of people's stories, right, their life stories, and sometimes that ending is really poignant and sometimes it's tragic, and it's always interesting and it's always sad for someone, and so that's incredibly human and that you know. That just checks all the boxes of what a good story you know will do. It makes you feel something and therefore you remember and you care about it, and so I think you have a particularly deep well to draw from of stories that you can share to get other people to actually think about what you do, to actually care about the difference between how you do it and how you know others do it, who may not be, not be providing the kind of care that you do in the nonprofit sector, and yet every industry has the ability to do that, and part of the company that you mentioned, contently, that I founded 12, 13 years ago now, a long time ago now part of the idea with that was to help businesses and organizations tell stories, even when they didn't know kind of how to do it, to build relationships and make people care and, over those years, seeing all of the different ways that that works. You might have a very boring company in a very boring industry, but you have a very good reason for doing what you're doing. You have amazing people working on that and those can all be stories. You might have customers who have gotten great results from what your company does, or you might just be in a place doing something not particularly noteworthy but needed for people, or in a place itself that has a great story.

12:06

One that I always loved is the story of Shinola, the watch brand, and now they make bicycles and other fun stuff. They basically were a bunch of people who saw this opportunity to help Detroit have a bit of a revival. People had abandoned Detroit for other cities. You know manufacturing was down and uh, yet there were all these really skilled out of work people who've been working at, you know, at auto facilities

and other places that are now shut down. All these warehouses, all this great stuff that could be used to bring together people to make a company of basically luxury watches and uh, and learning the story of det, not the story of the watch or the product, or even anything more than this, is about helping bring energy back into Detroit, got me to buy a Shinola watch, and actually I bought my best friend a matching Shinola watch and so we have like the, you know, the matching friend thing, and so that's part of our story. But it's like you could say oh, you have a watch company there's a million watch companies.

13:07

What stories can we tell there's? I think you can always find that, but in your industry in particular, there's a lot of very dramatic stories. I think that in some ways makes it trickier. Right, because you want to be sensitive to people's loss and the real human feelings they're feeling. But also it can be very healing to share stories when you're in that place and to hear other similar stories. No, actually, this is so good, shane.

13:35 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

So there's a couple of thoughts that occurred to me. I didn't anticipate coming into the conversation but you and I bumped into, when we're doing kind of show prep, the synchronicity of stories, the visual. One of my mentors would always use the visual of picture of mountain lake and when those raindrops start hitting the lake, the concentric rings. But intersecting with each other is create a beautiful kind of metaphor. And when you were just talking about that, I was kind of getting that visual of. The beauty of stories is especially when they start intersecting the synchronicity. So you retold the story of a company and then now you have a watch that also has another story, kind of building off of it. I mean that's just so cool.

14:15

One of the things that we did and I hadn't thought about this for years until something you said earlier we had a funeral home company that came and offered our hospice a service and I thought it was brilliant and so they would do these storyboards. Remember when we were in school, those little foam boards and they would do this as a service for the families we were serving and they would ask them for pictures that would put on this storyboard. So when you walked into their home you were walking into their story and I just thought that was so powerful and we loved it for our staff because we knew we were walking on sacred ground. But now you knew you were walking into their story and and this was the end of their story, and that was such a potent tool to realize hey, heads up, you're not just someone delivering care, you're literally walking into a story here. I don't know if you have any comments to that, but I hadn't thought about that in years.

15:11 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Wow, I mean, I love that it's. You know we have so much going on. You know inside of our heads and on the outside. You know in our day to day lives and often what we do can feel like we're on autopilot or we're doing chores, or you know it's all tactical and functional and seeing the humanity behind the things that we're encountering, the places we are, those tactical chores we're doing, whatever it is, helps us to have kind, to kind of put others first, when you might normally just go about your day and drop off the delivery and you know, and not think about it. It's like whenever you drive home the same route a million times, often you'll arrive home and be like I don't remember it all the drive, that's how we operate in life.

16:15

But you know there are things on our journey that often should be sort of thought about and you know, and commented on and appreciated. And you know if you're doing work that is affecting other people it can easily turn into that drive home where you don't remember it because it's the same thing every day. But remembering the people and, you know, remembering the stories and being reminded of the stories helps it to not have that effect and keeps us mindful.

16:45 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

I guess, or present.

16:46

It was another benefit of that Something occurred to me when you were saying that I hadn't thought about that, about the power of stories. But we live with so much technology you could go through life almost on screensaver mode, but there's stories draw us, it's almost like it makes us present, it does something to it, it's like it reorients you in such a way. Well, shane, since this is kind of like the theme of this one is mission, have you seen and you just gave one good example, but I bet you have others where an organization has re-energized their mission via storytelling?

17:19 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Yeah. And so, because of your content on mission, it's made me rethink a bit how I've thought about mission and mission statements. I've been known to bag on the mission statement as a laundry list of a wish list of things that we want to be and kind of what we want to do, but it has to be generic or vague enough and it's not true Like so often that happens but like a real mission, that is something that's rooted in purpose and in kind of a yeah, a why, beyond the goal, right, and it's very easy for again, like that driving home thing to happen when you are working on something that has a good purpose and

there is a mission there, but it becomes a job. And so this way you're asking you know, how do you re-energize your team or your company using storytelling? I have a few examples of that. I mean some of it's from the work that we did at Contently, some is from work I've done, you know, speaking and consulting with organizations, but one that comes to mind always on this is American Express.

18:33

Of mind always on this is American Express, a brand that's been around for I don't know 100 years and a huge company. It's known for credit cards and its fees and all of that. It's a premium brand, but they had this moment a few years ago where they, as a brand, wanted to put some energy back into I think, certainly internally, but also externally the company about who are we actually helping with these credit cards? Other people have credit cards. What are we doing? The unique parts of our product and the way that we operate kicked off this, they say, campaign around telling the stories of small businesses that use American Express, that take their cards and how, between the points and the perks and all of that, American Express is showing that they care about small businesses, and so they did this video series. They actually contracted us to do this series about small business owners and it wasn't. Here's how you accept a credit card at your coffee shop.

19:37

It was videos of the guy whose dream was to start a bike shop in his small town. He started a bike shop and it was great but very hard to be profitable. Not everyone buys a bike every day in a small town and uh and you know the dream was uh was slowly slipping away just because of the finances, and so he decided to add a coffee shop to the bike shop and at the coffee shop. He needed to take credit cards and he you know Amex helped him out. But the coffee shop became this kind of community hub in his little corner of his town where people would hang out, drink coffee. He actually made a lot of profit from the sales of his coffee shop, but they're all there with the bikes, appreciating the bikes, even if they don't ride the bikes, and then they tell their friends and bike sales went up, even though the coffee sales, I think, outstripped the bike sales. And so it's this great story of people coming together to help a small business succeed.

20:32

And Amex is a part of that. They made all these videos like that of telling these kind of micro stories of real small business owners. And then they created this holiday called Small Business Saturday, where they did a lot of advertising around it, where, you know, once a year it's on this Saturday and, whatever month, shop small, go to your local business, don't go to, you know, walmart or whatever. Go to your local business to make all your purchases. And they had stickers everywhere and they got people on board and sales for small businesses at mom and pop shops do go up that day every year and of course

that's good for Amex, but it reinforces that the thing that they're saying is we care about these people, these businesses.

21:13

We're actually going to do an event, not just tell their stories, but do an event to help them increase their sales, and I think that put a lot of energy back into the brand, certainly on the B2B side. Right, you know, business owners, I think, became much more enthusiastic and bought into American Express, you know, and they are higher fee than you know, than other credit cards, and so all of this, like we care and that the high fees are worth it for all the perks and all that and everything we do for you, I think was something that really resonated. So there's a lot of stories like that, but that's what I always come back to. So I love the thing that sticks for me it's the story of the bike guy who bikes weren't working and coffee shop, saved the day and then helped the bikes.

21:50 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Wow, because it sounds like they got closer to the true essence of what they were really about.

Got closer to the true essence of what they were really about.

21:59 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Can storytelling as a skill be learned, Shane?

22:02 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Absolutely. Now, like I said, the good news is we all have that kind of natural innate ability but, as you know, not every story is a good story, and sometimes good stories can be told really poorly. You know, we all know, like the person who, like, tells the long story and there's no payoff, and you're like, ah, where you know, if they just did it a little differently it could pay off. And and so there are. I think there are kind of high-level principles and then a lot of kind of micro tactics that you can learn to get better at storytelling. And certainly, the context matters and what your goal is matters. But I always talk about four things, and you know I talked about this with uh, with the teleos network.

22:47

Um, I think first of all you want people to be able to relate in some way to the story you're telling, either relate to the characters or the theme or the problem the characters have, or the setting or something you got to know, someone who reminds you of this, or it's got to remind you of you somehow. For you to

initially care, it's hard to care if you don't know why you would. You know why you would think about this. And then the second is a story needs to tell you something new. It needs to be novel. Now, sometimes stories are great. My kid is an example of this. He wants me to read him the same book over and over and over again. There's something different afoot there. There's like ritual and kind of comfort and all that. But you're not going to be interested if there's not novelty. And so you know you start with this familiarity like characters that you might care about in a business setting. It's like here's someone who has a life like you or a problem like you did or whatever, and then here's the novel solution that solved it. Or here's the novel thing, the twist or the surprise, whatever.

23:48

And the third thing, which really is where I think if there's one kind of tactic to learn about good storytelling, you put this first, and that is tension. It's establishing the tension in the story of what could be and what actually is and the gap between those two things. Aristotle talked about this thousands of years ago. Someone wants something that could be in this better place. But they're here now, Peter Pan, Captain Hook could be ruling all of Neverland, but uh, in his way is Peter Pan who's messing up his plans and a crocodile that ate his hand and wants to eat the rest of him, and you know that tension makes that story fun and interesting. You want to know what happens and so you know.

24:33

When you're telling a story, uh, with friends or in a casual setting, you might start at the beginning and say so, today this happened and this happened, and this happened. Or you might start with you'll never believe what so-and-so said today. Okay, I'll back up and now I'll tell you the story that's establishing the tension. Like, what is it? Why won't I believe it? And you see movies do this all the time.

24:58

But it's got to be interesting for you to pay attention at all. That relatability, novelty, tension, that makes it interesting. But I think even one level above that is you need to feel something if you want it to stick, if you want it to change your mind about something or you want it to really be memorable. The more of your brain that is active at any point, the more likely you'll be to change your mind about something or you want it to really be memorable. The more of your brain that is active at any point, the more likely you'll be to remember something. And feeling something is your brain telling you that there's this importance attached to the thing that you heard or saw or listening to, or imagining, and so stories that kind of get deeper than just relatability but that evoke, uh, I guess, empathy. You know, stories that help you feel sad for someone or feel pain with someone or feel excited with someone, um, you know that really helps and, again, it doesn't have to be super dramatic but, uh, but any emotion kind of will do like as a being excited with someone, like that's a fun story.

25:55

You know the story stories that they always have you. You know, at the Olympics when they're like this you know snowboarder her brother, you know, got injured snowboarding and you know now he has one leg and she's trying to win the gold medal for him and it's like, oh, like you feel the jolt of that and you root for the snowboarder. You know nothing else other than that story. You and you root for the snowboarder. You know nothing else other than that story. You don't know if she's good or not or whatever. That kind of thing. You see it, once you start noticing these elements, you see them everywhere, you know, starting with attention and making things relatable and the twists but then also getting you to feel something at the same time, as a way to get you to pay attention.

26:31

That is so good so you can learn all that that is so good I'm trying to decide.

26:37 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

There's something I did not tell you. I was going to ask you. I want to come back to it in just a second. It's basically about you writing versus kind of doing. I mean, just what we're doing right now in this podcast the improvisation. It almost feels like there's two different skill sets there, but I think this will be a better question on the heels of what you just said. I think this will be a better question on the heels of what you just said. So, through storytelling, do you?

27:11 - Shane Snow (Guest)

think it's helping to maybe reinforce the mission or maybe for the leaders to know it better, or to maybe even further or morph the mission or all of the above. You know, it does start to sound like one of those cures, like if you drink the noni juice it'll cure your cancer and your skin, and like your joints and all that. It does start to sound like that at a certain point. But I do think that good storytelling can, because of the fundamental things it does to our brains, it can be applied, I think, to all those things that you're talking about. Stories make things more memorable. You know, hearing a principle or a fact through a story will make it easier to remember. So if you want to remember the mission, a story about the mission will help you remember that. If you want to reinforce the mission, that's. You know that's part of that's about remembering, but part of that's about getting people to care.

27:59

Part of what stories do is they get us to care about things. They basically trigger these neurochemicals that get us to have an affinity for that thing that the story is about, or the person who's telling that story. And so telling the story of the mission gets you to care about it, especially the more kind of emotions and imagery and you know, and tension that's involved. But you know the morph, it part of your question I think is super interesting. I just recorded a video I'm going to post soon about this very thing, so I teach some courses on storytelling. Oh yeah, so your earlier question can storytelling be learned? I believe. So I teach courses on it. I'm hoping people are.

28:39 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

They go to your class, right? They keep coming back.

28:43 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Yeah, yeah, I think they're doing a good job. But in one of my courses there's basically a course on change management and there is a module in that course about storytelling for change management. I just recorded a video for YouTube kind of about this. That if you are trying to change someone's behavior, that's really hard. They have to decide to do it ultimately. You know, be convinced one way or another that this is the thing that they should do, or else. Or they should do because they want to, should do, or else, or or they should do because they want to. And uh, and often leaders come in to a situation where they got to change the mission or the. You know, we got to pivot, we got to go in a new direction, might be the old leader, might be a new leader, and it's this inevitable bull in the china shop thing. Where, even? If so, do you ever see? Uh, Ferdinand the bull, the uh animated movie? Okay, so I love that movie because we think of bull in china shop as, like this person's, just raging and smashing china, you know, get rid of everything. Where the original metaphor comes from was in. Uh, you know, in the markets in London people would bring their cows to the market, like in the 1500s or whatever, and sometimes cows would wander off into stores. And uh, and if a cow wanders off into a store, it doesn't want to smash everything, it wants to avoid everything, but it can't because it's a cow and it's huge. And so Ferdinand in the cartoon is tiptoeing through the china shop trying to get through, and he's just so big and he's knocking over china, he's trying to catch it on his hooves and his horns and he's trying, really politely, to put the china down. And it's just a mess, because you can't fit a bull through a sensitive situation like that. And that's often what it feels like when we're trying to change people's direction. You know, in business or in life, and certainly in leadership, you know we've got to get people on board with the new mission. Well, what about the old mission? We like that. That's our precious China. And so this is, yeah, the thing that I mean basically just telling what the video is is the Burn and the Bull metaphor.

30:46

If you could, instead of trying to tiptoe through the china shop and get, lead people to the next thing that you want them to do, if you could, together pack up the china in boxes and celebrate. This is where

we got this plate from. And oh, yes, all right, we're gonna put it away. Uh, it's sad, but like, remember, that was great. If you do that together, then you can clear out the china shop and make room for the next thing that you're meant to do together and that I've seen this done.

31:09

I sort of got this, uh, the metaphor I got from, you know, Disney, but uh, but I got this, uh, this idea from someone who actually did this in their business, where they, uh, they were being acquired and they held, uh, essentially, a funeral ritual for the old company and said, like, let's talk about the good times, like let's talk about what we went through, all this stuff, these great things we did. And now, you know, now we're putting on to rest and we're moving on and we're joining the new thing and, yes, that's scary, but we can do it because we did all this together and so we can get through the next thing together. And it's such a great use case for storytelling, because the story is not persuading you of the new thing you should do, which is also a thing you can use stories for. It's helping you to make peace with the fact that you need to change. And yeah, so I think you know to your question all of the above. But you know different types of storytelling can help with different types of goals.

32:05 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

I would say that is so brilliant on so many different levels. I think it was William Bridges. Years ago, I read a book it was the best book ever on change management and I'd never heard the term before you have to end the old before you can begin the new, and so what you just said totally speaks to that, but you did it in a way that's now probably much more sticky in my brain. Wow, that's really good, Shane.

32:29

Well, the other thing that occurred to me, listening to you, like you've written books but you are improvising right now with stories in this moment in this podcast, and my mentor, Dr Lee Thayer, who was actually Stephen Covey's mentor, he would say that leadership is all about improvisation.

32:45

In fact, he sent me to Second city in Chicago on like a field trip, which was awesome, Like watching with these amazingly talented comedians and that level of improvisation, and so I'm just wondering if that speaks to you and that, like you know, it's hard when you're writing a book because at the end it's going to be a static product, but then, doing what you're doing right now and my guess is you're so darn creative You're probably thinking about the tension between those two things all the time, Like there's it's helpful when you've got a book. Like you know, I've wrote a book too and but now it is a static thing.

But every day I'm learning and growing and new, and so how do you balance that improvisation versus now there's like a static product that's in the wake of the ship, of the work that you've done.

33:24 - Shane Snow (Guest)

Oh, man you're. You're kind of like putting a finger on like a core anxiety I have about my work sometimes, which is great it's. You know, there is this tension, right, you publish something. It's there kind of forever, right, like this you know episode that we're doing. You know, maybe it gets deleted and wiped out from the Internet, but chances are it won't and we will both evolve and become more wise and have way better analogies and better takes and better answers for all of this stuff. We might even be wrong about a couple of things we're talking about, and and this is still there. And so there's, I have that anxiety as someone who's you know whose job is putting content out there, you know, whether in book form or you know in speech form, in book form or you know in, uh, in speech form.

34:12

Uh, I think that's it's okay.

34:13

I think we we gotta recognize that that part of what wisdom is is recognizing that you can upgrade your knowledge and, uh, you know, and kind of come up with better things, and I think, with the, the improvising thing, what's funny about that is it's such a good way to discover new ideas, right, the yes and and like building on, you know, and vamping on an idea, but you're not always gonna, you know, hit the target, and analogies are never 100 accurate because they're not the thing right, the map is not the territory, and so you can't be literal about everything, and and so the yeah, the tension with the being able to improvise and sort of, for example, and pull examples down, is, uh is, you know, you're not gonna, you're not gonna be perfect at it, but it's, it's so useful.

34:57

I mean it's you know the now I'm improvising some more, but the, the classic thing in design thinking of, there's two phases of kind of coming up with good ideas. There's the diverge phase, where you explore lots of potential possibilities and ideas, and then there's a converge phase where you take those and and boil them down to like what is the thing that?

35:16

will work for our situation and, uh, you know, an improv is like you're exploring, you're finding ways to, uh, you know, to learn and to grow and to make things relevant and make things stick and be applicable and all that. But in that there's imperfect imperfection and you know, when you think about it later you'd be able to boil it down to something better. And that's actually the nice thing about books is, you know, you have this agonizing process of writing and rewriting and thinking about it, where you're pretty sure you know what you want to say by the time it gets published. But I just read my first book came out 10 years ago, so I just reread it as kind of a trip down memory lane and I cringe a few times reading that book and uh, even though it's good stuff, you know, uh, but I'm like I've come a long way, um, and this is permanent, but that's, that's okay.

36:00 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

So gosh, there's so much wisdom in your answer.

36:09

And one thing that just occurs to me, Shane, maybe it's a gift back to you probably some of the most potent and powerful stories are the ones that keep, because the potency of the story kept.

36:13

It keeps living on because it could be reinterpreted and reinterpreted um, not the best analogy, but, um, my second son the other night, he my favorite movie in the world is Forrest Gump and he had never seen it and like how did you miss that? And so he sat down and re-watched it with my daughters and to me it's a story that keeps unfolding for me. I've watched it like literally hundreds of times and there's a whole nother angle in the story that I kind of picked up the other night. And what occurs to me is you're the type of incredibly skilled, talented storyteller that that like that perfect story is the one that just it lives on and on because the interpretations are almost kind of endless and it keeps feeding people in different ways I know, yeah, that's a it's awfully nice to be uh, said in the same sentences as Forrest Gump and that's like one of the you know the best examples of of storytelling.

37:05 - Shane Snow (Guest)

I'll say this that you know this kind of harkens back to that last question. Leaders in particular, or someone with a cause, will kind of develop the stories that they know kind of get to people's hearts. You know you have your go to story that you tell over and over again and that's that's important, you know improvising is helpful again for the learning. But trying to persuade or convey a message, you know doing that deliberately and thoughtfully and you learn which are the stories that really resonate. And

salespeople are very good at this, like good story driven sales. You know they figure out what are the stories that are going to work with what people to get them to think differently.

37:43

But there's something really great about stories that are more universal that can be, you know, reinterpreted. You know the more that you, you know you find I mean this is like the stuff of ancient wisdom, right, like you, you find the nuggets in the story that you missed. You know, you, you find the little details. Or, honestly, our lives are changing and you read the same. You know, read the little prince a couple of years ago and I hadn't read that since I was a kid and very different perspective and very different takeaways as an adult, uh, about, uh, the little prince, and you know how.

38:16

This is written by an adult man who's a you know a pilot who has crashed his planes, and he's writing about this kid and this perspective is like I'm now interpreting this as as an adult who is complicated but wants to, you know, yearns for that childlike state. Or when I was a kid it's like this is fun, there's a, you know, an elephant being eaten by a boa constrictor and you know, you, you learn about kind of whimsicalness and kindness, but not about that kind of bigger picture, uh, sort of yearning, um, I, I very much improvised that one, but it sticks right like the oh guys several and that's why that story, that book sells no copies on copies every year still.

38:53

Yeah, sorry, just several times.

38:54 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

It's occurred to me. It's like five times in the course of you listening. My favorite quote in the world is a ts Elliott quote, that you arrive where you first begin, but you know the place for the first time. There's concepts that we keep. I just keep rethinking them the more you keep talking. And so well, Shane. Any final advice to leaders about storytelling.

39:15 - Shane Snow (Guest)

You know, one of the best things I've found in my life as a leader and, I think, as a friend honestly is that if you find yourself at odds with someone to the point that it's starting to be personal, learning their story and taking time to get to know where they've come from and who they are and where they want to go, can help you to still be at odds but care about them enough to not make things personal and not,

you know, not have conflict be destructive, and I've seen that in my businesses, you know, I've had that happen where I've just really not gotten along with someone and then, once I learned who she was and what she was about, I became, you know, dear friends and found myself wanting to hear what she had to say when I didn't agree with it and wanting to understand more rather than just ignore because we were different. And I think, as leaders, when you see that you see people at odds, if you can help them to learn each other's story and or the very least, to see themselves as part of the same story, that really can help elevate people above you know story. That really can help elevate people above, you know, whatever the argument is, whatever the conflict is and get to a place of it's us together and I care about you and we're striving for something. So maybe I don't have to be right or maybe we can both do things our different way and that's okay. And you know, we're always sort of mediating that kind of stuff as leaders we should be, and I think storytelling is a really powerful way to do that.

40:49

We're always sort of mediating that kind of stuff as leaders we should be, and I think storytelling is a really powerful way to to do that that's. You know, it might sound cheesy, it might sound hokey, but but it actually works. It works if people are willing to to give it a shot. So that would be. My advice is is get people to see each other as humans through storytelling and that will not make conflict go away, but it'll make help people to actually do the hard work of uh, of digging deep and seeing where conflict can get us, uh and uh how we can move forward.

41:22 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Well, Shane, the more this whole podcast and I'm so glad to ask you about your superpower earlier, because your superpower is apparent. You have a unique gift and it almost feels like a very timely gift. We live at a very interesting time. I spend a lot of my time in healthcare. There's a lot of change, confluencing and change that needs to occur and I can see the you're at the right place at the right time, because storytelling could help in so many different places in our society right now. So very much appreciate you and your superpower.

41:53 - Shane Snow (Guest)

That's incredibly kind of you to say. I dare say that there are a lot of people who are good at these things and who care about these things, and I'm lucky to be able to have venues like this to actually get to talk about it, and you know and share that passion. So, no, I appreciate it.

42:12 - Chris Comeaux (Host)

Well to our listeners. At the end of each episode, we always share a quote and a visual, and the idea is we're trying to create like a brain bookmark or a thought prodder about our podcast subject so you can further your learning and growth and thereby your leadership, and hopefully it sticks sticks in your brain. So be sure to subscribe to our channel, the Anatomy of Leadership. We don't want you to miss an episode. Make sure you check out the book on Amazon. We're going to actually put a link to all of Shane's books and his projects that he's working on so you can continue to support him and the great work that he's doing. Tell your family and friends and coworkers about the Anatomy of leadership. It's easy for us to rail against the world and be frustrated by things. Let's be the change that we want to see in the world. So thanks for listening to Anatomy of Leadership and here's our brain bookmark to close today's show.

42:55 - Jeff Haffner (Ad)

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