

Charlie - Welcome to “15 Minutes with Charlie.” I’m your host Charlie Mechem. I’m here interviewing different guests to show how the use of anecdotes can help you express yourself more effectively. I’ll suggest certain anecdotes from my just published book, *Total Anecdotal*, and my guests will react according to their own experiences and careers. So, here we go.

Charlie - My guest today is Jay Stockwell. Jay is a very experienced senior executive and a former naval officer. He also has an enviable track record, working with companies like Procter and Gamble, ConAgra, the Nielsen Company and Nielsen Catalina Solutions. Jay has played a large role in this book, and helped me a lot. His role grows greater still, as he spends these next 15 minutes with me.

Charlie - I hope you’ll enjoy listening to Jay.

Charlie - He received his Bachelor's Degree from the University of Nebraska, and the MBA from George Washington University.

Charlie - Now I must say that we're not going to get into Nebraska very much because if we do, we'll run out of time. Jay is the most energetic, enthusiastic Nebraska fan I've ever known, so just know that folks. And pull for the Big Red.

Jay - I came prepared Mr. Mechem. I've got my shirt on and everything.

Charlie - I know that. I should have worn the bathrobe that you gave me. Jay gave me a bathrobe with a big red “N” on it. One more thing before we get into the heart of the podcast, Jay has really played an unusually large role in this book because he gave me the opportunity to basically do a dry run of the book at one of his sales meetings in San Diego a while back. And my thought was that if his group liked it and thought it was worth pursuing, that I would do that, and happily they did. So Jay, you've helped me a lot.

Charlie - The idea here is that I will suggest certain anecdotes from the book, and then ask your reaction to them from your own experiences and your own career. The first one is under the heading of “Adaptability and Flexibility” in the book, and here's how it goes, “There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to

take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.” And that's a Machiavellian quote, but one that I'm sure you have a reaction to.

Jay - Well, as an entrepreneur, adaptability is essential. I certainly had to adapt in my career. I came out of the military in 1994. I started at P and G, and I went from tracking Soviet submarines in the Navy, in the P-3 Orion, to tracking snot viscosity on Puffs facial tissue in the paper division of P and G. That was quite a transition, but it's also critical in my current role as chief revenue officer. I've been chief revenue officer now of three companies for a period of 14 years. And in each situation, you have to adapt to the new situation.

Jay - Let me give you just one example. At NCS, we founded and built the company. At Claritas, we acquired it from Nielsen in 2016. And I'll tell you, you have to adapt your style to adapt to a team that you did not build, that you bought and inherited. And they have their own set of cultures and mores and behaviors, but one really has to adapt to them. And they, of course, have to adapt to us as well. But adaptability and flexibility, in my mind, are crucial both in terms of business and the military partially.

Charlie - That's very perceptive. I've noticed this, Jay, over the years that I've been involved in organizations. When you are promoted from one position to another, you simply can't continue to perform as you did in the old position. It takes new ways of thinking, new ways of understanding your responsibilities, so I think your comments are right on.

Charlie - Now the second anecdote comes under the heading in the book of “Arrogance,” and it goes like this: “Someone once said that the best advice he could give is if you try to not be in a room with more than one person at a time who thinks that he is Jesus.” I'm sure you've had experience in that regard or comments on that.

Jay - Well, ego is a powerful thing, it's a driver of human behavior. And what I try to do is coach my team to be confident, but yet not be arrogant. And that is subject to interpretation. There are people that I've hired that as we've talked and made the final decision, and assessed all viewpoints, thought that a candidate or two over time was arrogant. And my counter back was, “Hey, I think it's confidence.” But more to the point, when dealing with multiple egos, and I've dealt with a lot of them over the years,

and I could give you some examples, but we don't want to name any names, it's preferable, I think, to deal with them one at a time.

Charlie - Very good. The next anecdote in the book comes under the heading of "Courage and Risk Taking," and in writing that part of the book I just made up some scenarios to basically try to illustrate if in certain circumstances certain individuals had not had courage and willingness to take risks, things might have been quite different. And the one I'd particularly like your reaction to is: "Suppose that Neil Armstrong had said to Buzz Aldrin, his copilot, 'You know, Buzz, we're running a little low on gas, maybe we better let somebody else be the first man on the moon.' "

Jay - That's very funny, but this is a serious topic, and I'm actually going to ask you a question because I know you knew Neil Armstrong personally. But being a naval aviator, I'm incredibly impressed with the early volunteers in the space program. Just in preparing for this, I went back and looked at the number of test pilots around the world that have lost their lives in pursuit of something new and risky. And it's hundreds and hundreds of people. There's actually a Wikipedia page dedicated to it. And so tell me about your view of Neil Armstrong and the level of courage that he had as a human.

Charlie - I think the best way to answer that is that Neil was so brilliant and so totally prepared and ready for his assignments that he didn't ever worry that it wouldn't work because he couldn't imagine with the training he had and his ability that it would ever go wrong. I'll give you one example, one of my friends one day we were talking to Neil and my friend said, "It must have been unbelievable when you were flying. I think it was maybe the X15, the airplane that was like a rocket, and you flew it up to its apogee, and then you ran out of fuel. So you had to fly it down, what the pilots call dead stick. You couldn't control the flight at all." My friend said, "That must of been just incredibly difficult." And Neil said, "Well, not really. You just couldn't make any mistakes." And he didn't say that in a flippant way. He didn't expect to make mistakes. So maybe that's the best answer I can give to that.

Jay - I'll flip it to business on the topic for a second. Military guys make good business guys. And the reason Proctor likes to hire them is because we can follow directions.

Charlie - That's a good point. I'll give you one other Neil Armstrong story, which I love. Again, which illustrates sort of a piece of his personality. He was on a boat down in Florida on a fishing trip. And the captain of the ship, a friend of mine, owned the ship. The captain of the ship for that day was simply overwhelmed that Neil Armstrong was going to be on his boat. So as they get out into the ocean, the captain says, "Mr. Armstrong, I just cannot imagine everything you did, but particularly navigating. How did you navigate to the moon?" And Neil jokingly said, "Well, it wasn't that hard. We could always see it out the window!" So again, he just knew what he was doing and was, back to our earlier point, confident without being arrogant.

Charlie - This next anecdote, I've got to read a few words here, but this is such a good one. It's in the book, it's under the heading of "Forecasting the Future". Many years ago I was attending a conference in Cleveland, Ohio during which we heard a speech from the much acclaimed business leader and visionary Dr. Simon Ramo. One of my good friends from Cincinnati was also in the audience, name was Don Hinckley, of one of Cincinnati's top companies. And it's important before going on to note that the speech was given in September of that particular year. Dr. Ramo gave a superb talk and shared his vision for coming decades and even longer. It was thought provoking to say the least. When he finished, he asked for questions. There were a number, and then my friend Don raised his hand and said, "Dr. Ramo, I have truly enjoyed your vision of the future, but let me ask you this, how do you see October?" And the whole room broke up, including Dr. Ramo, who took it very well. But what's your reaction to that?

Jay - Well, look, I've got a very interesting one. My wife works for Salesforce, the beautiful Betsy Jones. And last year I attended the Dreamforce conference, and met their futurist Peter Schwartz. And I sat down next to him. In business, we're always so short term focused. What's the next week? What's the next quarter? But this guy, all he does is thinks about the future. And so we're sitting in the sixth row just waiting for Michelle Obama to start to speak, and he leans over, and he says, "Your children will be the first on Earth to be able to choose not to die. Because by then, they're going to have perfected the ability to stop aging." And that just stunned me, and I've been thinking about it a lot since then. And I've been dying to actually talk to you about it because I really think your perspective

would be... If that option existed, would you counsel your grandchildren to take it up?

Charlie - Well, it's obviously tough to answer, but my immediate reaction is I'd be very leery of that. First of all, the world is going to be awful full of people if nobody ever goes away. And secondly, and this sounds silly I suppose, but I really think it could well get kind of boring. One of the great thrills of life is to have a full life, age gracefully, enjoy your children and grandchildren. I think to tamper with that lifespan, which it would probably be tricky, and I'm not at all sure I want it to happen. And I, frankly, doubt very much whether it does because the Lord will probably intervene one way or the other.

Jay - I hope so. I asked the question about population immediately. He said they've done studies of ecosystems of things that live forever, and what would become rare in the story was children. And I think one of the greatest joys in life is children really. And so I don't think I'm comfortable with the notion either. But he also said that people will routinely live, outside of taking those pills, to over 150 just based on advances in medication.

Charlie - That's probably true. I must say, I'm almost 88, and there are days when I feel like I've lived forever. And just as glad that I didn't. One final one, Jay, and this is under the category in the book of "What is Really Important?" I ran across a wonderful quote. It fits perfectly I think in this section. The sad part is I have no idea who said it, if I did, I'd certainly acknowledge it. It goes like this: "In life, you will realize there is a role for everyone that you meet. Some will test you, some will use you, some will love you, and some will teach you. But the ones who are truly important are the ones that bring out the best in you. They are the rare and amazing people who remind you why it's worth it." What's your reaction to that, Jay?

Jay - I think it's fantastic, and I couldn't agree more. And my relationship with you is exactly that. You mentored me and my partners in my three companies for going on 20 years now, and you've made us better than we would have been otherwise. So our long association, I very, very much appreciate. And it got me thinking, and so I was thinking in that exact context, what would capture what Charlie Mechem kind of means to us. And I found one from Emerson, and I think as I read this, Charlie Mechem

just leaps off the page for me. “To laugh often and much, to win respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics, and endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition, to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded.”

Charlie - Well, my goodness.

Jay - That to me, is a perfect articulation of Charlie Mechem and what you mean to us.

Charlie - Well, you're very, very kind, and I guess I'm particularly happy that we called you today. I'm really kind of overwhelmed by that, Jay. And you've done this, and you'll learn it, I think mentoring is never scripted. I think you mentor people because you want to help them. And you just try to share with them things that have worked for you and that have not worked for you. So to the degree I've done that, I'm pleased, and I'm certainly most grateful. Now tell me one last thing, I know you read the book, *Total Anecdotal*, and I hope you enjoyed it.

Jay - Absolutely wonderful. And I did make a contribution. You refer to the friend that told you one of my core principles which is: “tell the truth if for no other reason it's the easiest thing to remember.”

Charlie - That's right.

Jay - I shared that with my teams going all the way back to when your son Dan worked with me, and it's one I continue to share. Ethics, to me, are incredibly important. And it's a slippery slope to a bad place if you abuse the truth. And so I'm appreciative that you included that in the book.

Charlie - It is in the book, and I also pay tribute to you in the opening part of the book, and what you've meant to this book. So thank you. Love to your beautiful family. And I know it's pleasant where you are. It took a while to get that way, I guess, this year but-

Jay - We had 22 inches of snow, 14 days ago.

Charlie - Well, Jay, thanks a million, and go Nebraska.

Charlie - Thanks for joining me for today's conversation. If you'd like to listen to more episodes, please visit totalanecdotal.co or search for "15 Minutes With Charlie" in your podcasting app. If you are enjoying the show you should check out my book, "*Total Anecdotal: A Fun Guide to Help You Become a Better Speaker and Writer.*" Learn more at totalanecdotal.co/book, that's totalanecdotal.co/book, or it's available through Amazon or Barnes & Noble, and perhaps your local bookstore.