

Charlie - Welcome to "15 Minutes with Charlie." I'm your host, Charlie Mechem. I want to help you become a more effective speaker and writer by using anecdotes to better communicate your message. I'm putting my method to the test by asking different guests how certain anecdotes from my just published book, *Total Anecdotal*, have played a part in their lives.

Charlie - My guest today is Mike Whan. Mike is the highly respected commissioner of the LPGA, the Ladies Professional Golf Association. I've always said that the LPGA commissioner has four constituencies to deal with: sponsors, media, fans and players. I think and hope that I know a little something of what I'm talking about since I had the same job in the 1990s, but Mike will put this statement and my anecdotal process to the test.

Charlie - Enjoy my time with Mike Whan.

Charlie - Mike was named commissioner in 2010, and has been doing a superb job. I know a little something of what I'm talking about here since I had the same job in the 1990s. Mike was good enough to read a rough draft of my new book, *Total Anecdotal*. The book will be published soon. It's a glossary, a dictionary of anecdotes, designed to help the reader become a more effective speaker and writer.

Charlie - What I'll try to do in these podcasts is to ask my guests how certain of the anecdotes in the book have played a part in his or her life. So welcome and thanks, Mike.

Mike - Thanks, Charlie. Thanks for having me.

Charlie - Before we get into the anecdotes, let me go way out on a limb and ask a risky question. What did you think of the book?

Mike - I think it was a lot like having a phone conversation with Charlie Mechem. I found myself laughing more than I probably should have, and then when I finished the book, I took out a pad of paper and started making notes. While I thought I was just enjoying myself, I realized afterwards it was really another lesson and education. So it's pretty similar to how all of our phone calls go.

Charlie - You're very kind. I'm sure glad I asked the question. Okay Mike, I'm just going to read a few anecdotes from the book, and I'd just like to ask you then to reflect on how that particular anecdote has relevance to your own life and career. The first one is a quote from the late Peter Drucker, who probably had one of the great business minds of the last hundred years. He said regarding change, "We no longer even understand the question whether change by itself is good or bad. We start with the axiom that it is the norm. We do not see change as altering the order. We see change as being order in itself. Indeed, the only order we can comprehend today is a dynamic, a moving, a changing one." What are your thoughts on that?

Mike - I always tell people there's three kinds of employees. There are employees that lead change, there are employees that accept change, and there's former employees. And those are the three kinds that you're going to have in every organization. I remember when I started in 2010, everybody would tell you, "Man, commish, we really need change in the organization. We really need you to make a few changes here." And I think they all felt that way until the change landed on their desk, and then... What they really meant is, "I think everybody else needs to change. I'm just fine." So early in my tenure at the LPGA, I needed to figure out who were the people that could accept the change I was bringing because they're critical. Not everybody can lead change. If you have too many change leaders, you really have a company gone amok. And pretty quickly on, you have to find out who can accept change, and pretty quickly I found out who needs to be a former employee. So who can lead change usually surprises you through the process as you go, but... and you know, I've said this many times, it used to be, when I started at Procter and Gamble in 1987, we would write our strategy in calligraphy, and we'd frame it behind glass, hang it on a wall, and it would sit there for 40 years.

Mike - Today, we jot it down on a napkin in pencil. You pull out the napkin every week and make some eraser marks, and that's just the reality is what you think you know of your industry. I love it when people ask me what my ten year plan is. I say, "My ten year plan is to get to my two year plan five times." It just... it's just not really feasible anymore to think you understand what's going to happen. We live right now in a sporting and TV business. What TV is going to look like for sports in 2025 is going to be dramatically different, but I haven't found the person yet who can tell me what that looks like in 2025, they just know it doesn't look like 2018. So I can't hang

anything behind glass on the wall and think that I've got the answers for the next ten years.

Charlie - That's certainly true, and I remember reading something just a few days ago, some sort of a cartoon that said, they were asking, "What is plan 'B'?" And the answer was, "To find whoever came up with plan 'A' and get rid of him." The next anecdote, Mike, you referred to P&G. One of my great friends, and I thought a great leader at Procter and Gamble, was a guy named Ed Harness, and Ed made a speech in New York in accepting an award one year, and here's what he said, "The key to successful marketing is superior product performance. While advertising and selling are certainly important, we've never been able to build a successful brand through these skills alone. Advertising and selling skills can get customers to try the product, but after that, the health of the brand depends entirely on satisfaction with its performance." How do you feel about that?

Mike - Yeah, one hundred percent. I've used the phrase a lot. I kind of grew up as a marketing guy, I kind of got labeled that, and I didn't really enjoy that. I used to always say that marketing's key job is to get out of the way. Get the consumer to the product and get out of the way. I think a lot of people in marketing, ad businesses, ad agencies, feel like they're somehow an integral part of the process, and the reality of it is really what marketing ought to be is trying to understand what the consumer is really missing in their product experience, help R&D solve it, and then get out of the way.

Mike - And the same is true on the LPGA. You know this from the time you spent here. You can sit in a boardroom all you want, but if our product doesn't deliver against the expectations of the brand... I'm sitting at the Kia Classic right now, and if Kia doesn't like the experience we deliver to their customers on TV and for their brand, it doesn't matter what my sales deck look like, it doesn't matter how many times I visit the board. We need to get the product together with the consumer and the rest has to take care of itself.

Charlie - Good. This quote comes from Yogi Berra in terms of forecasting the future, and he said, "If you don't know where you're going, you're liable to end up somewhere else." Classic Yogi, but I have a hunch you have feelings about that as well.

Mike - Yeah, it's funny, I just came from the Founder's Cup in Arizona last week, and it was one of the first things I admitted when I got to the LPGA, and people have asked many times like, "Why Founder's Cup? Why would you do that?" I said, "My father used to always say, 'If you don't know where you've been, you're likely to not have any idea when you get to where you're going.' "

Charlie - Right.

Mike - And I felt like at the LPGA, we probably lost a little touch with where we've been. I didn't feel like today's players understood the history of the LPGA, the... really, the philosophy, the persistence that made this core a reality. So I wanted to create an event where current players got a chance to meet former players, where former players had a chance to share their philosophy with current players, and the whole event was creating something better for the next generation.

Mike - So you know, to me, I feel like the LPGA is in a stronger place today, not because of me, not because of players, not because of TV. I think we're really reconnected with what we've always done well. What we've always done well is care more about the check writer than most other sports, and I think when we got reconnected to that, things sort of took care of themselves. So that wasn't about looking forward, that was really probably more about looking back and understanding that the 1950 version of the LPGA had a business strategy that was sound, and maybe the 2010 version of the LPGA just needed to go back and look at what that original strategy was. And I think most of our growth in the last five or six years has really stemmed from returning to what we do well.

Charlie - Very well said. I could not agree with you more. One of the first things I did, as I think I've told you before, when I became commissioner, was to try to reach out, get to know the older players. And I was stunned to learn that they really had been neglected for a long, long time, and you have really brought them to the floor, and not only do they appreciate it, but we all benefit from it. This next anecdote is under the heading of "Meetings," and someone said, "Any simple problem can be made insoluble if enough meetings are held to discuss it." What are your thoughts on that?

Mike - You know, as a kid who grew up at Procter and Gamble, I'm probably ingrained, and I'm okay with meetings. My challenge on meetings is how often we meet and never talk about the person who's really paying for the meeting. What I found when I went to LPGA is I would sit at a meeting where we would talk about the HSBC Women's World Championship, and we'd never talk about HSBC. We really have talked about the golf course, we really knew camera angles, and by gosh, we knew exactly how we were going to get the players from the airport to the golf course. But I remember, after my first hundred days at the LPGA, I implemented a new plan, which is, if we're going to have a meeting about a tournament, the first 50% of the agenda has to be about the check writer. I always said, "We can't pay for this game without HSBC, but we're comfortable having the meeting and not talking about them?"

Mike - So I think a lot of companies have gotten away from who is the real check writer. I don't just mean tours and sports agencies, I think a lot of times, they get together and they talk so much about their share value and where they are in Wall Street, or what they're trying to do in terms of the next big investment, but forget about the people that are literally paying their salaries, people that are buying the product, or more importantly, the people who stopped buying the product. So I don't really have a problem with number meetings, you know, I'm not a smart enough guy to succeed on my own, so I need to be surrounded with smart people. So in my case, meetings are almost essential just to succeed. I just think a lot of times, companies and meetings get away from the real core of the business. When I see businesses go awry, generally speaking, at the core of it, they've lost touch with the people that are actually buying the product.

Charlie - Very, very good thought, Mike. This next one comes under the category of "Optimists and Pessimists," and Winston Churchill once said, "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." What do you think about that?

Mike - I think for me, I think the key is to surround myself with a little bit of both. I'm definitely an optimist, I'm probably incurable. I really do think every idea I have driving to work is doable, even the ones that clearly are not, and I always tell people on my staff, "Just remember, when I'm telling you about one of my ideas, I'm going to sound like I'm right even when I'm wrong because I don't know when I'm wrong."

Mike - So I think finding the right balance on your team is probably key in business. I need a few folks on my team that let me do my thing, get up at the chalkboard, tell everybody where we're going, and then when everybody leaves, they'll close the door and go, "You know you're an idiot, right? That's never going to happen." And I think if you don't have people on your team like that, you get yourself in a lot of trouble. So I've worked for some pessimists, I've worked for some optimists, I personally like the mix. I think as long as your pessimists don't pull down the morale of the company, but help guide you, that's fine. Like I said, in my personal opinion, I need to surround myself with some realists, and that's what I try to do.

Charlie - Very good. This next one comes under the category of honesty. A friend of mine said, "Always tell the truth. There are several reasons to do this, including the fact that the truth is much easier to remember." Your thoughts on that.

Mike - I remember reading that when I was reading the book. I was flying to Seoul when I was reading the book. Like a lot of readers, I think they're going to stop and go, "I'm honest, aren't I? I always tell the truth." And I thought when I got to that point, "I'm curious how I would score. How would our customers and how would my staff rate me on that?" I hope it's high, but I'll bet you everybody thinks they're real honest. And I've said this to a lot of my people who work for me, which is, "At the end of the day, if the customers think you're a straight shooter, even if they don't want to do business with you now, they might want to do business with you in the future." If they find that you're spinning a yarn, not only do we lose them now, but we lose them forever.

Mike - And I think a lot of the sponsorships that I've been able to sell have come from somebody I met with who did not jump on board with the LPGA, but liked what we were about and liked our approach for doing it, and told somebody else that then called us. So I always tell people that a really bad sales call can lead to some really good prospects, as long as you handle the sales call... as soon the guy tells you what they're looking for, I had a guy from a pretty large electronics company call me one time and told me why they wanted to partner with the LPGA. It was all about eyeballs and how many viewers they were going to get worldwide, and I

literally gave him Tim Finchem's number, who at the time was the commissioner of the PGA tour, and said, "I'll be honest with you. He does that better than me." But that person called me awhile back and said, "What is it you do better?" And we got into that, and it led to some interesting business.

Charlie - That's a good point. I always felt, too, Mike, in that regard, that if a pitch that I made was unsuccessful, I tried not to grumble and complain and attack the other person. I wanted to know why it was unsuccessful, and if all I learned from the person was the reason we didn't accept your proposal is this, this, this, and this, then to me, it was a successful opportunity.

Mike - Yeah, it's a great trip.

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.