

**Intro:** [00:00:01] Hello and welcome to 15 Minutes with Charlie. I'm your host, Charlie Mechem. I want to help you communicate more effectively and I believe the use of anecdotes can get you there. Explore this with me as I share anecdotes from my book, Total Anecdotal, and ask guests to react in relation to their own experiences and careers. Pete Blackshaw is the newly appointed CEO of centrifuge, and he's headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio. Cintrifuse is a fund of funds and startup incubator created by Procter and Gamble, Kroger, Western Southern, and other major entities in the Greater Cincinnati region. The fund primarily invests in venture capital funds outside the region in order to strengthen local deal flow and access to start up innovation. Prior to joining Cintrifuse, he was the Global Head of Digital Marketing and Social Media for Nestle, the international giant based in Switzerland. He is an alumni of Procter and Gamble and is one of the brightest, most impressive young men I've had the privilege to meet. Now, on to my discussion with Pete.

**Charlie Mechem:** [00:01:28] The first anecdote that I want to get your reaction to is on page 26 of my book, and it goes like this. It's a quotation from Machiavelli. He reportedly said "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." I'm sure you have some comments on that.

**Pete Blackshaw:** [00:02:01] Yeah, absolutely. This is the one I probably connect to the most having been a digital internet future of advertising pioneer, there's so much uncertainty and there's waves of hype. In this business it's lonely and sometimes scary pushing the frontier, and so I think Machiavelli was absolutely spot on. It almost feels tailor made for the Digital Economy leaders. The key thing is that you just have to have the courage and the tenacity and the bit of intestinal fortitude for failure to push forward. It can get very lonely if you're kind of on the bleeding edge of these things, but I think it's very good counsel. We are, I think more broadly beyond my experience, we are entering a new world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity. Leaders need to be very comfortable stepping into that. This is a great way of bringing a measure of comfort or reassurance that folks have been thinking about this principle for quite some time.

**Charlie:** [00:03:16] As someone said, "The only thing you can count on in this world is change. And if you can't handle change, you better find another occupation."

**Pete:** [00:03:27] Absolutely.

**Charlie:** [00:03:28] The second anecdote is on page 33 of the book. It goes like this. It's a Mark Twain quote, and obviously these aren't many Mark Twain quotes that aren't funny and accurate. He said, "It ain't what you don't know that gets you in trouble, it's what you know for sure that just ain't so."

**Pete:** [00:03:52] This one is such a great warning shot around hubris and overconfidence, and we see this all the time with leaders. It's important to know where you're going, but you need to be very flexible on how to get there, and anyone who's so overconfident they're just asking for trouble. Again, going back to what I said earlier, if you are trying to chart the future in this highly unpredictable ambiguous world, you're in for a big disappointment. For me this is an important message for leadership with humility.

**Charlie:** [00:04:35] I agree, and I've learned over the years to always ask yourself, "Do you really know enough about this subject?" And if you don't, you better do some homework.

**Pete:** [00:04:47] Absolutely.

**Charlie:** [00:04:48] The next anecdote is on page 68. It goes like this: "A man prayed and asked God to help him win the lottery. Every day he renewed his prayer, and finally he said, "God won't you please help me win the lottery." To his absolute amazement the skies darkened and lights flashed, and a strong deep voice said, "Would you at least buy a ticket." I've always loved that because hard work, I have always felt, is the absolute bedrock of any success.

**Pete:** [00:05:22] I love this one. I've actually used this a few times since I've read the book. But again, beware of a sense of entitlement. You got to put skin in the game. You have to co-invest and this is really important. The, "Would you at least buy a ticket?" Think of how many people that don't take that first initial step, or forget that they even have an obligation to do that to get from A to B. So this one, I absolutely love. It's one that I will constantly remind myself of as well, but I probably see this more in other

people as well. Even my kids, there's probably a bit of a good-- Some teachable moments here.

**Charlie:** [00:06:04] Yeah. Particularly young kids, and by young I mean their early teens, tend to think if you get a good education and have had a good family background that everything just happens from then on. We both know that is unfortunately not the case.

**Pete:** [00:06:26] That's right.

**Charlie:** [00:06:27] Here's the next one. This is one of my favorites. It's on page 75 of the book. "The president of a dog food company was addressing the annual sales meeting of his company and he was not happy. Sales were poor and he was giving the group a stern lecture. And he said, "I just don't understand it. We have the finest product in the business, our packaging and marketing are second to none, yet sales are terrible. You guys must not be doing your job. Tell me what's wrong." Well there were several seconds of silence, because nobody really wants to challenge the boss. Finally, one guy in the back of the room raised his hand and the president said, "OK. You think you know what's wrong? Then tell me." The fellow in sort of a frightened voice said, "Sir, the problem is that the dogs don't like it."

**Pete:** [00:07:23] I love that. I really relate to this one as a marketer, and as a consumer. It relates to a couple of the other ones as well, about hubris and working off of the wrong assumptions. At the end of the day we have to put the consumer's opinion and their experience with the product at the center of the business universe. Too many managers put their own data or their own spin or their own interpretation or their own preferences in front of consumer common sense, and I think this is absolutely spot on. We even see it a lot on the internet, too. Where products that on the surface look like they're poised to do well with consumers completely flop. That's because the marketer has missed some obvious consumer truth.

**Charlie:** [00:08:16] Very well said, and I quite agree. The next selection is on page 109 of the book. "I've been a devoted fan of a comedian named Steven Wright. For years I laughed harder at his lines probably than any others, and I hope he won't mind if I quote a couple of them. They have to do with statistics. He says first, "42.7% of all statistics

are made up on the spot." Next, "99.9% of lawyers give the rest a bad name," and this is my all time favorite, "Do you realize that half your friends are below average?" So, what about statistics?

**Pete:** [00:09:00] I love this one. I haven't used it yet, but I plan on using this many times. It reminds me that there's three kinds of lies. Lies, damn lies and statistics. Yeah. The reality is that people will give precise numbers with confidence, but it makes no sense whatsoever. It's a good warning shot that data, as much as we're worshipping data today, it can be manipulated all the time and you just gotta be on guard and you got to be three steps ahead. This is just a great illustration with a lot of humor.

**Charlie:** [00:09:39] He is so funny. He's the one that said, what was it. "What is the speed of dark?" That was also one of my favorites over the years.

**Pete:** [00:09:52] That's fantastic.

**Charlie:** [00:09:54] The final anecdote, and this is a sobering one, and I think a thoughtful one. I ran across a quote that fits perfectly. The sad part is that I have no idea who said it. If I did I'd certainly want to give appropriate credit, but it goes like this: "In life you will realize there is a role for everyone 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 who bring out the best in you. They are the rare and amazing people who remind you why it's worth it." I've certainly had people like that in my life, and I'm sure you have too, Pete. But, your thoughts on that?

**Pete:** [00:10:44] This one is absolutely spot on, and this is not just an anecdote. This is a management philosophy and one that I have been a beneficiary of. When I think about the leaders that have found strengths and skills and maybe even a blend of magic in what they've seen in me, that I never identified. They really helped me stretch my full of possibilities, and it's something that is almost a bit of a flywheel because you want to take that same ability to spot talent. Especially in people that may be very modest or humble about their skills, and to bring it out. This is-- I've had several meetings since I've got my new role, and these are the discussions I'm having. Like, "What can I do to bring out the best?" Or "I see a capability that you don't really talk about, but I think it's something that can really take this business to the next level." I think that is the ultimate

skill in management. How do we help create that exponential value in people? People are always shy about what they know or don't know, and sometimes it takes a third party. They zero in and see it or nurture it.

**Charlie:** [00:11:59] You're right. I've learned over the years that delegation of authority is A) one of the hardest things any manager has to learn, but B) perhaps the most important. And I've also learned that nothing makes you feel better than to see somebody that you have delegated responsibility for and to, to perform maybe even better than you did. That's not easy to acknowledge, but one of my-- I think this is original with me, but I define maturity as the time when you realize that somebody else can do better what you do best. When you can come to that point, you've grown up.

**Pete:** [00:12:52] What's interesting, Charlie, is that this one nicely dove tails with your first one. Because the great managers are the ones that really encourage you and give you confidence to walk through the fire or to go through the uncertain ambiguous window, knowing that if you win when you get through you're gonna be stronger and you're going to be more confident. That's where coaching plays such a critical role. As I look back on my career so many instances where even going to business school and having a boss you just insisted that I reach for the top school, and I'm like, "You're crazy." But they just help you see skills that you don't believe that you have, or help you go down a path that looks scary but really isn't once you kind of try it. As I'm sure you know as well, this is also the most satisfying part about being a mentor.

**Charlie:** [00:13:49] Absolutely. One final line, obviously you've read the book which pleases me a lot, and I hope you enjoyed it.

**Pete:** [00:14:00] I loved the book. It's a great management compass. I think the use of humor and the use of storytelling is a severely under-leveraged skill. As we've let management theory and practice kind of almost move into hard science I think we sometimes forget the softer, more empathetic, high emotional quotient skills that can really move the needle. It's a balancing act and I believe this book makes a very positive contribution. I actually feel like I know you a lot better. I feel like I've now kind of figured out some of your secret sauce.

**Charlie:** [00:14:44] At my age, it's ok. I'm giving it away now. Not charging--.

**Pete:** [00:14:49] I want to see 2.0, though. I know you have more. I know there's more.

**Charlie:** [00:14:51] Absolutely. Well, Pete. First of all, congratulations. Cincinnati and Cintrifuse are very fortunate to have you. It's a challenging job but kind of exciting, I think, and I know you're jumping right into it. Thank you so much for helping us out here, and we'll be in touch.

**Pete:** [00:15:17] Thank you, Charlie.

**Outro:** [00:15:22] Thank you for joining me for today's conversation. If you'd like to listen to more episodes, please visit [CharlieMechem.com](http://CharlieMechem.com), or search for 15 Minutes with Charlie in your podcasting app. If you're enjoying the show you should check out my book, Total Anecdotal. A fun guide to help you become a better communicator. Learn more at [CharlieMechem.com/book](http://CharlieMechem.com/book).