

**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. In today's episode I am sitting down with Tommy Thayer, American musician and songwriter, and lead guitarist for the legendary American hard rock band KISS. Tommy was raised by his mother, a classically trained violinist and singer, and his father, a community leader, business man and Brigadier General in the US Army during WWII. Because of this background Tommy has a lot of unique experiences from his life and his career to bring to our discussion today.

**Charlie Mechem:** [00:01:04] Tommy, welcome.

**Tommy Thayer:** [00:01:06] Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here. Your introduction was quite impressive. Thank you.

**Charlie:** [00:01:21] I'm going to throw out to Tommy, five anecdotes, and then say "Have you had times in your life when that anecdote really brings it home?" Here's the first one.

**Tommy:** [00:01:35] OK.

**Charlie:** [00:01:35] It's in the book under the category of Forecasting the Future. Forecasting your future is obviously tricky business. Certain things that you think will be around forever sometimes vanish without a trace. Just consider a videotape movie rental stores, dial up internet, the evening news, and 8-track tapes. Tommy, how does that resonate with you?

**Tommy:** [00:02:02] We still don't have 8-track tapes anymore? I love those. No, it's so true. Things that you thought were just gonna be there forever do change in a lot of ways, and the first thing that comes to mind in my world, is the business that I'm in which is the music and the record business. With the advance of technology in the last 20-30 years the record business has really changed drastically, and you never would have thought that if somebody would have told you that years ago. But the record labels really aren't selling records anymore. People are going out now and streaming their

music, which is really a subscription. So people aren't buying and collecting music like they used to, which is unfortunate. Because in the old days we grew up with LPs, albums, and there were these great packages with this lovely beautiful artwork and liner notes and photos, and it really added to the mystique of the groups and what we were buying. It really made you want to collect and buy music.

**Charlie:** [00:03:08] Right.

**Tommy:** [00:03:10] But with technology changing it eventually went to, like you said, 8-tracks and cassette tapes, and then to CDs. Then eventually iTunes came on the scene and it became you'd buy an MP3 file, which is--.

**Charlie:** [00:03:25] Right.

**Tommy:** [00:03:26] I like to say there's nothing very sexy about that. It's no surprise that the whole thing changed into streaming, where people aren't actually buying the music they're just subscribing. You can listen to anything you want, that's the magic.

**Charlie:** [00:03:41] There will be another dimension where those things will disappear.

**Tommy:** [00:03:45] That's so true, and I know this has really affected not only the record business but all facets of the entertainment business. So that's the one thing that comes to mind, so I'd say that as a person in the music business you have to be flexible and be able to roll with these things and roll with the changes. But nothing is set in stone.

**Charlie:** [00:04:04] Nothing is set. In fact, in the cupboard just behind where Tommy's sitting is, where we do this podcast, is a stack probably two feet high of 78 RPM records. In the 40s and 50s when I was a young guy, I collected them all. I've got some great things that I don't know that you can find today.

**Tommy:** [00:04:27] How long did a 78, if you put on a side of the 78 record, how long did it take? A few minutes?

**Charlie:** [00:04:32] Three to three and a half, and that's another personal gripe of mine. I think most songs today are longer than they need to be.

**Tommy:** [00:04:42] I agree.

**Charlie:** [00:04:43] These were great songs. Three to three and a half minutes, and then you went on to the next one.

**Tommy:** [00:04:50] It got that way over the years, even with records in the rock and roll business, they would want to add more songs to the album. I remember when I was growing up there was 8 or 10 songs on an album, and I thought that was great. These days, 15-20 songs it becomes too much. I think you lose the focus of what it's about. So, I agree. I think sometimes simpler and less is better.

**Charlie:** [00:05:12] Right.

**Tommy:** [00:05:12] Makes more impact.

**Charlie:** [00:05:13] Here's the next anecdote from the book. This is on page 71, under the heading of Honesty. I should say, by the way, that this book Total Anecdotal is sort of a glossary of anecdotes to help you become a better speaker and writer. What I've tried to do is, under about 45 different categories, I've listed anecdotes. For example, on this one if you wanted to find anecdotes regarding honesty, you'd look under honesty and come up with a number of them. This is not the one I'm going to ask Tommy about, but it's funny. "Trust in the Lord, but lock your car." Hey, here's another one. "One of the greatest lies about honesty that I ever heard is, never buy anything from someone who's out of breath." So, anyway. The book's got a lot of these kind of things. Here's the one I want to ask Tommy about, because among his other passions he is a dedicated and successful golfer.

**Tommy:** [00:06:20] I don't know about that.

**Charlie:** [00:06:21] Well, you always try though.

**Tommy:** [00:06:24] Yes.

**Charlie:** [00:06:25] Here's the story. Some years ago there was a very amusing, at least it was to me, BC comic strip about golf. Every golfer should ponder the message. In the first panel BC was explaining golf to his girlfriend, saying "The object is to hit a ball as few times as possible." In the second panel, his girlfriend repeats with some puzzlement "So, the object of the game is to hit the ball as few times as possible?" He responds, "Yes." She says, "Then why hit it at all?" And walks away. In the final panel, BC is sitting alone in the dark staring at the moon and repeating in an almost dazed way, "Then why hit it at all?"

**Tommy:** [00:07:09] I agree with that part. "Why hit it at all?" I went out and played golf yesterday, I hadn't played in two or three months, and I tell you it was really a disaster. But I really enjoyed myself because of the people I was with, and this is one of the most beautiful places in the world so I still had a great day.

**Charlie:** [00:07:31] Good. It's a cruel sport in the sense that--

**Tommy:** [00:07:37] Absolutely.

**Charlie:** [00:07:38] The better you get, the more hooked you are, and once you're hooked and you can't stand to not continue to get better, and that rarely happens.

**Tommy:** [00:07:48] It's interesting. I know a lot of the guys that are on the PGA Tour, and I know Charlie knows all of them, and LPGA Tour as well. But you think, "If I could only be that good I'd really enjoy myself." I've never met more tortured souls than some of these guys that are on the on the tour and they're the best, the best hundred fifty in the world. Yet they're just-- They go through torture every day trying to-- You know what I'm talking about.

**Charlie:** [00:08:15] Arnold Palmer was a very dear friend of mine, and as his game began to go downhill, when he was in his 80s, I was laughing with him one day, I said, "Arnold, it must be really tough to have been as good as you were and then see your game going down. In my case, I was never any good. So it doesn't bother me to see my game is getting worse." We had a good laugh about that. But you're right, once having achieved a certain level you just don't want to lose it. You want to keep it.

**Tommy:** [00:08:47] Yes, so true.

**Charlie:** [00:08:48] Here's the next anecdote. This is one of my favorites. This is under the heading of Passion in the book. Page 88, "The great playwright Neil Simon gave a marvelous speech (I'm not sure he ever gave anything but a great speech) at a Williams College commencement. It's right to the point of giving your best shot. Here's what he said: 'Whatever path you follow from the moment you take all those long black gowns, do it as though Gershwin had written music to underscore your every move.' Romantic and idealistic? Yes. But I can't think of anything worthwhile in life that was achieved without a great deal of desire to achieve it. Don't listen to those who say 'It's not done that way.' Maybe it's not, but maybe you will. Don't listen to those who say 'You're taking too big a chance.' If he didn't take a big chance, Michelangelo would have painted the Sistine floor and it would certainly have been rubbed out by today." It's a great quote. What are your thoughts on that whole story?

**Tommy:** [00:09:52] I believe in that in a big way. I was honored earlier this year, Pacific University in Portland which I've been on the board of trustees for 15 years, they honored me with a honorary doctorate degree and I gave the commencement speech. Which you inspired me, Charlie, and I'll maybe get to that a little bit later, about how I started it out with a story or a great anecdote to break the ice. But anyway, the big question that I always get asked is-- And I talked about this in my speech, the question I get asked is "What is the key? What is it that makes success? How did you get there?" And all that sort of thing. I've thought about this quite a bit and I really believe the number one thing is that passion and that persistence and perseverance. I think it's the most important quality in anything you do to keep that that stick-to-it-iveness going, and not let up. I think that's led to me seeing a lot of good things in my life. Sometimes in the field I'm in, which is music, not necessarily being the greatest musician is the key. You have to be good, but I think it's the other things. It's that drive and that passion and that love for what you do, and really the persistence to keep going is, I believe, one of the most important things.

**Charlie:** [00:11:11] I'm reminded of the first Solheim Cup, which is the female version of the Ryder Cup that I was Commissioner of the LPGA, was in Scotland. Two of the players on the team who ended up being the stars that won the match for the

Europeans, were two young Scottish girls that probably were not in the top hundred in the rankings, but they got in there on their own home ground with their own home crowd and they just rose to new heights. It's amazing.

**Tommy:** [00:11:47] I love seeing that, when that kind of thing happens. When they get fired up. There was something indescribable about that fire and that passion that just got them fired up and made it made it happen.

**Charlie:** [00:11:57] Right.

**Tommy:** [00:11:57] I'm a big believer in those other types of things like passion and perseverance, they make a huge difference.

**Charlie:** [00:12:04] Here's one I wanted to quote to you, because of your being in the music business, and it's under the category of the Uncertainty of Life. "Life can often be terribly unfair as well as uncertain. One of Johnny Carson's great lines went like this, "If life was fair Elvis would still be alive and all the Elvis impersonators would be dead."

**Tommy:** [00:12:36] This, to me, is an extension of the last thing we were just talking about, at that uncertainty in life and death. That is something we all deal with every day. Those are the kind of things that in lot of people's situation, it gets-- They stumble with that. It's the thing that-- Or sometimes it's an excuse to, "Maybe I shouldn't do this because the uncertainty of it." Again that's something you just can't let get in your way, because we all deal with that stuff every day and there's a lot of doubt and "I don't know what's going to happen," we don't know what's going to happen next week, or tomorrow for that matter.

**Charlie:** [00:13:15] That's right.

**Tommy:** [00:13:17] So, again, it's just something that you can't let be a stumbling block. Try not to let that stop you from your forward--

**Charlie:** [00:13:26] Did you ever get a chance to see Elvis?

**Tommy:** [00:13:29] I didn't. A little before my time. Because he died in 1977 and he was obviously massive in the 50s and the 60s, but I have a lot of admiration. I did visit Graceland one time and had a private tour, which is phenomenal. But he's definitely the king of rock and roll and he's one of the key guys that really started it all, and got it going.

**Charlie:** [00:13:49] His songs are still wonderful.

**Tommy:** [00:13:52] Fantastic.

**Charlie:** [00:13:54] Here's the last anecdote that I'll throw out at you, but it's a great one. This is under the heading in the book of arrogance. "Someone once said that the best advice you could give is that you try not to be in a room with more than one person at a time who thinks he's Jesus."

**Tommy:** [00:14:20] I like that one. That's a good one. It's interesting, because I'm in the business of entertainment, so a bit of ego is good.

**Charlie:** [00:14:27] Sure.

**Tommy:** [00:14:27] But I've seen it-- Obviously, things get out of hand and a lot of cases with ego. Even in the band I'm in, I got to be honest with you, there's some good sized egos there.

**Charlie:** [00:14:37] True.

**Tommy:** [00:14:38] But I think it's important to have that in a lot of cases, especially if you want to get in front of people and present yourself that way. The one thing we like to say is "There's only so much air in the room." The guys in the band, Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley, amazing people. They've given me so many opportunities and these guys are really pros and their track records really speak for the success that they've had. But there are egos there, and I think it's important, just as long as they don't get completely out of hand. The thing that I've been able to add to the equation that's good, I have an ego too but I have the ability to kind of work within and around these people to make it comfortable and make that balance work.

**Charlie:** [00:15:21] There's a difference in my mind, between ego and just supreme confidence.

**Tommy:** [00:15:27] Yeah.

**Charlie:** [00:15:27] You can be very confident without believing that you're the end of the world.

**Tommy:** [00:15:31] That's true.

**Charlie:** [00:15:32] In fact, there's another quote-- I probably won't find it here. But it said something like, "The cemeteries are filled with irreplaceable people." Unfortunately, that's true. Well, Tommy this has been great fun. For me, at least. I hope it has for you.

**Tommy:** [00:15:51] Well it has been, Charlie. Like I said earlier, you've always been an inspiration to me--

**Charlie:** [00:15:56] Thank you.

**Tommy:** [00:15:56] You've been so helpful and supportive, and the whole Mechem family has. Dan, who is sitting here too, as well. I did that speech at Pacific University earlier this year, and I started out-- You inspired me. This is more of a funny little quip, but I said "Because you're the millennials I'm going to keep this short and sweet. Rock and roll all night, and party every day." And I acted like I walked offstage and the crowd went crazy. But that was Charlie Mechem, he inspired me to say something that really set them off in the beginning. Something funny that got people off--

**Charlie:** [00:16:27] I'm glad it worked. The essence of what Tommy is talking about, is my feeling that if you can get your audience-- And by the way, audience doesn't have to be one hundred people. It could be three people.

**Tommy:** [00:16:41] You could be sitting in the living room.

**Charlie:** [00:16:42] Exactly. To get them feeling good about you, I think it's helpful right upfront to say something that will make them smile, something that will make them realize that you're very human and you're not going to be talking down to them. Because if you go into your speech with them feeling that way about you, that's a huge advantage and vice versa. If all of a sudden they decide they're not going to like you, then they're probably not going to like you.

**Tommy:** [00:17:09] That's why Total Anecdotal, the book, is fantastic. Because there's a lot of great ideas and a lot of direction there for exactly that, for people that are making speeches or just talking to people and breaking the ice and meeting. Getting those kind of relationships and communications--

**Charlie:** [00:17:26] That's the point I want to be sure to make. This is not designed, as I say, for just public speaking because you can be in a business meeting for example right and need to get the room to smile a little bit or feel a little better about you using it.

**Tommy:** [00:17:45] Break the ice.

**Charlie:** [00:17:45] Yeah, break the ice is right. I've seen it happen in my life countless times.

**Tommy:** [00:17:50] Sure.

**Charlie:** [00:17:51] I know it works. So hopefully this will help young people or older people to just be able to communicate a little more effectively. Thanks, Tommy. A genuine pleasure.

**Tommy:** [00:18:05] Always a pleasure.

**Charlie:** [00:18:06] Thank you.

**Outro:** [00:18:11] 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).