

**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. My guest today is Richard Hunt. Richard is the publisher of my book, Total Anecdotal, and my previous book Who's That With Charlie? He is the head of Praus Press and has become a dear friend of mine. He's been a wonderful help to me and can offer his insights on the publishing industry. I also thought it would be interesting to have my publisher tell you why he felt that it was useful and desirable for him to publish the book. Please enjoy my conversation with Richard.

**Charlie Mechem:** [00:01:05] I propose to comment on several anecdotes and the first one is on page 24 of my book under the heading of Adaptability and Flexibility. "This is kind of unusual, this was Neil Armstrong's favorite joke, but he laughed so hard he rarely if ever finished it. But it's a good example of flexibility and adaptability, and it goes like this: Two guys were walking down the street on a very hot and humid day. Each had their dog and were enjoying her stroll, except for one thing. They were both thirsty. One fellow said to the other, 'I'm dying for a beer.' The other fellow said, 'So am I. Look, we're in luck. There's a bar.' They started to enter the bar when one of the guys noticed a sign in the window that read in bold black letters, 'No dogs allowed.' At first they were devastated. Then one guy said, 'I've got an idea. I'll go inside and if the bartender challenges me, I'll simply say this is my seeing-eye dog. If I'm not back here in five minutes then you'll know it's safe for you to come in.' The other guy said, "Sounds like a great idea.' So, the first guy goes in the bar and the bartender immediately says 'Hey buddy. You can't come in here with that dog. No dogs allowed.' The guy responds, 'I'm so sorry, sir, but I'm blind and this is my seeing-eye dog.' The bartender's embarrassed and says, 'I'm so sorry. I didn't realize. Let me help you over to the bar and the beer is on the house.' Meanwhile, five minutes have gone by and the guy who stayed outside decides the coast is clear. So, he walks into the bar with his dog and the bartender says, "What's going on here? Can't you read? No dogs allowed." The fellow says, "I'm very sorry, sir, I didn't know about the no dog rule because I'm blind, and this is my seeing-eye dog." The bartender said, "Wait a minute, buddy. That's a Chihuahua." Without missing a beat, the guy says, "What?! They gave me a Chihuahua?!" This is a wonderful story, but comment on adaptability and flexibility and how it has played a part in your life.

**Richard Hunt:** [00:03:17] I think that every person wants to be able to think on their feet, especially when you're in the business world. Because you can't get all the questions in advance, you don't necessarily have the benefit of 15 minutes or an hour or a week to think ahead and script everything out. These guys are clearly the guys that you wanted to hang out with in high school, because these are the lines that you tell over and over again years later, "Can you believe they were able to say this?" They're just quick on their feet. It's not malicious. They're not trying to pull the wool over, or steal anything at the same point. They are kind of sharing in the human endeavor, saying "I'm going to have a little fun here." I think this was one anecdote when we were putting it in the book though, and this for-- Especially for speaking, nowadays in our very politically correct world, you want to double check and say "Is it still relevant? Will anyone possibly get offended?" You never want to be making fun of any group that might even be slightly put-out or set amiss with this. It still rings true. This is not poking fun at anyone, except the sort of predilection of guys who were out and wanted to be able to sit down and enjoy a beer for a few minutes.

**Charlie:** [00:04:53] That's very good. Very good observation. The next anecdote is on page 34 and 35 in the book, under the heading of Negotiation. I'll sort of paraphrase it, but it has to do with when I was involved in a negotiation with a very prominent and extremely bright and tough business man in Cincinnati some years ago. I made a proposal to him that I knew was a little self-serving, but I thought I'd try it anyway. He looked me in the eye and said "Charlie, if I were to accept that proposal you would be entitled to at least a full chapter in the New Testament." I've never forgotten that one. But how does the art of negotiation play a part in in your life?

**Richard:** [00:05:42] To some degree, even if you're working with a partner organization, you have to understand that they have their point of view and you have yours. You want to be able to advance both sides at the same time. A great deal of it is just communication. You can't bluster in, that I've experienced, and expect the pay of the folks alongside you simply because now they're having to do everything that from your point of view would be the smartest way to do it. You have to put yourself in their shoes for a little while, and you have to explain. Especially if you need their help. Most of the time business exchanges are that way, they need a little bit of what you have and you need a little bit of what they have.

**Charlie:** [00:06:29] Right.

**Richard:** [00:06:31] If they understand the context, it is a meeting of the minds. If you feel like you're just being played, you're much less adaptable or open to say "Yeah. Let's do this together," if you don't feel like both sides are being considered and advanced.

**Charlie:** [00:06:52] Good. Very good.

**Richard:** [00:06:53] I think you're-- Because Jack had a-- As you said, he kind of had a legendary reputation in town. Sometimes I think he liked negotiations just to negotiate. This was part of the game for him. But--

**Charlie:** [00:07:08] That's very true.

**Richard:** [00:07:08] Because he did enjoy it, and most people back down somewhat. They're like, "I don't want to go there. This is what we've got to do."

**Charlie:** [00:07:16] That's right. Very good. Good insight. This next one is under the category of Brevity, page 38 of the book. As a publisher I thought you'd particularly be fitted to comment on this. It's a story-- It's a quote from Winston Churchill in which he once said this about an overly long government report. He said, "By its very length it defends itself against the risk of being read." I'm sure you've come across that problem before.

**Richard:** [00:07:50] Indeed. I think with Winston Churchill, you sort of have to tip your hat as one of the best anecdote and responders--

**Charlie:** [00:07:58] Indeed.

**Richard:** [00:07:59] That has ever been chronicled. Mark Twain has a similar comment. He would say, "I wanted to write a shorter note but I didn't have time." It's one thing to write a draft, but it's really the mark of a professional to be able to go back and review it with a fresh eye to cut it. There is such pressure on time now, you do have to get to

your point faster. You don't want to lose your audience, especially if you're speaking in front of them. So, tighter. There's phrases in the publishing business like "Write tight," or "Use strong active verbs," and "Get rid of the passive voice," and all those elements that sort of bloat either a manuscript or a presentation that-- People want you to entertain them but they don't want to be bored. Whether it be a book or a presentation, being concise. I thought it was very telling, this might be your most concise anecdote in the whole book.

**Charlie:** [00:09:00] You're right. By the way, it reminds me. This is also in the early part of the book when I'm giving some tips on speaking, I give some suggestions as to how to open your speech. One of them is to say to the audience, "Look. We both got a job today. My job is to speak. Your job is to listen. If you finish with your job before I finish with mine, please raise your hand." It always is a good way to start a speech. OK, next. Here, too, I call on you in your role as a publisher and a wordsmith, if you will. This is on page 60 under the category of the Fragility of Language. "These were sent to me some years ago by my brother who was a minister, and he had some excerpts from church bulletins that seemed to really be in league with the fragility of language. First is, 'This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.' The second one. 'Irvin Benson and Jesse Carter were married on October 24th in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their early days.' The third one, my favorite. 'The low self-esteem group will meet Thursday at 7PM in the social hall. Please use the back door.' It just underscores to me how fragile language is, and how easy it is to say it wrong or say it incompletely.

**Richard:** [00:10:44] Absolutely. I think especially the churches that have the little sign out in front of their--

**Charlie:** [00:10:52] Yeah.

**Richard:** [00:10:53] Our masters of witticism. But at the same time, they will always come back to their point. You could probably ask your relative whether there's some online service that these guys go to, because I can't imagine all of them are that witty.

**Charlie:** [00:11:08] Nor can I.

**Richard:** [00:11:10] But it's great that they understand you got to [talk to] somebody and you gotta make them laugh and get their attention, and whether it be in the church bulletin, or-- I remember some of the publishing version of this that you'd think "OK. That was a bad title." We share those sort of elements as well, that I could see the intentions were good but it just came out a lot different than you thought it was going to.

**Charlie:** [00:11:39] It's always a good idea to reread what you've written, or think about what you've said, to be sure it says what you really wanted to say. I think that's particularly true in this day of emails and texts and things that people tend to push the send button without really knowing whether it's said the way they want to say it.

**Richard:** [00:12:01] Absolutely. One of the great rules in publishing is, once you finish your work, put it in the drawer at least overnight if not for a week. When you come back to it these things jump off the page, and you weren't even aware of it when you first thankfully heard "The end," ring in your head and put it away.

**Charlie:** [00:12:23] That's very good advice. This next anecdote is on page 76 of the book, and it's in the category of Marketing. "It seems that these two guys had tried their hand unsuccessfully in a variety of businesses, so they decide to try selling cantaloupes from the back of their truck along the highway. Things were not going well when they decided to try to figure out what went wrong and what they could do about it. The one fellow said to the other, "How much are we paying for the cantaloupe?" The other fellow answered, "We're paying a dollar a cantaloupe." The first guy responds, "Then what are we selling them for?" "We're selling them for 90 cents a cantaloupe." The first fellow thought about the situation for a moment then said, "I think that's the answer. We've got to get a bigger truck." I've seen this philosophy used, Richard, over the years in marketing and selling and I suspect you have too.

**Richard:** [00:13:24] Absolutely. It's usually a sign of the great value of institutional intelligence, somebody who's been in a place or a position for a long time. From the publisher's perspective we are looking, let's say in the case of Total Anecdotal, "How much will it cost to make this book?" Then you get a figure that's called PP&B, paper, printing and binding. I can remember the old stories from the guys who work in the press room who would say, "Sure. That's \$8,000 worth of paper, but you also gotta pay me to print it, and you're really going to want me to somehow attach it so that people

could read it." The ad-rookies would stray into this, only hear one number or don't ask the two or three other questions that will get you to that final more complete answer.

**Charlie:** [00:14:16] Good. Very well put. This final anecdote is on page 111 of the book under the category of Taking Responsibility. "This was an experience that I have never forgotten. When my granddaughter graduated from high school the program included a talk from a faculty member who'd been chosen by the senior class to share his thoughts for the day. He said, 'In deciding what to talk about I consulted with my 10-year-old son and 6-year-old daughter.' He said that his son offered some very helpful advice but it was the advice from his young daughter that he, and I, found very powerful. Remember, this is a six year old who is just starting school and is learning many new things. When her father asked her what she thought that he should tell the graduating class, she thought a moment and then said, "Daddy, tell them to be sure to put their name on their paper." I love that because it's such a such a childlike and beautiful way to illustrate a simple but extremely important quality of taking responsibility for yourself.

**Richard:** [00:15:31] Absolutely. When I first read this anecdote it called to mind how my father had been a teacher, and at the opposite end of the spectrum he was teaching vocational school. Very often, especially at that time, gentlemen were returning from the Vietnam War. They were probably in their mid 20s. His job was teaching electricity, and it seemed to be-- It was a trade, but it was one that if you weren't paying attention it would kill you. I mean you grab hold of a 220 or something, at best you're going to remember it.

**Charlie:** [00:16:03] Yes, indeed.

**Richard:** [00:16:04] He would say, and then we've heard it all our lives in classrooms, "Read every question before you begin." He would have all these math questions, and talk about watts and all of that. But it wasn't until you flip the paper over that the last line said, "Thank you for reading all the questions. Simply sign your name here and you're done." And these guys would jump into the test and they'd run out of time. His whole point was, "You've got to think through the process first.

**Charlie:** [00:16:34] Very good. Well, Richard, before we close could you just say--? The audience may well be saying, "Why did he publish the book in the first place?" I'm not

looking for kudos, I'd just be interested to know what it was about the concept that persuaded you it was worth publishing.

**Richard:** [00:16:57] It can be summed up as simply as the number one fear of Americans, at least, if not humans is public speaking.

**Charlie:** [00:17:08] Right.

**Richard:** [00:17:08] To be able to stand up in front of a group and address folks in a cogent, compelling and to an earlier point, concise way. It takes a lot of work. I thought you were a master of this, gained from decades of experience of standing in front of groups, and you want to provide-- It's one thing to say, "We published a book." But it's much more to say, "We did this to help people." I'm not sure public speaking is really seen as that, as a way to help. We think of nursing, or a social service of sorts. But if you can take out the fear and improve the presentation of somebody, this little \$14.95 book is probably their best investment they're going to make.

**Charlie:** [00:17:57] I can't tell you how many people have called me and said, "Not only did I enjoy your book but I've already used several of the anecdotes from it." That really pleases me, because I couldn't agree with you more. Again in this day of rapid communication I think it's harder and harder to communicate effectively, because sometimes you've got to really think about what you're saying, and anecdotes can help. In any event, speaking of helping, you've been a wonderful help from the very beginning when we first met and talked about my first book, Who's That? with Charlie. I hope that will continue. I'm being urged to publish a volume two of Total Anecdotal, so stay tuned and stay safe.

**Richard:** [00:18:48] Thank you for having me on, Charlie. I really appreciate it.

**Charlie:** [00:18:52] It's a pleasure.

**Outro:** [00:18:57] 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

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