

## 15 Minutes with Charlie - Steve Mosko Interview

Charlie Mechem: 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 that 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 experience and careers.

Charlie Mechem: In today's episode I'm talking with Steve Mosko, an old and dear friend of mine. Steve was chairman of Sony Pictures Television for a number of years and enjoyed great success. He recently left Sony to become CEO of Village Roadshow Entertainment Group. Steve is one of the most respected and successful executives in the entertainment business. That said, welcome to the show Steve.

Steve Mosko: Hey, Charlie. How are you?

Charlie Mechem: I'm very well and thanks so much for doing this. The way I like to do this is just to quote a few anecdotes from the book and then just get your reaction to the anecdote as it may have related to your own career.

Steve Mosko: Sure.

Charlie Mechem: The first one is on Page 26 of my book under the category of Adaptability and Flexibility and it's designed to sort of emphasize how important being flexible and adaptable can be. Here's the anecdote: I was privileged to serve for more than 25 years on the board of the J.M. Smucker Company. Paul Smucker was CEO and driving force through the years, an extraordinary man in many ways. One year during the question and answer period at the annual meeting a woman got up, noted that she and Paul had known one another since they were in grade school together and that she'd always loved the company and everything it stood for. But she said, "There's one little thing, Paul. All of your jams and jellies are put up in such large jars. We older folks, especially those of us living alone, don't need such big containers. Couldn't you put your jams and jellies in itty bitty jars?"

Charlie Mechem: The audience laughed and applauded and I thought, wow, how's Paul going to handle this one? It was a good question and it was being asked by a lovely lady and an old school friend. Paul smiled and said, "Mabel, you're right. We've known one another for many years and I respect your judgment. It's a very good question that you've asked me. Let me try to answer this way. We could indeed and maybe should put up our jams and jellies in itty bitty jars, but Mabel if we did that then we'd have to pay itty bitty dividends." The crowd roared, Mabel smiled, and the meeting went on.

Charlie Mechem: Steve, your thoughts about adaptability and flexibility.

- Steve Mosko: Sure. First of all I've read the book probably a dozen times. When I talk about people getting along when you and Arnold Palmer worked together. I refer to those relationships as peanut butter and jelly relationships because they go so well together. You had a peanut butter and jelly relationship with Arnold and I think I have it with some of my people, but in terms of how that relates to my business today in terms of the entertainment business, the world has changed from a linear world to an on-demand world.
- Steve Mosko: If people in our business weren't flexible enough and willing to change enough to adapt to this new world they would be getting itty bitty profits as well because the world has transitioned. This is not to say that the CBSs of the world or the NBCs and the linear networks are going away, but certainly there's a place and there's demand for these streaming services like Netflix, like Amazon, like Hulu and people in the industry who have adapted to their business model have done very, very well. There couldn't be a more pertinent reference you could make than that one. When I read the book, like I said, that's the first thing I thought about.
- Charlie Mechem: Good. Thank you. The next anecdote I wanted to highlight is on Page 44 under the category of Courage and Risk-Taking. I just made up a few hypotheticals of what might have happened if some of the people involved in the greatest moments in history had not had the courage to go on or had been risk-adverse. Here are just a couple of them: Suppose Neil Armstrong had said to Buzz Aldrin, "You know Buzz, we're running a little low on gas. Maybe we better let somebody else be the first man on the moon."
- Charlie Mechem: Another one: What if Wilbur Wright had said to Orville, "It's awful windy here and I'm not sure this crazy thing will fly anyway. Let's just forget it, we'll think of something simpler to invent, something that stays on the ground."
- Charlie Mechem: I'd like your thoughts on being risk-adverse without being reckless.
- Steve Mosko: My favorite story here I guess is that a couple years back there was this television show that we were developing. If I gave you the one liner you would probably look at me and say, "That's a terrible idea." The idea was about a guy who develops terminal cancer who decides to sell crystal meth to support his family long after he's gone. That was the original idea for Breaking Bad, which today is recognized as one of the greatest shows ever produced in the history of television.
- Steve Mosko: There's a process which we go through when we get shows approved where I had to go to my boss and say, okay here's our idea, here's what it's going to cost, here's how much money I think we will make. We joke about it to this day

but he said to me when I presented the idea, "That's the worst idea I've ever heard for a television show."

Steve Mosko: The long and the short of it is that everyone involved, Bryan Cranston went on to great things, Vince Gilligan, who created and wrote the show, will go down as one of the great writers of this generation. But it was a huge risk and when you're looking across the table and your boss says, "That's the worst idea I've ever heard ...", it makes you think twice.

Steve Mosko: But myself and the team, I was an associate on my team that helped develop it, were like, "No, we believe in this idea." It not only went on to be one of the most recognized dramas in the history of television, but also one of the most profitable pieces of original IP in the history of Sony. When I say it took a lot of courage, it was a group of us that had the courage to stand up and say, "We think this could be great." Again, I think if you believe in something and you're passionate about something and you've done your homework, you just need to go for it.

Steve Mosko: Anyway, that is my best and only example. I don't have one that's better than that.

Charlie Mechem: No, that's a good one.

Steve Mosko: My example, that's a good one.

Charlie Mechem: I don't know if I've ever told you this story but ... By the way, for those listening, in the interest of full disclosure, many years ago Steve worked for my company, Taft Broadcasting Company. Steve was a terrific part of our company. I don't know that I ever shared with you, Steve. One day I got a call from Barry Diller, one of the legends in the industry then and now. He said he had a project he wanted to talk to me about. He came to our office in Cincinnati and proposed that we be one of the original five investors in a show that he was hoping he could make work called Entertainment Tonight. We were one of I think five investors. We didn't put up a lot of money because Barry said, "Hey, we'll do a few shows. We'll run them, if they work fine we'll make more, if they don't we'll forget it." God knows, as you know very well, Entertainment Tonight is still on the air. That's another example of risk taking.

Charlie Mechem: The next one is under the category of Forecasting the Future. This is one of my favorites. Several 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, Don Hinkley of Cincinnati, was also in the audience. It's important before going on to note the speech was given in September. Dr. Ramo gave a superb, thought-provoking talk and shared his vision for coming decades and even longer. When he finished he asked for

questions and my friend Don raised his hand and said, "Dr. Ramo, I've truly enjoyed your vision of the future but let me ask you this: How do you see October?" It brought the house down, but your thoughts on short-term and long-term.

Steve Mosko: Well, I'll tell you. I go back to my college days on this, Charlie, when I was captain of the Delaware lacrosse team. We were working really hard in the preseason and our goal was to go undefeated. Every day we're running our miles, we're doing our sprints and we're doing all these things to prepare for the season. We're going to go undefeated, we play our first game and we lose. I thought to myself, wait a minute, everything we were doing was built for us being undefeated. Now we've lost a game, now what?

Charlie Mechem: Right.

Steve Mosko: That was a very good lesson in my life from a business standpoint because what I realized is, it's great to have a long-term goal but in order to be successful in business you have to put one foot ... In order to win a race you've got to put one foot in front of the other. At that point I realized in life that you can have long-term goals but then you have to have your short-term goals along the way in order to achieve those long-term goals. A more realistic goal could be winning the conference championship, which we did.

Charlie Mechem: Excellent point.

Steve Mosko: We could have executed a certain plan every game or just giving 100% every game. Whatever it was which allowed us to have a long-term view but really focused on in order to achieve that long-term goal, hitting short-term goals along the way.

Charlie Mechem: Amen.

Steve Mosko: That was a huge, huge moment in my life because it really carried over into business.

Charlie Mechem: Boy, it sure does. Thanks for that one. Next anecdote is on Page 88, it's under the heading of Passion and it's a quote from PT Barnum who said, "It is critically important for success to make every goal a stretch goal. If you get there, fabulous, if you don't get there you're still going to get a lot farther than you would have had you not set that lofty goal in the first place." Barnum put it this way, "If I shoot at the sun I may hit a star." Your thoughts on that.

Steve Mosko: Right. That's accurate. I just think we've got to be realistic about our goals in life and what we're trying to achieve. I guess my whole thing is I have big, lofty goals and I'm shooting for the sun, but along the way I want to enjoy myself and be

surprised what might pop up along the way if I'm on the right road. Again, you can always have that view of what's coming up down the road, but as you're driving look out the window to see what's coming at you because you might be surprised and might be happy.

Charlie Mechem: Absolutely. The next anecdote is on Page 104 of the book under the heading of Self-Reliance. In other words, the importance of not just having team members and support, but you've got to be able to rely in a final analysis on your own ability and your own willingness to do the things we've talked about, take risks and so on. Here's the anecdote: A man was traveling through the wilds of Vermont and he felt totally lost. Happily he saw a road sign with two arrows, one pointing east read: Rutland, Seven Miles. Unfortunately, the other sign pointing west had exactly the same thing: Rutland, Seven Miles. Now the guy was totally confused. Here were two signs pointing in exactly opposite directions yet saying the same thing. The man drove up, stopped, got out and asked a farmer, "Does it matter which road I take to Rutland?" The farmer thought for a moment and then in that classic Vermont twang he said, "Not to me it don't."

Charlie Mechem: Your thoughts on that.

Steve Mosko: This is about self-reliance, right Charlie?

Charlie Mechem: Yes.

Steve Mosko: When I read some of the things you're talking about with self-reliance, hopefully this ties in because I always think about what motivates people to reach and have some self-reliance. But I used to be a greens keeper, not greens keeper, I was head of the greens committee for my golf course years ago and what ... This is somewhat counterintuitive but in terms of we were talking about how you water the grass. You would think the more water you put down that the grass would be greener and stronger, it's actually the opposite. You actually want to, I don't want to say starve the grass a little bit, but what you want to do is make the roots fight for the water because it actually in the end makes the roots stronger if they have to reach down and grab the water. By watering the grass a little bit less than you would think, you actually make the grass better and stronger.

Charlie Mechem: Great point.

Steve Mosko: When I think about business, I look sometimes at companies that overspend on things, overspend on movies or overspend ... What ultimately happens is you get lazy when you have too much because you don't have to work hard for it, you're not self-reliant. Whereas if you work with a little bit you make the most out of it. I also think about when my grandmother was living with us. We had

seven kids in our family and my grandmother and my grandfather came to live with me and my grandfather was a coal miner, came up through the Depression and the whole thing. You had to be self-reliant if you lived through the Depression.

Steve Mosko: She would cook dinner for all the kids to help my mom out and she would make baked chicken on Monday, she would then take the leftover chicken and make chicken soup on Tuesday and then take the leftover bones and such and make chicken paprika on Wednesday. She used every possible piece of that chicken because she was used to taking care of herself and being self-reliant.

Charlie Mechem: Yeah.

Steve Mosko: Anyway. Yes, so those are two examples from me about what self-reliance means.

Charlie Mechem: Those are great stories. By the way you and I have got to talk some day, my grandfather was a coal miner too.

Steve Mosko: Oh, I know. I remember you told me that.

Charlie Mechem: Did we talk about that? Yeah, and my grandmother did much of the same things that you were talking about.

Steve Mosko: Yeah. Sure.

Charlie Mechem: One final anecdote, and this one is, I love this one. It's on Page 116 of the book under the category of What's Really Important. This is a quiz that it's hypothetical but it makes the point. Here it is. The first quiz goes like this: Name five of the wealthiest people in the world. Name five Heisman Trophy winners. Name five winners of the Miss America contest. Name ten people who won a Nobel or Pulitzer prize. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners, male and female. Name the last ten winners of the World Series. Well how did you do? Probably not very well. Let's try another one.

Charlie Mechem: Here's the next quiz: Name three teachers who aided your journey through school. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time. Name five people who have taught you worthwhile things. Name a few people who have made you feel special. Name five people who you enjoy being with. Name several heroes whose lives have inspired you. I suspect that you've answered every question easily.

Steve Mosko: Sure.

Charlie Mechem: I'd like your take on that.

## 15 Minutes with Charlie - Steve Mosko Interview

Steve Mosko: Well, first thing I will say to you as the host of this podcast is that you would certainly fall in the people that has made a big influence in my life, so thank you for that.

Charlie Mechem: Thank you.

Steve Mosko: I went through a situation where ... I've been in business now for 41 years, and I know what you're thinking Charlie, I don't look like I've been in business for 41 years so thank you for thinking that.

Charlie Mechem: No you don't.

Steve Mosko: I've had a great career. I was in the broadcasting business thanks to you and Dudley Taft and those were great years. I had the great fortune of spending 24 years at Sony. After putting those two back-to-back I decided that it was time to do something which was a little more entrepreneurial. As I sat back and looked at what my priorities were going to be going forward I said a couple of things to myself. One is, I think the best years are ahead of me, and I'm saying that as a guy who will turn 63 in April.

Charlie Mechem: Yeah.

Steve Mosko: I think these next ten years are going to be phenomenal thanks to what I've learned and how I've taken care of myself and all that. But I also made a vow to myself that to really ... When I make this decision what I want to do next is really determine what's important. What I realized, it wasn't the perks, it wasn't all the vanity things that come along with these entertainment jobs, it was working with quality people, it was being with people that were passionate about what they do, it was doing something where I had fun and just not working with people I thought were less than quality people from a moral standpoint, ethics.

Charlie Mechem: Right.

Steve Mosko: I surround myself with good people, people that were passionate and people that wanted to enjoy what they do. Fortunately now as CEO of Village Roadshow, I'm surrounded by people who are exactly that way and it's very rewarding and, like I said, I will say this and I'd say it if you weren't the host of this podcast is that you have always been to me the perfect role model for several reasons. One, you are as friendly to the guy who's the security guard as you are to people that were heads of state, and that's a remarkable quality and you've always had that.

Steve Mosko: Second thing is, you have what seem like to me watching from the outside, just so smoothly transitioned from major things in your life, whether it's running Taft

or partnering with Arnold Palmer or running the LPGA and all the boards, everything you've done in your life. It's been amazing to me how you've transitioned so easily, at least from my view, and it's because you've treated people the way you treated them whatever you did, the right way and the way you would want to be treated. You demanded excellence but you also took into consideration the human element that you're dealing with people.

Steve Mosko: Listen, it's an honor to be part of this podcast and I just want the listeners to know and you to know how much our friendship means and that you've been a great role model for me. When I read your book or your books, you've lived this life. This isn't something you had to make up, this is who you are so it's a privilege to be a part of it.

Charlie Mechem: You're making me blush. If we run into any time problems on this podcast we'll certainly use the last part of it. I'm teasing. Steve, having people as successful as you come through our orbit, if you will, and be part of our life is really what's important to me. I've always said people, people, people. It's like the old real estate, location, location ...

Steve Mosko: Yep.

Charlie Mechem: Business is not that complicated if you realize it's all about motivating people to do what not just you want to do but they want to do. Thank you very, very much. Continued success and I look forward to seeing you soon.

Steve Mosko: Charlie, have a wonderful day. I love you and many, many, many more years of success on this earth and I'm proud to call you my friend.

Charlie Mechem: You're the best. Have a good one pal.

Charlie Mechem: 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 show you should check out my book, Total Anecdotal: A Fun Guide to Help You Become a Better Speaker and Writer. Learn more at [charliemechem.com/book](http://charliemechem.com/book). That's [charliemechem.com/book](http://charliemechem.com/book). Or you can acquire the book either through Amazon or Barnes & Noble. Thank you.