

EPISODE 345

[INTRO]

This is the Other Side of Potential Podcast. I'm Dr. Sharon Spano, and each week I'll be exploring the many complexities of our world that often disrupt our ability to effectively lead ourselves and others. Join me in these provocative conversations with cutting edge trailblazers as we navigate the art of high impact leadership and how to move beyond the daily pressures of success to a place of radical abundance.

[INTERVIEW]

Hi everyone, and welcome back to The Other Side of Potential. I'm Dr. Sharon Spano and I'm so glad you're here. Today's episode is a “Best Of” conversation with someone who truly embodies the journey from success to significance, and that person is Paul Epstein. Paul spent over 15 years as a high profile executive in the NFL and the NBA living what many would call the dream.

But when he paused long enough to reflect on his deeper purpose, he made a radical pivot. He left behind the sports world to build something that would help others find their why. In this episode, you'll hear Paul's story of transformation and how it can serve as a mirror for your own. Here are just a few of the key takeaways that we thought were valuable from this episode.

What it really means to move from success to significance and why one doesn't necessarily guarantee the other. How discovering your why can radically shift your leadership, your energy and your sense of fulfillment. The powerful role of reflection and journaling and finding clarity and purpose and you know, if you've listened long enough that's a big, big factor that I believe in very, very much. And also how values-based decision making can fuel lasting impact, both personally and professionally. This is an inspiring conversation that you don't wanna miss. For anyone who's hit all the external markers of success, yet still finds themselves asking, “Is this all there is?”

So let's dive into this “Best Of” episode with Paul Epstein.

Welcome to the show, Paul. Thank you so much for taking time out of your hectic schedule to be with me today.

[00:01:36] PE: Thank you so much, Sharon. It's truly my pleasure.

[00:01:38] SS: Well, I know you and I had some conversations before and I love your passion and energy. Before I get into the questions that I have for you, can you just give us and the listeners overall a bit more about your journey through these multiple sports franchises and how it is that you came to be so passionate about helping others find their purpose and their passion? Tell us that story.

[00:02:00] PE: Absolutely. It's overall, since college days, let's call it a 15-year journey and sports happened a year out of school. For me, this has been over a decade in the making and being immersed in such high-performance cultures and everybody knows sports for what happens on the field, or the corner of the ice, my seat was in the front row, in the front office of multiple NFL and NBA franchises, eventually working for a global agency and then landing in the NFL League Office.

The majority of what my roles were on paper were to lead sales, enterprises and organizations. Think of a 70,000-seat stadium and who's responsible for filling the seats and the suites and the corporate partnerships that are involved, essentially the back-end revenue that makes everything possible. Those are the worlds that I was immersed in.

I share all that with you, to say that over the time, I started to realize that there were certain talents and skills and that I can truly maximize my potential, as well as that of my team, but there was something that if I could look back, now having the perspective, the cliché here is it's much easier to be a Monday morning quarterback, look back 24 hours and say all the coulda, shoulda, wouldas. If I could really simplify what I did in the sense of who our teams were on the

best day, versus the worst day, the best days were always inspirational cultures. They were always founded on purpose.

In other words, what was our greater why? Were we a part of something bigger than ourselves in terms of our contribution and our impact? On the contrary, when I could say that perhaps we're hitting quotas, but we're having high turnover, we're dealing with a lot of the same business challenges and disruptions, it was when there was no deeper baked meaning.

Success, personally, professionally, that has never been the missing box in my life, where I could say that I sometimes ran into challenges throughout my journey is what ultimately was going to make me feel alive. What's going to inspire me to go into work and then fulfilled on the back-end, knowing that I made an impact while I was there and then excited to do it again the next day. Then how could I scale that to other people? That was my leadership journey in a nutshell. It involved many phenomenal accomplishments, which included as you said, a chapter with the 49ers and opening up a billion dollar plus stadium and Levi's and being a part of the NFL League Office and shattering whatever revenue records were in place relative to premium hospitality, being in New Orleans for then the Hornets, now the Pelicans, when the team was on the verge of relocation.

Really, it was a franchise-saving campaign called 'I'm In', where civic pride was front and center. Civic pride became the purpose and it was bigger than basketball. Those are some of the achievements and the moments and the chapters that I'm most proud of. Really, where I tapped into inspiring purpose in others, which is my why and where I knew that this had to become a calling, it was back in 2016. I still remember to this day, the moment and the experience.

There was a leadership retreat for the president of the 49ers. I was one of his reports of his entire team. We went away for two days to find our sense of personal purpose. I walked away with clarity and language around my values. Then I started to make very intentional decisions around those values. It drove my actions, my behaviors, the types of decisions that my values

were essentially my lens on how I showed up and how I viewed the world. It changed my entire life.

Finding my why was literally the greatest gift that I've ever received. Now I've dedicated the rest of my life to share that gift of purpose with others. From there, I started again, to make decisions in alignment with my values; one of my core values is growth, and so I define that as a growth mindset, which for those of us familiar with the book *Mindset* and the fantastic work of Carol Dweck, essentially I stopped looking at life in a linear and fixed fashion, where A leads to B leads to C and I'm essentially on this treadmill. Most outsiders look at it as success, but I wanted to start to see significance.

One of those big decisions of growth took me back to school, which I would have never thought was in the game plan, but all of a sudden, it seemed like a logical thing. I said, "Well, I'm close to running an entire business enterprise here in the sports industry." A few promotions away from that level. How can I cover up some of my weaknesses? How can I double down on some of my strengths? How can I surround myself with an amazing tribe of people, which became my MBA cohort?

I end up committing to the University of Michigan. Thankfully, I'm an LA boy, so they kept me out of the cold. They do have a Los Angeles sport at the time I was living in the bay, so it was an easy commute down once a month. Over a two-year program, I thought that the biggest takeaways from the program would be in the class. What I found, that there were two takeaways that I wouldn't trade for the world, even bigger than what I took from the class. For one, I now have a tribe of sisters and brothers that I wouldn't trade for the world, those being my cohort, peers and members. The second was for the first time in my life, I had my own coach. You see, I had been coaching others through my life and I had what I would call mentors, but it was all largely folks from my industry. It was all a very tight community.

This was my first chance where I started to see the power of expressing my own purpose and my own potential. My coach that was a part of my leadership development program in my MBA cohort, she said, "Paul, I understand what you do. You head up revenue for an NFL franchise.

That's fantastic. Tell me more. What do you love about it? What do you hate about it and what's in the middle?" I answered all three. She then asked me to describe more about my love bucket.

I said, well, I love being a coach, just like you. I love the people side of the business. It's all the leadership and the culture stuff that gets me out of bed. I love molding and growing and developing talent. That's my fire. She said, "Awesome. What percentage of your time are you doing that?" I literally started to sink in my chair, because I knew that I wouldn't be proud of the answer. I responded, about 20%.

[00:09:13] SS: Wow.

[00:09:13] PE: She said, "Okay. Well, if I was to wave a wand and you become your boss tomorrow, would that number 20 go up, down or sideways?" I said, "Down. It would be more strategy, less people." What about your boss's boss? I said the same. This was the question that changed everything for me.

[00:09:33] SS: Wow. Yes. Those are very profound questions. I want to stop you for just a minute to attack some of this, because I know you're used to telling this story. For listeners, I want to make sure we extrapolate a profoundness of this and the intensity of this, because you have what many, or had what many would think is the ideal job, the ideal path. You said, the missing box wasn't success.

I want to go back before the leadership retreat, when you were still in that place of success and you were still asking the question, what would make me feel alive, inspire me? Even though you were in the middle of a lot of that every day, there was something within you that knew it wasn't all there was. Can you recall that moment, or what sparked that question within you?

[00:10:26] PE: Yeah. No, thank you for bringing that up, Sharon. I'll tell you, while I have my why in words, which is to inspire a purpose in others. I do it all in the legacy of my dad. The reason that I'm so inspired and what lit my purpose is that I live in his legacy. I lost my dad

when I was 19-years-old and I was a freshman in college at the time. I literally got the phone call from my next-door neighbor to share the news. I shared with others that I picked up that phone call as a boy and I hung up as a man.

It is because of the impact that my dad has made on my life, even more so since the day that he passed, because by trade, he was an educator. He taught largely in underprivileged communities here in Los Angeles. I never realized the gravity of what he did. I knew he talked about a continuation high school, which for those that are familiar, that's typically a kid's last chance. They've been kicked out of traditional schools and this is really that last shot and that was his pride and joy. Years after he passed, I'm in a barber shop in the same neighborhood where he taught and in walks a man, 7-foot tall, bulging body, tattoos on every square inch of his body and face, somebody that if you saw in an alley, you would run the other way.

We lock eyes and he charges at me. In my mind, I am thinking, "What is about to happen? I am in fight or flight mode. What did I do to deserve this?" I close my eyes bracing for impact. When I open them, I expected to see a fist, but what I saw was a finger and he pointed at me and he asked, "Are you Mr. Epstein's son?" When he asked me that, I was so startled I couldn't even respond. He apologized and he said, "I just wanted to come over and say thank you. I remember you on the side of the stage that I graduated from and your dad was the first person that ever believed in me. I've had a job for two consecutive months now. It may not sound much, but it means everything to me and I owe it all to your dad. He gave me a reason to think that tomorrow was worth it."

At that moment, he literally went from somebody that scared me to an angel delivering a message. I kid you not, Sharon, that moment inspired me to not only serve in the space of leadership, because I saw while my dad was a teacher, that was his what, his why was to impact lives. I said, that is going to become the torch that I live the rest of my life through. If I am making my dad proud and if I could have one-tenth of the impact that he had by the time that my life is over, then that'll be a great life.

As I'm achieving all these things in the sports world and I'm checking all the success boxes, when I felt that there was tension in the sense of the significance side of things, it was because I felt like everything was in the what category and not as much in the why category, but it all stems from the memory of my father and wanting to carry his torch on.

[00:14:00] SS: That's such a beautiful story. Thank you for sharing that. I'm definitely sorry for your loss, because I know when you and I spoke earlier, we talked about just for the sake of the listeners, we are both from – I'm from Lincoln Heights. I believe you grew up in Highland Park, right?

[00:14:17] PE: Correct.

[00:14:18] SS: We're from different generations, but clearly, I know when I lived in the area, just to put a context for the work that your father did, it was an extremely rough area. Later of course, after I was long gone it became even more so with heavy gangs and drug use and whatnot. When you talk about him reaching out to these kids, I mean, it's a significant thing and I'm sure that that man that approached you is just one of many.

Now when I hear you talk about this, I'm wondering then, the success mode that you were in, the drive there, was that in any way also to make your dad proud, given, I would imagine that would be a natural thing to just want to be successful, since you were so young when he passed? Is that accurate? Did you have awareness of that?

[00:15:08] PE: I did. As I mentioned, so starting at an entry level sales role at the Staples Center, this is back close to 15 years ago now, my inspiration and my motivation to eventually lead teams and lead people, it was all because of the impact that I saw him have on students. I erased the fact that the one platform is a school, one platform maybe a corporate office. I viewed it through a lens of a similar opportunity to impact lives, and perhaps, the people that I was impacting may not have come from the same disadvantaged backgrounds, but I still saw the opportunity to inspire, the opportunity to create purpose, the ability to let people know that you believe in them sometimes more than they believe in themselves and really to elevate that

level of awareness and performance by maximizing their potential. That's what truly got me out of bed. I did have awareness of it.

Reflecting back, I wish that I had used that awareness for my favor more often, because sometimes to be completely candid, especially in a quantitatively heavy environment like sales and in a business forum that many cases, we make short-term decisions, I did also fall prisoner to the fact that you get obsessed with the results, you get obsessed with the outcome, you essentially make short-term decisions. As much as I'd love to say that those business decisions are always what's best for people, if I could describe my leadership journey in four quarters, I would say that the first and the fourth quarter, one million percent, I was through and through all about people.

That's when I think I leveraged the power of my dad's memory and his legacy. In the middle, I also and I look in the mirror, Sharon. I'm not one of those that blames an environment, or blames a boss. Yeah, sure. I could easily point fingers in terms of why I thought the way I thought, but ultimately, I own it. Yeah, those middle chapters were elements of you want to hit the number, you want to make the world proud, you want to hit those achievement marks, you want to be successful, you want the next job, you want the next promotion, you want to make the people above you happy.

At many times on that fast-moving treadmill, I lost a little bit of the perspective of putting people first and thinking, what would my dad do? That's what I mean when I say, I wish I would have had more awareness. I wish I could have been more present, even when I was successful. I wish it would have been where my feet were, versus always looking over the horizon.

[00:17:51] SS: I think this is very significant. I don't want to lose sight of the fact that whatever path you originally chose, that deeper foundation, I'll use the word of truth, that he instilled in you was always there. I mean, I think it's natural for a young man to gravitate towards that fast-track of success. That's one way of doing it.

Then there's the pivotal moment. I just commend you, Paul, because you're still young and you made these hard choices at a young age, where you still have a whole lifetime ahead of you, God willing, to impact literally millions of people, given the path that you've taken. I'm wondering though for the sake of the listener and anyone out there, because I know that many of us, I should say, not all, but many of us reach that point where we have an opportunity to dig deeper.

I can remember when it happened to me and I was literally sitting on the street trying to decide literally, do I turn left, or do I turn right? When I realized I really didn't want to turn right, because of where that road was going to take me, that's when I realized you need to stop everything you're doing and change.

Now when you made that decision though, you're walking away from I'm assuming a very – it's a high-level career, there's good money there, there's good opportunity for growth and success as you've alluded to. How did you make the decision, because you're literally walking away from a lot?

[00:19:20] PE: I walked away from a dream job and a dream career just to be very specific about it. I did it very consciously. 99.9% of the world that didn't know me on paper, they see your LinkedIn update and they think, "What the heck just happened?" You go from an executive role with the 49ers to you're working for a leadership institute. What is that? What happened? They were thinking that I was running away from something, but those that were closest to me knew that I was running towards something.

Going back to my conversation with my coach when she asked me about the love and the hate in the middle and we basically constructed this fact that I was loving what I did about 20% of my day, essentially I started to compartmentalize things in two buckets. Everything you do, either gives you energy or depletes you of your energy. Let's call that fuel. I was being fueled 20% of my day and the other 80% was draining.

On the surface, everything seemed great to the outside world, but on the inside, that's where I felt the tension. Her question to me was, "So what are you after?" When I started to think about my day-to-day specifically, are the activities that I am most often participating in giving me energy or depleting me of my energy? I knew that it was on a downward sloping curve that started at 20. That's when I knew I had to get off the treadmill. The treadmill happened to be a very sexy treadmill. It was the supermodel. It was the NFL. It was the NBA. It was the dream job and career, but that's the outside.

I started to care more about how I felt on the inside and literally, that was when I started to tap into a lot more of my purpose and what made me feel alive. To be very specific with listeners, because I can be abstract when I share some of these things, what I specifically did was I pulled out the list of my core values. My core values in no particular order, but these are the five; belief, growth, authenticity, courage and impact.

Impact was the one that caught me. Impact was the one where I said, how can I show up in my current role to create impact? I believe that within the 49ers four walls, I could create infinite impact. Trust me, now that we're on our way to the Super Bowl literally this Sunday, oh, my gosh, it would be a dream to still be there. But that said, I felt that my impact and this was just my view. I'm not suggesting it's right or wrong. My view was, my impact is largely limited to what happens inside these four walls, versus if I take a leap. How can I amplify and activate my purpose to create more impact in the world? That's where things such as keynote speaking, consulting across all industries. I thought that I could grow as a person, which again, growth is one of my values. Really, when I put opportunity A and opportunity B side by side, I ask myself, A, where can I do the most energizing activities for definitely more than 20%?

I can tell you in all earnest right now, I'm probably at the 70% to 80% mark, which is fantastic. I've never felt more alive in my life. I get to spread a message that A, changed my life and B, I know can change the lives of others, and it's not limited to four walls. I literally have unlimited potential, unlimited reach and unlimited bandwidth right now. It's just a matter of putting in the work and being gritty and resilient to attack a plan of impact. That was how I made the decision.

[00:23:20] SS: I love that, because it could have sounded had you not given us this context, like it was an impulsive decision, which I know that it was not, that you thought it out and you had built this foundation of understanding about yourself. The message I want for listeners, because they hear me talk often about purpose, it's something that I have preached for years and years and taught for years and years, because like you when it happened for me, everything changed.

I think you and I spoke briefly about and the listeners often hear me talk about my son, Michael, who passed away at the age of 27. He was disabled. I have often said, during that time period when my son was critical, he was critical for four years, in and out of hospitals. I literally was living in hospitals. I would have to leave during the day to go see clients. My husband and I would trade off and we had a woman that helped us through those difficult times, but I would sleep at the hospital and be there days that I wasn't speaking, or working with clients.

It was when I left the hospital to work with clients, the passion became more and more apparent to me, because it was what was keeping me going. I knew at the time and I want this to be very clear for listeners how this passion and purpose will get you through the most difficult times in your life, because I knew had my work and my purpose in the context of that work not been so clear to me, I wouldn't have sustained through those challenging times.

I'm not even sure if I'm articulating this well enough, because it's such a difficult thing to describe, because it can sound superficial. You go off to work and leave your kid in the hospital. I think if I'd had a job boxing groceries or something somewhere, it would have been a very difficult thing for me to do. When you're going through those types of adversities, you keep working, one, because you don't think they're going to last as long as they do and many people can attest to that. Also, I mean, you have things that are real concrete things, like my husband and I both being sole entrepreneurs and you need to keep the insurance and you need to keep things going. If you're working for an employer, I mean, you can't be gone for months at a time.

I want to hear what your thoughts are around that, in the context of adversity. If you've had a similar experience with your clients as I've just described, where that clarity of purpose keeps the passion burning, even in the most traumatic points of life.

[00:25:50] PE: Absolutely. Sharon, if I could just go back to and thank you for sharing what you just shared. For one, I'm sorry for your loss. Two, I also hear and feel and have tremendous empathy for the experience you went through and how you said that you tapped into what you do, because of why you do it at such a moment of tragedy. If I could just add a little bit of context to that and connect the dots of what you said with some experiences I've been through.

This is just a mindset anchor that people always – because we've talked more about the positive side of purpose and how altruistic and ambitious and it's oftentimes, it's cast in a very positive light. I want to say that one of the bigger transformations that personally I have seen for myself and for others of finding your purpose, is it will keep you on the treadmill of life, especially on the days you want to get off.

That's what purpose does. Purpose, yes, I'd love to say that there's rainbows every day, but that would be incorrect. The reality is that adversity is inevitable and through tragedies, or circumstances, or hurdles, or obstacles that you and I and everybody listening to this goes through in life, adversity is a test. With purpose, gives you the callous on your skin toward is that they are temporary tests. Ultimately, you need to understand why you are going to choose to show up with grit and with resilience and with adaptability and with agility. Ultimately, have the most courage when fear and risk are highest. That to me is all tied to purpose, because you need to understand why you want to get through something and that is what it can be.

I also want to go back to one thing you said, Sharon, where you mentioned an example of working in a grocery store. That's a great example. I'll share that one of my clients who is a hospital, we were meeting with a variety of leaders in different departments. Then it got down to the frontlines. We were having conversations and listening to essentially, doing some culture

and leadership and systems work. I will tell you, there was somebody that I'll keep her name anonymous, but she was in the janitorial services department.

After a conversation with her, I left knowing that purpose is not exclusive to the higher ranks of an organization. It literally can be felt by anybody. Her purpose was to create an environment where lives could be saved. In other words, the cleanliness and the health of the rooms where patients are cared for, if she doesn't do her part, the doctors and the surgeons cannot do their part.

I also want to debunk the myth that purpose is for the higher order. I certainly think anybody can feel it. I will tell you, going back to your question, when has adversity hit a client and when has purpose gotten them through. I believe that purpose and trust are interlinked. If purpose is inspiration that gets us to take the first step, so finding your why, it's certainly extremely inspirational. What is going to get you through the storm is creating a culture of trust. Those are the examples, the consulting, the training, the coaching work that I do, yes, it is about finding your why and then aligning the individual why, to the team why, to the organizational why and then how do you live and lead through behaviors with your why, and then how do you amplify it to others so they live their why, but then what? That's going to get you through the blue skies and the clear days.

What I have seen is that when disruption happens, when there are consumer shifts, when there are technology shifts, right now everybody is freaking out on this automation thing and 40% of jobs in some of the companies that I work for will be gone within two years. That harsh reality, if you stay focused on what you do and blocking and tackling and keeping your head down and just executing and staying in your lane, that fear and that ambiguity and the risk, it can overwhelm you, versus understand why you do what you do, create more value to your organization through that purpose and perhaps, there is greater opportunity for you to have purpose outside of the organization. I just give an example of I think disruption just creates opportunity for positive change, if you have the right mindset.

[00:30:50] SS: Well, I want to go back to that notion of mindset for a minute, because I totally agree with you about purpose not being something that is only for the higher order. When I alluded to boxing groceries; in my context, that would not have worked for me, because that's not my purpose. I think to your point, anyone at any level, in any environment and any job description can certainly find their purpose. We know this, because we see it in third-world countries where people have very little and would have what we might consider menial, or less than ideal jobs here in the United States. Yet, they're very passionate and purposeful about how they live their lives and how they contribute.

What comes up for me on behalf of the listeners then, because I also know from being a consultant and a coach and working 30 years in the field that some individuals who are in maybe entry-level positions, I'll use that as an example, do not get the opportunities, or have access to people like you and I, or to seminars, or workshops, or whatever we want to call it, to really do the deep work that you were allowed to do with that first retreat, where you discovered your why.

What might you offer someone out there who may be listening who says, "Wow, I'm not really clear on my purpose. I just get up every day and go to work and do my best to put food on the table." How might they go about that process?

[00:32:14] PE: Yeah, that's a great question. Frankly, one of the things that inspired me when I say that I've dedicated the rest of my life to share the gift of purpose with others, one of the first things that I did after finding my why was providing wide discoveries for each and every member of my team. Then, eventually as that word started to spread, the HR department caught wind of it and then approached me and said, "Hey, what do you think of coaching this, through some of the onboarding that we have in our organization?"

Literally in my department, it was a two-week onboarding process. The second Friday afternoon off, go to my house, personal why discovery. In four hours, I felt closer to somebody, versus having known them for four years. That was the power of that. Now relative to the audience and what you can do, understanding that resources sometimes can be limited, but I

would say this, there is a significant purpose movement going on throughout the world and it takes on a variety of forms. Relative to finding your why as an example and this is certainly not a plug, this is only using it as one of thousands of examples around the world.

Literally 30 days from now, I'm going to be speaking at USC with their business school and providing an opportunity for students and young alumni to find their why in the form of a workshop. These workshops exist in many places in the world. I think it's about doing the research and starting to follow, whether through web channel, social channels, digital channels, where those opportunities are out there.

Beyond that, there is a little bit of and sometimes the "self-help" stuff gets a bad rap. I firmly believe that personal development is something that can change your life. Reading to me is one of the bigger elements of finding your purpose and not only reading the books tied to purpose, which we can put some in the show notes and share those out with the world, but also, is put yourself in situations where you can be inspired every day and here's a specific behavior of that. I think that TED Talks are one of the most powerful platforms of inspiration in the world. I literally listen to one TED Talk every single day.

[00:34:36] SS: So do I. Yeah.

[00:34:37] PE: The reason is I'm inspired that they are inspired. It's not even about what the person is talking about. I assume if it has a lot of views, then it's probably phenomenal and it's going to add value and therefore, it's a worthwhile investment of 20 minutes of my time. I could tell that their purpose is tied to what they're speaking about. You can feel it. You can sense it.

I think embedding daily practices, such as watching a TED Talk, embedding, reading into each and every morning, embedding journaling into your life, so that you can be more present, which will connect to your purpose. Specifically, here's what I journal; every day there are two elements; one is and this is more common, the second one will be less. The first one is gratitude. They say, the science shows as you know, Sharon, that it is impossible to have many of the negative emotions in life at a moment and a time where you are feeling gratitude.

While so many people have anxiety and stress and they're in the rat race and all of these other things, gratitude can be the secret sauce and the medicine that gets you to escape and be present in a positive place. Ask yourself, what's right versus what's wrong? Now the second piece and this is going back to what my coach shared with me. I started to journal what am I excited about today. Excitement.

Here is my key. I have a rule. It's a self-created rule, but it ensures that I will live a life that makes me feel alive, through the power of excitement. My rule is I don't force it. If this morning, I sat down and I put pen to paper and I said what is exciting me about today. If I don't have an answer, I will not make one up. I will leave it blank and it hurts. It makes me feel like life is better than this, so what am I going to do about it? How can I play offense to change the landscape in the next day? My rule is I can leave it blank once, but I will never go two days in a row without journaling what excites me.

If today being Tuesday, nothing was put down, tomorrow my rule is if nothing jumps to mind, I will not get out of the seat until I put something on my calendar that same day that will excite me. I will never. Yeah, I'll never go back-to-back days without excitement. That's where the juice, that's where the passion, that's where feeling alive comes from, but I had to create a journaling process to make it super intentional, so I can have clarity and attack with intention. It all goes back to my feeling of purpose and wanting to be alive.

[00:37:17] SS: I want to go back. I love that. I mean, these are really practical things that listeners can gravitate to if they don't know where to begin. I'm with you. I listen to a podcast, or a TED Talk every single day. Not only do I feel that it helps my growth and my knowledge, but it does keep me inspired and hopeful, because as we all know, these are challenging times for many. If we pay too much attention to the news, I think it's easy to get dejected and feel like things are not moving forward, when there's just so many amazing things happening.

I want to share one quick thing and see if you've ever done anything like this. This is years and years ago, one of my mentors when I was writing a book, had us do a lifeline. You had

mentioned how you saw at one point, that even when you were on the success track and the treadmill of that with all its stress, you were still doing what you felt you needed to be doing in order to make your dad proud and to be successful. When you looked back over it, you saw that the through-line, as we would say in writing, was that you were always about helping people.

That's when I did the lifeline, I saw that even though I had done it in many different ways, my mission statement was clear, that it was always about helping people realize their highest potential. I did it in just so many different ways. That's the name of the show is the other side of potential. It was always about human potential for me and growth. Have you ever done anything like that, where you literally just mapped out the events in your life and you started to see, "Okay, this 10 years look like this, this five years look like this," but then you start to see the commonality that there's this through-line through all of it?

[00:38:53] PE: Sharon, I don't know if you know this, but I just gave you a big bear hug over the phone. Yes, a million percent to what you just said. The lifeline was literally a part of my why discovery process. When I coach and facilitate this with others, the lifeline is a part of it and essentially, peaks of life go above, the valleys go below. For me, hey, my dad passing is below. Then literally, that barbershop story could be above.

You stay simple and you from birth to present and you start to reflect and you start to discover themes. Those themes are the fuel toward putting language around your values. Yes, a million percent to the lifeline. I would suggest while somebody can certainly do it on their own, I always think the help of a coach, or somebody that has at minimum, been through it once before is a valuable exercise. I would advise that for anybody and everybody out there. It is life reflection. It is one of the keys to understanding who you are and to try to find the bright spots and essentially, scale those for the present and the future based on what you learn about yourself from the past.

[00:40:10] SS: Well, well said. Yes, yes. I think, that's quickly back to the point of what we were saying if someone doesn't have opportunities, to maybe to go to things, just to really take away the value of life reflection and trying to come up and really see what theme is through there. I'm

totally with you that you often do need coach support, because it's too easy to get stuck on the valleys, the negative pieces and not see the learning opportunity there and the opportunity for growth.

I want to now segue in the last bit of time that we have, because you're doing some amazing work. You're very articulate. You're very passionate. You're a key player in the industry. Tell us, now you've gone from success to significance, which I know has success in the context as well, just given who you are, but who's your ideal client? What's the focus now for Purpose Labs? What's next for Paul Epstein?

[00:41:09] PE: Oh, yeah. Thank you. What's next, and this is really hot off the press, in the sense that I birthed and have become founder of Purpose Labs this month here in January of 2020. This is my way of living my why to inspire purpose in others. We created Purpose Labs as a platform that is inspired by meaning, mission and motion. Meaning being the purpose. Mission is that north star that carries you forward. Motion being, how do you activate it? Because purpose can be a hollow thing if you don't bring it to life and set intentional actions, behaviors and decisions that are in alignment with your purpose. That's where the feeling of impact and contribution come about.

Then the end outcome and what I hope for others and why Purpose Labs was created is so that people can shift from a life of success, to a life of success and significance, from a life of self to a life of legacy. Oftentimes, people think of legacy as something that they'll worry about in their elder years and then they try to give back at that point in time. How awesome would it be if you could start to build your legacy today? To have intentional processes around that inspiring fact, that is why Purpose Labs exist is so that people have purpose every day of their life. I'll just say this, my dream and I will say this, a huge mentor and inspiration and we've even done some work together is Simon Sinek. Most people know him for *Start With Why* and other purpose-driven initiatives that he has. I have a very similar dream. I have a dream, and to give the context, I've done the math and it's scary math, but let me just lay this on every single person listening.

If you work over 40 years in your life, which many of us will, and assuming that you will work 40 plus hours a week, you will invest over a 100,000 hours in your life to what you do. Why would you go through that journey without purpose? That is why Purpose Labs exist. My dream is you start hearing more, “Thank God, it's Monday,” versus, “Thank God, it's Friday.” My dream is that people are inspired to go in, they're fulfilled when they go home and they're excited to do it again the next day.

The people that I help, A, individually, I do coaching, B, I work with teams and organizations across Fortune companies across startups, professional sports organizations, I've worked with athletes, non-profits, universities. Really to me, purpose should not be kept in a box. I don't want to be the solution provider of purpose for a vertical in life. I want to do it for anybody and everybody that is willing to meet me at the 50. Meet me at the 50 is my definition of authentic partnership. Whether you are a person looking for purpose, you lead a team that you want to inspire to find their purpose, or you are running an organization that is after your why, not only as a whole, but for each person to be a part of something bigger than themselves through their why, align it to the team's why, align it to the organizational why, that is where the real magic happens and that's why Purpose Labs exists.

[00:44:53] SS: I just so love everything you've said. Because really, when you think about it and I know that's why you and I do the work that we do, there's an opportunity to change the world here. I mean, really and truly, just imagine how the world would be if every one of us were living from that perspective. What comes to mind for me and I know you probably run across this as well in your work, is every now and again, you bump against the cynical and people have good reasons sometimes for being cynical.

I'm thinking of a friend that I had years ago, very close friend, who was always rather put off by my passion and sense of purpose. On more than one occasion said to me, “Not everyone has a purpose, Sharon.” Of course, she's a very, very unhappy person and life hasn't turned out so well. I'm wondering, what you'd say to someone who believes that that not everyone has a purpose?

[00:45:51] PE: Well, and I usually have had encounters and conversations like this. I'll tackle it in two ways; A, how do I handle that in a macro, and then B, how do I handle that individually? In the macro, I would say that there's three buckets of people, those that highly believe in purpose, those that don't and then there's the largest cluster that are in the middle. The way that I would tackle this is to shine a light on the bright spots for those that are living and leading with purpose. It will naturally attract a big part of the population. This is the whole bell curve.

If we're in the stage of early adopters and we're climbing the curve, but it still certainly is not majority, I view that as opportunity. When I hear things like 88% of our workforce is disengaged and relatively few people feel purpose, that could be doom and gloom to one mindset. My mindset is what an amazing opportunity. Shine a light on those bright spots, have the tourists come over to join the partners and the prisoners that are way off on the other side and that's just something that we may never be able to reach, but my hope is that it's a shifting curve.

Now relative to an individual, if I was talking to somebody that had the same reaction to your friend, I would say first and foremost, I don't think purpose is something that you can push on somebody. I think it is certainly something that is a pull. When I say, I found my calling and people look at me like I have a third eye or a second head and I say, "There's not much I can't say in that moment to convince them, I have a calling. All I can do is live my calling."

When they see that, they have three choices; they can join, they can gravitate, they can stay put, or they can push against. I have learned that for me to feel energized and inspired every single day, I need to hang out with the first two clusters of people, because that's how we can build momentum. Whether it ever overtakes a 100% of the population, I don't know many things that do. We can't please a 100% of the people a 100% of the time. Therefore, I'm going to focus on the partners. I'm going to inspire some of the tourists. If there's some prisoners on the other side, then hey, I just chalk it up to I'm going to live my life and hope that I can put a small dent in the mindset of everybody, just by being the flame that people can walk toward.

[00:48:21] SS: I think that's very, very well said. Again, your passion and your purpose comes through so strongly. It's just very exciting. I wish you great success. I know you're going to

impact many, many lives. I know your father is somewhere up in the universe smiling down, just knowing that all his hard work was not for naught, that you're going to impact even more lives than probably he ever could have imagined.

Now what's the easiest way then, Paul, for someone to find out more about Purpose Labs and more about you and how to connect with you if they're interested in coaching, or speaking opportunities?

[00:48:58] PE: Absolutely. My website is paulepsteinspeaks.com. Epstein is E-P-S-T-E-I-N. Paulepsteinspeaks.com. I'm very active on LinkedIn, so I would love to connect on my personal page, on the Purpose Labs page and then across all social media platforms. Starting with my website, all the information is there and would love to form a partnership. My direct contact details are on the website as well. Whether it's a cellphone call or, a text, or an e-mail, everything is at people's fingertips and I'm just ready to inspire purpose in others and I hope that folks are ready to meet 50.

[00:49:36] SS: Well, I know they will be after listening to you. Any last bit of advice for someone out there who's maybe pushing for success and not quite sure how to meld to success and significance as we've talked about them?

[00:49:50] PE: Yeah. I would just say that life is about each and every moment and each and every experience. They mold you and they grow you and they develop you, not just the successes, oftentimes the failures are going to impact us much more, so long as we learn and we grow from it.

Right now if I could share this with everybody, what you heard on this podcast is somebody that has found his calling, that is inspired with purpose and that loves every day of his life. I could not tell you that that would be the case five years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago. The point being, everybody has the potential to grow and to be inspired toward purpose.

I literally needed every single experience, the good, the bad, the ugly. I had to work for great companies. I had to work for other companies. I had great bosses. I had bad bosses. You name it. It is the spectrum of life. Don't get stuck in what your life is today. It is building you to be the person that you are meant to be. If the first mountain of life is about success, chase that second mountain, which is about significance and everything starts to open up for you. Those would be my closing thoughts.

[00:51:18] SS: So perfect. Perfectly stated. Thank you so much, Paul, for your time today. I hope we can do it again.

[00:51:24] PE: Thank you so much, Sharon. It was a blast and appreciate everybody for listening.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:51:29] SS: Listeners, let me just recap a few important things. So much to unpack today. Obviously, Paul's passion for finding and understanding your purpose and your why and with that comes the passion. I think he's really shown us the significant value of finding it and then knowing when to walk away and pivot and not just do it haphazardly, but to really stop and think and be very intentional on how you make that shift.

What enabled him to do that is having a clear sense of his values, his core values, because when we have that, you hear me talk about that a lot, when we have that melded with our purpose, really no matter what happens in life, you can get through. This I can attest to. I think you've certainly heard that in our conversation today.

Then he gave us some very real, concrete tactics; reading of course, TED Talks, podcasts, journaling for gratitude as he gave us the example, and in his case, what you're excited about. Those are some real practical things that you can sit down and start doing immediately. Then always, the life reflection that is the umbrella for all of this and we both talked about the value of a lifeline. If any of you don't have the clarity as we expressed it today, certainly reach out to

either Paul or myself and we can give you a way to do that. Again, doing it on your own, I can tell you is not as impactful as doing it with someone who can hear what's not being said, as well as what is being said to help you gain that clarity.

I know that you've learned a lot today from my conversation with Paul Epstein. I want you to be sure to check him out at Purpose Labs, or paulepsteinspeaks.com. Then I'm going to challenge you, as I always do and certainly you've been inspired by him today, to incorporate at least one of the ideas we talked about into your life, into your business and then to challenge you to continue the process of personal and professional development. Because remember, I always remind you every week that you cannot be big and small at the same time, but the good news is you get to choose and I hope you will choose big.

Until next time, here's to your highest potential.

[OUTRO]

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And if you'd like to reach out to me personally to discover how I can help you uncover what might be holding you back from being a better leader for yourself, your business, and your family, please go to [sharon spano.com](http://sharonspano.com) to schedule a complimentary consultation.

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