



TC Johnstone (00:00)

He gave this acronym and the light bulb went on. just knew, was like, I will use that for the rest of my life. And since then, I've probably taught it a hundred times. You're listening to the Faith and Work podcast, where we explore ways to serve God and others in our daily work to bring life and hope to workplaces and cities.

Ross Chapman (00:21)

Welcome to the Faith and Work podcast. I'm Ross Chapman, the CEO of Denver Institute for Faith and Work and your host for today. And today we're continuing our series that we've been doing all year long called Voices from the Workplace. It's where we explore the stories and experiences of leaders working across different industries. And today we're launching into a new industry. We're talking with a guest from the arts and media industry, and I'm very excited for you to hear from him. It's an incredible conversation.

He's an expert storyteller. He's someone who's spent his entire career using film and media to bring real change by telling stories of impact. And so we're going to ask him, what does it mean to tell a good story? How do you listen for a good story? How do you become a person who can listen for a good story? And then how do you translate that to actually telling it in some sort of media? And really, whether you work in film or media or not, you're going to be encouraged today because you're going to see how God has uniquely positioned people.

in everyday workplaces to transform workplaces and cities and whole communities, but also because of all the technology and tools that we have in our pocket today, we're all creators on a different level. And so you're going to learn something that you can take with you today as well. without any further delay, let me introduce you to our guest, TC Johnstone. TC is an impact documentary film director and producer, and he has produced and directed multiple features and short documentaries.

including In the Dirt and the award-winning film Rising from Ashes. It was executive produced by Oscar-winning actor Forrest Whitaker. That film went on to win 19 film festivals, received US and international distribution, and sparked the creation of the Rising from Ashes Foundation, which continues to support the work of peace



and reconciliation. If you haven't checked it out before, you definitely should, Rising from Ashes. TC is also the founder of

the Gradus 7 Media Group Foundation, which produces films designed to create measurable change in five areas, reconciliation, equipping servant leaders, assisting the poor, caring for the sick, and educating the next generation. TC, welcome to the Faith and Work Podcast. Thanks for joining us today.

TC Johnstone (02:23)

Hey Ross, thanks for having me.

Ross Chapman (02:25)

It's a joy to have you. It's been fun just getting to hang out with you a little bit more frequently over the last few months. And Jeff Shepard really had a fun time learning from you about story and about the arts and filmmaking and how important that is. And so we're so glad to have you on the podcast talking about this in the Voices from the Workplace series. And I thought we'd just dive in with just tell us a little bit more about what is your job? What are you actually doing? What are you creating in the world? What does that look like on a day to day basis?

TC Johnstone (02:55)

Yeah, I'm an impact documentary filmmaker, so it's a little different than just making documentaries. So our goal is to move audiences, to entertain them really well, to inspire them with a good story. Usually we educate them on something that they might not know the specifics about, but ultimately it's to help audience move from viewer to participant, to participate in a larger story.

Ross Chapman (03:18)

Well, I have watched a couple of your films and I would say you've nailed it. And I think figuring out how to go and live after watching one of your impact documentaries is a challenge and it's nice to do it alongside others. Okay, so tell me like, have you always done this? Give us a little bit of your background. Like, how'd you get into



this work and how have you come to see it as kind of a place where you're integrating your faith in your work or do you see it that way? Do you call it ministry? You know, give us some frame of reference from

how you got to where you are.

TC Johnstone (03:49)

Yeah, I was on staff with Young Life up in Steamboat, Colorado, and I met a guy named Ryan, and he wasn't interested in Young Life, but he wanted to make movies, and I had bought a video camera, and the technology had changed to digital, but then he said, hey, help me with my senior project. So I didn't really know what that meant, so I drove to the Tattered Cover in Denver, the bookstore, and bought basically the entire rack of books on filmmaking, and came home, read them all, and.

bluffed my way through that and he said, well, I don't know either, so this all works, because we were good friends. And we helped with the senior projects, but we had to write this script on, that was what we realized, you have to have a script, it's a blueprint for anything, just like building a house. And next thing you know, he pitched this idea, said, why don't we just make it? So the short version is, we spent 28 days, 18 hour days with 130 high school kids and made a feature film that's been shown twice, because it's really awful. So it's been shown the,

We had to show it to everybody because they participated in it and put their blood, sweat, and tears in it. But then the second time was, that was my 40th birthday present he gave me, was to have a whiskey and watch this movie. Everybody else left after about 10 minutes, it was so bad, but we got a good kick out of it. But that's how it got started, is I realized that in that process, film was, the journey was as important as the destination, and then I'm dyslexic, so.

Ross Chapman (05:01)

Gosh, that...



TC Johnstone (05:16)

When we started doing scripted stuff, it was a real challenge. And then I realized that doing interviews and talking with people and observing their life and then using cinematic tools was a great way to tell stories. And so next thing you know, I found myself in this documentary world. And as my friend Sean has said, in the last 25 years, the camera has really been like a backstage pass to the world. And it's taken me to 63 countries and there's tons and tons and tons of stories we've done over the years.

It's a tool for transformation. It's a vehicle that I've been able to use to kind of do something bigger than myself and to be able to share the things I'm seeing with people that may never go there or see that or hear that. It's been fun. I mean, I really love what I get to do.

Ross Chapman (05:58)

Well, that is really cool. And as you're talking, it makes me want that for everybody's work, right? Like to be able to see it as a tool for transformation, to have an impact on people's lives. And you're actually largely telling stories of people who are doing that, some through their work, not exclusively that way, but I just watched a recent film and it was all about somebody's work and how it was just so transformative in a community. And I just think that's an incredible...

opportunity and perspective that you get to have. And I'm curious, if we just think about the arts, you've developed an ability to see something beautiful and to be able to share that with people in a way that maybe they hadn't seen it before or heard it before. And just talk to me a little bit about your thinking behind that and how your faith is informing that, you know, how you're actually creating something, you've got intention behind it. You what have you learned?

through the years doing that and becoming an expert in it, 63 countries, know, telling all these stories. How does that play out in the actual creation of the art?

TC Johnstone (07:04)



I think early on what I realized is that faith has a language to it and more and depending on what area of the country you're in, more, they're better at this inclusive language that, you know, when I became a believer at 18 through young life, I started a relationship with Jesus and then all of a sudden I realized there were all these words that people had that I was like, this is like this internal language that I don't understand. And over the years as a filmmaker and a storyteller, I've learned that

Those words are the same words that everything else has. It's when you have it, somebody says, let me share my testimony. All that is, is a life transformed. And so I got really addicted to that side of it where when people change, when something happens in their life that allowed them to see the world differently and that their behavior and their heart and head connected for the first time, the plug went in the wall and there was power to it and they saw something that made them come alive. That's when the game was on.

Is it, cause you could see it. The difference between film and everything else is, you always use this term, show me, don't tell me, is a great documentary. I mean, we communicate in over 700 different ways with each other, one's verbal. So I can tell a story without anybody telling me something. What I've found is in the faith genre, people like to talk a lot. And it's sometimes,

When we see a story, can tell you, oftentimes they don't ever have to say a thing, because I can just see it in their actions, the way they walk, the way they sit calmly, the way that they communicate. So my job really is just to observe people. And now it's just, you just never stop doing it. It doesn't matter if it's a person with a grocery store. So you can look around his room and a table, and that's kind of where there's something intriguing with people who have a deep connection with their faith. And that's where I...

think I don't wear that as a badge. I'm not a Christian filmmaker, because I would give up basically my market share in a lot of ways. People, they put a context and say, oh, I think now you're gonna tell me what you believe. And I just say, no, I just wanna show you what somebody else, how they're living it out. That's a different context.



Ross Chapman (09:15)

I love that you said that and it makes me think about a couple of things. One is I actually had the experience of being an executive producer on a few short films before I to Denver. One of the things that I said, yeah, you're gonna love this TC. One of the things I said to the writer and the filmmaker, because I was like providing some vision and the budget, that's like executive producer role, apparently.

TC Johnstone (09:39)

Thanks for

Ross Chapman (09:40)

So like they don't really rely on me for any artistic value. And so I was like, yeah, I wonder if we should put like a, like a message at the end, you know, like put something up in the words at the end of the story so that we give people something to think about. And they were both just like horrified. They're like, do that. You know, like that's the, that's the antithesis of what we're trying to create. We're trying to create an opportunity for people to feel like they need to think about it. And there's some unresolved tensions from the story.

And we want them to place themselves in the story and multiple characters potentially and start to think about that. And it was such a huge learning moment for me and I loved it. And we've talked a little bit about that, but it reminds me of Jesus' parables. I just met with the church today and we were talking through how like the creator of the world, the son of God decided to spend like two decades just taking the stuff he made out of nothing and making new stuff with it. And that was like really, really profound.

but he's just, creating with what he has made and he's going out and doing this for 20 years in an obscure place, doing just like work no one knows about. That's like the crazy thought. Well, if you just think about his parables, like over 80 % of them are from the workplace context and it's because he actually lived it out and so much of the parables is exactly what you're talking about. So has that been something that has been like a



Like you've noticed that and so that has informed your storytelling or is that something that you've noticed just being an observer of humanity?

TC Johnstone (11:15)

I'd say both. think in the last 15 years I've learned, you know, podcasts and spending time in community and going to conferences and all that stuff. It's great. It's really helpful in that. But the gold mine that's sitting next to me every morning is this book and the scripture. If I can take the time to stop my brain from moving so fast and the to-dos and everything else and just be still and calm in the scripture and to visualize and to see what he's saying.

And then all of a sudden I started seeing the story is all there, the principles are written in scripture. And it probably took me 15 years of learning the craft of storytelling and the art of filmmaking. And then I started realizing that I needed to have my personal philosophy on it and where was I getting this stuff from? then as we started...

building those frameworks as far as people would hear us say something or do something and they didn't know where we were getting it from. And then they asked me to start teaching it, which is kind of why we started Doc Film School. Another thing is this filmmakers were wondering where are the principles behind this? And ironically, people weren't been opposed to scripture. They just don't want to be told that's what they have to believe. And so they don't mind that, you a lot of people that we hang out with in, you know, the markets that we run in, you know, we've had films on Netflix, we've had all that stuff, but

Ross Chapman (12:26)

Mm-hmm.

TC Johnstone (12:37)

At the same time, I kind of run in the middle ground and people don't care that I'm a Christian. They're just going, just don't tell me that's what I have to think. And if my life is lived out in a way that is reflective of



something they want, they'll ask. And most of the time they know they want to have the conversation. So it's not very disruptive. And I love those scriptures where it says, know, Proverbs is where I, I'd really enjoy those. Cause it was very simple.

whether it's leadership or hard work or any of those things where it just says, if you do this, I'll do this. Don't go build your barns and then plant your fields. It's like simple things like that. It's like, go plant some stuff and then you can figure out where to put it. But some of that story stuff, you can just apply that to, hear people have these big dreams and they talk a lot, but they don't do anything. That they talk about their work or they talk about their business being faith-based. like, no, just go, I know you're already doing it, because I've seen it. Just don't talk about it. You don't have to talk about it.

Wait till somebody asks you to do a podcast.

Ross Chapman (13:37)

Well, actually, know, Peter writes and he says, hey, always always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you profess, which assumes somebody is asking you a question. And I think that's what you're suggesting here. But it's also based on how well you're telling the story and your commitment to doing it with excellence and competency and honesty and just the sincerity of saying, I want to tell the story as well as it can be told.

And I think that applies to all of our kinds of work. Like if we're known as like the most competent workers and the ones who are trying to do it most excellently and most curiously, that kind of gives people the interest to go, Hey, why are you doing it this way? Or tell me more about your perspective on this. So I love that you have that mentality. Take us like into something like, let's just say I'm, wanting to kind of get into storytelling or art.

Like what are a couple principles that you as a seasoned storyteller who's really trying hard to integrate faith in work might suggest for a Christian in this industry to think about as they're doing the work?

TC Johnstone (14:49)



Yeah, there would probably be three things. The first one is learning to be curious. And a lot of that is just self-awareness. It's, you can observe some great things if you just put your phone down and just start watching people. So a lot of the times for me, everybody laughs when they'll say, what time do you need to be at the airport? And I'm like, I don't know. It's several hours before my plane flight. Cause I love watching people. Cause it's a place where there's stress.

and a destination and nobody goes to the airport without purpose. So they're gonna be in this space where they're in a transition. So just watch people, the way they walk, the way they have their dog, what they want you to think, how they dress. It's a great place to observe people, but that can springboard anywhere. Go to lunch with people and just watch how they eat lunch. Are they on their phone? Are they talking with people? Do they go observe the birds? You can see these things in

I think the first one is just to learn to be curious and to be able to start looking and watching people. And a lot of that's self-awareness, but then also taking the time to just not be distracted. The second thing I would say is to learn to ask great questions. And some of that's vulnerability, is not having the answers to things. Just you start with curiosity and then I ask people how to do everything. I'll see somebody that, I saw somebody recently, was a.

African American gal and she had these shoes, but they were laced up really. And I said, that's amazing. Where'd you learn how to do that? And she said, Instagram. And she told me the whole story about it. And I said, are you have a lot of shoes? And she started, that led to this whole why she was doing where she was going and this whole thing. But it's just finding that opening question. And I think the third thing is notice the small things. As people are trying to communicate with you, people wanna be known. And it's a gift when we allow,

when we give people the gift of listening. And so that's the third one is just listening to people and not interrupting or having to tell them something that gives you relevance to their story. Just listen. Those three things go miles, but most people are, I've got 10 minutes to talk with you, give them 25. Ask them a question



about, you how was their Christmas? Those things, I mean, those can be done in the workplace. They can be done on them anywhere.

Ross Chapman (17:16)

Hi, I'm Ross Chapman, CEO at Denver Institute for Faith and Work. We want to see a future where every person's work brings hope and life to their city, which is a contrast with society's views of work. And for now, it's often a contrast with the views of work we hear at church. That's why I'm excited to share with you that we are currently in the midst of our FOR campaign. That's the F-O-R campaign, meaning this is a vision for the future of work, workers, church, and cities.

Like you, we've noticed a lack of accessible, biblical grounded, and excellent vocational discipleship opportunities. This gap is causing many to have an anemic or a lifeless vision of their work. Vocational discipleship can come from many places in your life, such as this podcast. And as we seek to expand those opportunities with high quality content over the next five years, our aim is to help 100,000 people recognize and affirm their daily work is central to joining God in his vision and work to make all things new.

If you've been encouraged and disciplined by thoughtful conversations that you hear on the Faith and Work podcast, or if your life has been shaped by Denver Institute in some way, I encourage you to help advance this mission through the way you work and by giving. Will you consider a one-time quarterly or monthly gift to support this work? If so, visit the give page at denverinstitute.org to get started.

Well, I love that advice and I'm thinking, okay, so you said be curious requires self-awareness. Asking good questions requires humility. There's like an external result from the internal work. Like talk to me more about that. Talk to me more about what does it look like to become more self-aware and more humble and how has that then translated to what you're just being a good observer of people and wanting to engage in their story.

Did you have to grow in that? Did you have to grow in self-awareness? How did that happen?



TC Johnstone (19:12)

Yeah, mean, the self-awareness part is how am I conducting myself in a place where I'm approachable. In my job, because we deal with a lot of things in foreign languages, it's all in the eyes and how you engage with someone. Just recently, we were in Italy a couple weeks ago for vacation, and I had this entire conversation with this guy at this vineyard, and we never said a word to each other. He knew just that I cared in a way I carried myself, and I didn't.

you know, self posture, like all those things. Like I was aware that it was his day off and we were asking him to own up, to open this vineyard up, you know, but I've done that in grass huts in Africa. It doesn't matter. You can feel it. You can feel that tension of anxiety of it's letting go of control and being okay that you're okay. And knowing that there's somebody in control of your life. It's allowing someone else to have authority.

I'm not under my own authority. I'm under someone else's authority. And I've surrendered that. So just trust it. It's like a little daily little thing I can do just to say, you know what, I'm gonna surrender a little bit right here. I'm probably not answering your question, but.

Ross Chapman (20:25)

No, that's good. mean, just the, you know, internal working of what does it mean to become self-aware, to recognize who we are before God? How does that then translate to the questions that you're asking people, how you're interacting with them? So before I ask you some more meta questions about art and creation and creativity, translate those three things into how that shows up in your filmmaking.

TC Johnstone (20:49)

Yeah, I mean, the difference between, you know, people talk about narrative and fiction and nonfiction. Those are the two categories. So fiction is something you write and you hire actors and they say the things that you've written on a piece of paper and they have facial expressions and you tell them where to put their feet and where to place their body in a frame. Documentary is no different. It's you're following somebody but you don't have control over them.

I'm just taking a risk that what they're gonna do in their daily life, and I have some variables of time, space, I can calculate what's gonna happen, but ultimately I don't know whether they're gonna laugh or cry or what's gonna happen or they're gonna say something that's interesting. And kind of going back to what you're saying is that we call them the internal versus external conflicts as we teach this stuff. You have external conflicts and most, what we found is a lot of times,

young storytellers will tell external conflict stories. You'll see it like a men's Bible study. It's like, how are you doing? Well, my aunt's got cancer. That has nothing to do with you. That's an external conflict. We got in a car wreck. It's when somebody says, ~ I've really wanted to slow down drinking. And it is really hard at night because I get home and I'm tired and that's a great place for me to relax and I don't wanna do that. Or I haven't mastered the morning.

is I really have a hard time getting out of bed and spending time with Jesus where I know that's the start of my day. Those are internal conflicts. Like those are interesting, to be an interesting person in the room is to share internal conflicts. People know you're not hiding.

Ross Chapman (22:30)

That's Wow, that's good. See, I love that.

TC Johnstone (22:33)

So we're watching, that's all I do all day long, is watch that stuff. And so when I interview somebody, how are they answering questions? And I'm like, this guy's never gonna break. And most of the time you start to see that people that hide behind external conflicts, they're scared or they're insecure in who they are. And I wanna have empathy for that, because not everyone is at a place where they have those tools to be able, so now I've got an opportunity to encourage them and we'll talk about some of that in a minute if you want, but.



That's where my faith in my work really started to hit, is that I started to get these tools by learning how to tell stories that allowed me to care for people and ultimately to love people in a genuine way, whether it was with words or my actions where I could start to, and so then it became, filmmaking became a lifestyle, it was no longer just a job.

Ross Chapman (23:26)

I can totally hear that exactly playing out for you. And I think that's incredible. I mean, I like fiction, but I love what you said about nonfiction. It's being a good observer, not controlling what's going to happen and seeing kind of leaving a room for what has got going in this person's life that that maybe would be a great story for others to know. Like, a cool thing. And wow. Well, we're going to give people an acronym to help.

them get into other people's stories, share their story, really listen for story. But before we do that, just do you have any commentary, just being in the doing this work for a while now, like what's really, really good about the art industry right now and what's really challenging? Just one thing each, what comes to mind.

TC Johnstone (24:11)

One thing that's really good and one thing that's really challenging. What's really good right now is that the tools have gotten so incredible. Anybody can create. And the roadblock is when they have to face the mirror. Whether it's a podcast, whether it's Instagram, whether it's photography, mean an iPhone is, I the first camera I ever had, my iPhone's 10 times better than that. So anybody can create. It's just learning to tell a story.

That was the first one. And then what was it that one was about?

Ross Chapman (24:42)

Yeah, what's biggest challenge? Like, what do you think is really hard right now in filmmaking or arts?

TC Johnstone (24:49)



~ It's probably two things. One is courage to say something that takes some bravery to put things out there that follow your conviction. And then the second thing is just not being overwhelmed. There's so many outlets, whether it's filmmaking, photography, Instagram, I mean, all the way down to future films. It's like, where do I even start? How do I try to do everything and do nothing very well?

what we kind of teach folks is simplify things down. Learn to tell a really good story in the practical ways is, you there's a thing that's on this board in our office and it says, you this happened, therefore this happened, but then this happened. And you know, you can have somebody talking about where they went to go get, up their car with gas and you'll listen to that story all day long because they know how to paint the picture. So.

My biggest thing I even tell feature filmmakers is that, I mean, had somebody just recently just tell me about this massive film. I was like, back it down. Like that one's gonna take years. So what's the one you can do this year that you can, know, so set a timeline or start practicing. You know, instead of just talking a lot, learn to tell a good story and then self-evaluate, you know, whether, and the first one is learning to tell your own story, which is the whole other podcast, but.

Most people really aren't good at telling their own story. Then you ask, what's your story? And I hear it nine out of 10 times. Well, what do you want? And then they'll kind of go down this track and it's just complete boredom. And I'm like, I know that's not true because I know the person who wrote, I know your author.

Ross Chapman (26:32)

Yes.

TC Johnstone (26:33)

so the

skill hadn't been developed.



Ross Chapman (26:36)

Yeah, I think you're right. There's an author and there's a narrator. And if you put yourself in the narrator shoes, you know, how do you tell that story? think, I think that's really important. There's like a good story, but there's a good story that's told really poorly that you won't listen to. So, well, that's really, that's helpful. Hey, just curious question. How are you thinking about the influence of AI in arts? Is there anything that makes you excited? I think the norm response seems to be like, this is bad.

is gonna steal our stuff and do things with it that we can't control and blah blah blah blah. Like what's your take?

TC Johnstone (27:10)

I love it. I think it's the coolest thing that's ever happened. You have to have a creative idea. AI is a tool in many tools that help you refine it and get there. It can help you get there, especially being dyslexic. mean, with filmmaking, have to, it's the elephant in the room nobody will talk about. You have to be a good writer. Because it's the first place that somebody experiences what you're trying to say. Most filmmakers,

Ross Chapman (27:14)

Tell us why.

TC Johnstone (27:37)

They have this big aha thing in their head, but they can't explain it with words. They can't put it on paper and they get stuck and discouraged and feel lonely. And it's an awful space and AI has really helped with that. But now it's taken a bunch of jobs, which is very interesting as far as, you know, poster designers or, you know, I just had a interview that I did and there was a bunch of birds in the background. And I just talked to my sound guy and I said, Hey, can we shoot this in here? And he goes, you absolutely can.

and I'd send it off and they remove all the birds. So the ramifications as a filmmaker, I could tell you 50 things like that that are just, it's wonderful. It's a great time to be a creative.



Ross Chapman (28:19)

Well, I'm glad you said that. And I think that's exactly what we said earlier in the conversation was, you know, this is a tool for transformation. And I think as the world interacts with artificial intelligence, that's one thing that we would want people to think about is how is this a tool for the transformation that God wants to see in people's lives and in his world. that's all technology should be,

TC Johnstone (28:39)

Well, I'm curious from your end. mean, you work with businesses across the board. What are you feeling and what are you seeing?

Ross Chapman (28:47)

Well, I see a lot of anxiety around the uncertainty of what it will be in the next few years. And I think there's a lot of ~ excitement and there's also just a lot of fear. We actually had somebody asked me at an event, came up and said, just, it wasn't an ask, it was more an observation. It was just, hey, I'm not really sure my employer is going to recognize my humanity as valuable. And that was a scary, scary statement.

~ All the way to you know, I can do a better job in my work because I have more powerful tools and that's gonna allow us to create better products and services It's gonna allow us to take care of our employees better. So it's just like across the board differences But yeah, it's a it's a moment We're all kind of sort of our breath and waiting to see what is this actually gonna look like? But I'm grateful for your perspective on how it's impacting the arts is just a tool It's a great it's a really powerful tool allows all of us

who are kind of a made in the image of the creator to be more creative. I think that's very cool. Just like everything, all tools can be put to use for the wrong things. that's also, it's a powerful tool for creativity. It's a powerful tool for de-creation in some ways. And so Christian should lead the way in demonstrating a way to make it good and not go wrong. So we'll see how it plays out. Hey, before I let you go, I really want you to share



this acronym that I heard you share at a gathering we had you at. And I just thought it was a really profound way to think about how do I enter into people's stories? How do I listen for stories? How do I tell stories, even my own? So if you would, would you share that real quickly just with us? Because I think it's something people can take into their workplace.

TC Johnstone (30:29)

Sure. This is a tool. So years ago I was, I did a film on a guy named Rick Warren and we were sitting in this parking garage and he gave this acronym and the light bulb went on. I just knew I was like that. I will use that for the rest of my life. And since then I've probably taught it a hundred times. So it's speak S P E A K and it's he, he was an acronym junkie still is. And, ~ it kind of gave this framework for how to engage with people. So

S stands for story and it's a set of questions and actions to take. So S is for story. So whenever I meet somebody, I'll just ask them what's their story. And nine out 10 times, they won't know how to answer it. They'll say what part, and I just don't say anything. I just let them, but they will tell you something. Maybe one out of 20, they just won't tell you anything and that's fine too. But now I've gotten to a place where I'm like, well, I'm gonna get it. It's like catching a fish. I'm here, I'm gonna get it.

And it's fun. ~ But people will tell you anything. I remember sitting at airport in LA once and this lady sat down next to me and I could tell she was distressed. And I said, hi, how are you? She said, I'm fine. And I said, what's your story? And right out of the gate, she said, my husband's pulling up. I confessed to him that I had an affair on this business trip. And he said he forgives me, but I don't know what he's gonna do when he gets out of the car. Wow.

That was first, I just asked her, and I, so now I'm in it, and I just said to her, do you love him? And she said, I feel like I ruined my life, and it was the biggest mistake I ever made. And I just went for it. I mean, I just was like, hey, she'll never see me again, we're at the LAX airport, and I just said, do you know you're loved and you're a treasure? I said, regardless of what happens here, was like, there's, your creator loves you more than you will ever know, and I said.

And she said, actually, my husband and I are Christians. And he walked up, he got out of the car, and she walked up, and I'm still standing there, or I'm sitting on this bench. And he just starts crying, they start crying, and she turns to me, and she kind of just gave me this look, like I have hope. And I was like, well, I'm gonna take another chance here, and I just walked up to him, and I just said, you're gonna make it. And he just started bawling.

And I just walked away, but you don't know. So the first one is story is just ask people what their stories. That's not gonna happen every time, but when they do tell you their story, they're telling you basically exposition. They're telling you things about their life that are important to them, where they came from, where they grew up, their siblings, are they married, do they have kids? You have all this context to what their life looks like. Then the second thing is asking them what their passion is, that's P. And most people are never asked what they really care about.

and just taking the time to listen. Now I have their story, I have a bunch of facts about their life, I know what they really care about, which is a vulnerable space. The third part is just, I now have this arsenal of things that I can encourage them with. Whether they say, I just love going to my kids' soccer games. Well, I can easily just tell them, you know, it's really great that you really enjoy spending time with your kids and you've made that a priority. Have you thought much about how you do that or is that, where did that come from? Where'd you learn how to do that?

you just get really good at asking those things. And then A is assistance, is usually when I have all this backlog of information, my mind, because we're built with a purpose and our purpose, whether we know it or not, instinctively most people who care about other people will wanna serve someone else. So it's saying deliberately, hey, I heard you talk about that you're trying to find somebody to.

do social media for you. It could be anything. It could be how to fix your bumper from a car wreck. It could be anything. say, hey, I know this guy that lives in your town that ~ has the best body shop in the United States. And can I connect to you guys? Or you just simply ask them, hey, what do you need help with right now?



Nobody gets asked that. And it's such a simple question. And then K is knowledge. And that's where we're built to be generous. And so you're giving permission to someone else to be generous to you. So it's saying,

Who do you know or what do you know that I need to know? That's the principle. But what you put that into a simple way of asking them, hey, I was trying to figure out how to buy my wife and I were buying two new toy. We were buying two new trucks and we both buying toyotas. I didn't know to buy a Tundra or a Tacoma. And I said to her, I met this guy on a plane. He worked for Toyota. And I said, Toyota or Tundra? And we started. He goes, man, well, if you're doing this and he broke the whole thing down and.

He gave me the facts I need. We became friends. I still call him probably once every two years and he's still inviting me to come down to Toyota to test drive these cars with him. But he was so excited to give me knowledge and that's Kay. So it's story, passion, encouragement to that person, asking where they need to be help, where they need help, assistance, and then Kay is knowledge. What do they know or who do they know that they can give to me? Now here's the key to the whole thing.

Most people won't do it because of the first question. They don't know how to engage a conversation. So it can be as simple as, and I've just learned, people will tell you anything if you just ask some stupid question. I mean, I'll get to the airport and I'll say, where are you going? They'll tell you. They don't care. I'll say, I really like those shoes. Where did you get them? And then they'll say, I got them at Foot Locker. Cool, what's your story? They'll just.

start telling you stuff. People want to be heard. They're not known anymore. So it's fun to do with your employees at a business or, you but it does take time. I will tell you this. If you start this progress, make sure you, my wife will tell me, like if we're sitting there talking to somebody, she's like, don't do it. Don't do it. Cause she knows the second you open somebody up and you, you've asked to be in that situation, it, you can be in it for a little bit.

Ross Chapman (36:39)



You're interruptible. That's awesome. Totally. No, TC, thanks for sharing that. I think it's really profound. I think it can be applied to our workplaces. I actually want it to be because we just did this study with Barna and found out 50 % of workers feel isolated and alone in their work. Really? Yeah, 50%, which matches the national number as well. So people are just taking that loneliness that they're experiencing and bringing it right into their workplace. Like, what if Christians were known for speak?

And they became workers who did speak whenever they got the chance. know, maybe, yeah, you're right. People need it. People need to be heard. They want to be listened to. And that's exactly what God offers us. You know, he just wants, he wants us to share. asks us questions. You know, what are you, what are you searching for? Do you want to be healed? These questions that are open-ended and man, I just appreciate the way you're going about your work, TC. Thanks for being on the podcast today. I'm going to leave you with the last encouraging word. You know, what would you say?

to the church about the arts? What would you say to the church in the arts? Anything that would just be, hey, here's where you're seeing good stuff. How would you encourage them?

TC Johnstone (37:47)

Think outside the box. The world is changing, the church is changing, business is changing, and we need each other. And the best thing we can do is we need community around something bigger than ourselves. And we don't have to believe the same thing, but we don't have to walk, we don't have to see eye eye to walk hand in hand on the things that matter. And nine out of 10 times, those things are things that we all would agree on. And I think we need some conversations of civility. I'm learning that when I just listen to somebody,

the amount of conflict that goes away. And just, I just was about to buy this domain yesterday for this documentary I came up with. It's like the lost art of disagreement or being offended. And I'm like, I know who I am, but I can just fire it off. I'm okay. So.

Ross Chapman (38:36)



That's right. Well, I appreciate that TC. It's been great to have you on the podcast. Thanks so much.

TC Johnstone (38:42)

Yeah, hey Ross, one thing I just wanna say, ~ one of the pieces of this podcast or what you all do in your work is it's so unique, because there's just not many spaces to be able to figure out this dialogue. And the workplace is, it's tricky to navigate, and I just really appreciate the work that you all do.

Ross Chapman (39:05)

Thanks for saying that, man. Appreciate it. Well, if you're like me, you're leaving this conversation with TC thinking about this acronym that he just left us with, Speak. So I just want to challenge you to maybe try it this week with a coworker. Maybe it's a customer, somebody who you've got a chance to just ask them what their story is and then jump into their passions to encourage them, to find out ways you can assist them, to learn what knowledge they have that might serve you well, who they know or what they know.

What a cool way to just dive into the stories that God has put around us. So that is my challenge for you today. That's one way you can certainly integrate your faith and your work. And of course, it's clear that people need this kind of interaction from their coworkers. So you could do that today. And so if this conversation sparked something for you, we encourage you to share it with a friend. We'd love for more people to listen in and be encouraged in this way by what TC has said.

And then a couple other tools that in addition to what you can find on our website, denverinstitute.org, two I want to make a special point about, ways to just continue learning. How do I just take what I believe to be so true and essential in my life into my everyday work? First is to join us at Women, and Calling. It's our annual event. It's on November 7th, which is a Friday. It is our largest event of the year, 22 host sites and a location right here in Denver as well.

Love for you to jump in and be a part of one of those gatherings and learn from one another. And then we've also relaunched our fellowship. Our 5280 fellowship has gone from a nine month program to a five month



program from \$3,000 cost to a \$1,200 cost. And that is all in an effort to make it more accessible. So if you are right here in Denver, we love to have you participate, even if you're in Boulder or Fort Collins or Colorado Springs, we'll work with you on figuring that out.

And then if you are in a different city listening in, just check and see if your city has an Institute for Faith and Work or an organization like it, because they may have a similar program and we'd love to help you connect with them.

TC Johnstone (41:05)

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