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Welcome to media masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game today I'm joined down the line from Dubai by Scott Armstrong, former editor in chief of Arabian Business Magazine, and now founder and chief executive of mentl, a new mental health content platform. A journalist editor and leading strategic communications consultant for more than 30 years, Scott is on a mission to tackle head-on the stigma of workplace mental health after a career leading digital and print titles. In his former role at Arabian Business, it became the only mainstream media title to feature mental health on its homepage and was the first title in the middle east to make a successful transition to a digital paywall. Previously, Scott has worked in senior positions on The National in Abu Dhabi, the Times of Oman and as editorial director of global communications giant, Hill & Knowlton, and was even the business editor at the Nassau Guardian in The Bahamas. Scott, thank you for joining me.

Ah, very welcome to be here. Thank you for asking me to be on

It's a pleasure. We should let our listeners know that we're very old friends. Have we known each other for 30 years?

It depends where the comma comes in that statement there because yes, we are very old, and we are friends, but we've also been friends for a long time.

We have! Tell us, you've obviously had an incredible journey. Did you always want to be a journalist? Walk our listeners through your career, what were the first steps that you took along the way?

I've been a journalist since I was about 16. In fact, journalism was kind of my saviour when I was a kid I had a family breakdown. Wasn't the best of childhoods towards

the end of my teenage years, and journalism came knocking at 16 years old and really kind of put me on the path. I started as a 16-year-old Cub reporter on a weekly paper called the Newark Advertiser. I won't tell you what Newark is an anagram of, but Jasper Carrot once famously said that on stage and got drummed out of town - you can look that one up for yourself! I started on a weekly paper just as a Cub reporter, 16 on the princely sum of £5,000 a year, and I still swear I had more money back then than I do these days.

You probably did! We all did, didn't we? My first hourly rate was £1.59 an hour for working at a card shop. And I always had money in my pocket in the nightclub, whereas now I don't, well now I don't go nightclubbing frankly. So was it always non-negotiable that you were going to be a journalist?

Yes, kind of. There were only ever two things I ever really fancied and one was boringly a lawyer, and I'm not quite sure why the world of the legal profession was tempting. But the other one was a journalist and then two things sort of confirmed my view - a friend of my fathers was a lawyer and he showed me all the boxes that you had to do, all the case law and all that lawyers have to learn. And I looked at that and went "oof! That seems a lot. I'm not sure I can be bothered to do that." And then I went to a careers afternoon at my old school and the one that impressed me the most was the journalist that didn't turn up because he was hungover. I was like, "hmm that might be the career for me!" So yes, English was the only thing I was really good at. I got a U in geography of all things. So yes, English was always the only thing I was really any good at. So I think journalism was probably the best place for me, particularly when I was starting out, for sure.

And how ambitious were you at the beginning? Did you always want to be an editor? Did you want to sort of cut your craft in journalism? What were the bits about being a journalist that you liked? You mentioned writing there, but is it breaking stories? Is it sort of getting drunk with the sources and doing the investigation? There are so many facets to journalism. What were the bits that sort of resonated with you?

Well, that certainly works. Imagine, like, as a relative child actually, as a 16-year-old, it took me a while to kind of find my feet. So to start with, it wa just keep the job, learn the craft, get over the inhibitions that particularly young guys have, and try to go up to people and talk to politicians and that sort of thing. So in the early days, it

was just learning the craft and learning how to actually write a story that's interesting, try and find the intro that will connect with audiences. I learned some really good lessons on that, the first four years at the Newark Advertiser, I had some incredible sub-editors and mentors who really taught me the craft of the story, and then by the time I left, yes, it was definitely the thrill of chasing the front page, getting the front page. There is a degree of vanity seeing your name on the front page of a newspaper albeit a weekly newspaper in a market town. But, yes, it was getting that story, and then as you go down the line, there are things that you find as you mature and you grow up that you kind of enjoy and value more. I think it was connecting with people, sitting down feeling very privileged at times to tell their stories and really trying to connect with what had happened to them. And there were so many interesting stories, so many people, from the funny to the tragic. So, the human side of it and meeting human beings, I never went to university so the job was my education and the people I met along the way were kind of my education and I'm still learning today. So, that's what that thrill was, but yes, getting drunk with sources, particularly as an 18-year-old, of course, I never went to the pub before I was 18. But, that was actually important making time out, getting to know people, making real contacts and then genuinely getting better stories because you established trust with them. And if trust came in the form of a few pints then all the better,

In these early years, where did you see your career going? Some reporters want to specialize in a beat like you could have become a transport correspondent. Did you want to be an editor or did you like being a generalist or did you not have a plan? A lot of people on this podcast have said, "oh, looking back, it looks like my career is just like one progression from one great thing to the other, but it's just been chaos and I've always been very opportunistic". How's yours gone?

Yes, that's pretty close to it, to be honest with you. I couldn't confess to having any major plan in life. I think I just winged it most of the time suffering from imposter syndrome and waiting to be found out! As we got on, I really did enjoy writing the stories and getting better at that, and eventually an editor, I think it was a guy called Roger Burrell actually in the Newcastle Evening Chronicle kind of pushed me down into the business world. So I spent a long time, I spent big chunks as a business journalist, and I was lucky because it was on the Newcastle Evening Chronicle which was a very vibrant daily newspaper. It wasn't dry or stayed, so you got to have a bit of fun with it. It was a city that had at the time swan hunters, building ships, it had

vicars building tanks. So you would be in tanks driving around, you'd go down and march on parliament on a special train full of Geordie ship workers that wanted to march on parliament, and the trade union put a special train on them that was packed for the special brew on the way down. So, that was a really interesting day as an industrial reporter, watching a hundred absolutely smashed geordie's on the tube in London and the Geordies being the talkative people that they are walking up to people going, "yes, how are you?" and people diving off the tube because you don't talk to each other in London, do you on the tube? So, yes I was lucky that pushed me into the world of business and it was quite a sort of entertaining entrance to the world of business. It wasn't dry or stayed that was for the morning paper. And so business has been kind of where I cut my teeth a lot, and then from there, I went onto the news desk, which is a completely different skill. Management in journalism is an interesting space because no one ever teaches you how to lead people.

What were the fast lessons that you learnt early doors?

You think your mates are going to help you and your mates think you are going to help them. And that's one of the difficulties when you graduate, shall we say, from the reporting floor to then trying to run the reporters. And nobody tells you, nobody teaches you in journalism, how to lead a team or get consent or, inspire your team, shall we say? I think you look at the cultures in a lot of newspapers, if you look at it now in comparison to many other industries, it can be quite toxic. And that's because we got a lot of insecure leaders and I know I've been one of them on my journey because we were just never taught how to do these things. We were never taught how to get the best out of teams and there are some lucky people that can just do it by instinct, but most of us are there by the seat of our pants. We've already got imposter syndrome and then you are put into a position of authority. And the first thing you're trying to do is actually learn how to pull a newspaper together, get the front page, survive the editorial conference where you have to sit in front of the editor and show him or her - as it was at the Newcastle Evening Chronicle, what you got for that day. You didn't want them to literally take your news list and rip it up in front of you and go "get the F out and go and find something better". So yes, there was a lot of pressure, and I think at the time leadership lessons and management lessons and culture lessons weren't even on the radar back then. So it was interesting graduation into the world of news management, shall we say.

But it also changes what success looks like for you because at the first stage of your career, you get a byline by Scott Armstrong, you expose a council wrongdoer or whatever it might be, and your name's there in lights.

Known a few of them, Paul!

Indeed. So, what does success look like when you're the news editor? Just that the paper didn't collapse and that you got it out the door? Is that a real thrill?

Yes, the real thrill is actually getting that exclusive news on the front page, finding a cracking story, and also learning what constitutes a cracking story. We both know an older editor who sadly passed away recently, Kevin Booth, who was my editor at the York Press, and he always used to talk about the mathematics of news. He really sort of taught me relevance. Today we've got metrics, we've got all sorts of Google analytics, and that tells us how successful a story was or wasn't. Boothy used to do this by instinct and by experience and by getting a real feel for his audience, because the only way you could track whether a story was actually a well beater was on sale or returns, like did the paper fly off the shelves? Or did you get 90% of your copies back in the world of print back then? So, he really taught me how to put a really good newspaper together, identify what was the front page, but also identify what you needed inside, a mix of light and shade, with human versus hard, it couldn't be all miserable all the time because you were a newspaper that was serving a community and you had to represent that community. But, yes, you can go from the individual pride or vanity or whatever you want to call it, the satisfaction of having your name on the front page, to then looking at the newspaper in the round and going, yes, that was really cracking edition. The team I worked with at the Newcastle Evening Chronicle when 9/11 happened, that afternoon we put out about seven different editions, probably worked for about 48 hours and got all sorts of different lines to an incredible interview with a friend of mine, Steve Kennedy, who went on to work for The Sun newspaper, interviewed a guy who had been on the 98th floor or whatever it was when the planes went into the building and he managed to get out. And the only reason why he managed to get out was the first time that Bin Laden had bombed it the first time, had attacked it the first time, he'd evacuated so he knew the route and all that sort of thing. And it was an incredibly powerful, iconic image at the time where three guys, they were from different ethnicities, but they were all caked in white dust, and at the time I think The Guardian headline was everybody's

equal today or everybody's the same today. He was one of these three guys, and it was an incredible story, him telling out how he saw the plane going into the building. So, the satisfaction went from personal glory or achievement to wanting the paper to just be as strong as possible.

How did you find a local angle for that? Like there's 9/11 you're at Newcastle. You found a firefighter, a local resident who was involved in it. Is there a challenge to make national news relevant to your readers? Or is it a question of like here are five or six pages of local news and here are some pages of the national stuff which might be bought in from saying Newsquest or a larger group?

What's the old saying - six degrees of separation. It's just so bizarre sometimes that you'll find a local story in many of the world's biggest news stories. If I looked at Newcastle, say, that guy that I'm talking about who had escaped, he was from Gateshead, and all of his family is in Gateshead, and because we were a local paper and we had a local connection to the community, the community had told us about it. Or community told a former chief reporter of ours who then gone to work for the council who then called us, and then we called him. So we got a local connection to one of the biggest stories of all time. There was also, I don't know if you remember, a guy called the Tasmanian devil, who went on a school shooting spree, very similar to what you'd see in the states in Australia. And actually, that attack led to Australia really cracking down on gun crime and doing amnesty for guns and all that sort of thing. That kid grew up on Tyneside, he grew up in Newcastle and again, we had the family album and they were willing to speak to us because we had that relationship and we were trusted in the community. So, it is just kind of, I don't know, being aware and open and there is always someone from your community, somewhere else in the world that when these global stories happened, with six degrees of separation, you'd always find an angle. It's strange, but it absolutely happens.

Did you always see yourself as being in local news or did the ambition bug get you? Did you watch a like Macbeth or something and thought, "well, he did all right".

No, the desire to move on came slightly later in life. And I think also, back in the day Boothy, Kevin Booth, was a hell of a mentor for me and a great friend and he was supporting my career.

Much missed.

Yes, very much missed. He had an impact on my life and had he not left the newspaper, I'm not sure what would've happened. Maybe I would've stayed on the same track, but that did happen and then I started looking further afield. I went from York to New York Press to the Nassau Guardian in The Bahamas as its business editor. And that really put me on an international path, shall we say? I wish I could say that I had some grand plan that I'd followed, but literally, things kind of fell into place. Sometimes you had good experiences and sometimes you had bad experiences, but I couldn't say that I had planned to get anywhere. I just found myself there.

How did you get to The Bahamas, how did that happen? And, what was your time like there?

My time was brilliant there. I actually was trying to get to Abu Dhabi because a friend of mine, again in York, who was an investor in Abu Dhabi had said, "Do you know what, you really should get to Abu Dhabi because it's great!" And I applied to a newspaper that, somewhat strangely, initially said that I didn't have enough business experience. I was like, "oh okay, fine". And then advertised on a job board was business editor for The Bahamas. Okay. Applied, got it. Moved the family there and had a great year there. It was so much fun. The team were brilliant, they were ambitious, and they had more ambitions than I had. They kept wanting to break into the states. Miami was literally 30 minutes away, so they really had their eyes on the US. So, they were just such an energetic go-getting team. It was a real pleasure to work with them. So I really enjoyed it. I will say island life after a year, it was time to move on. There's not much to do other than drink, and it used to be an interesting island because there was no drink-drive law and there was actually no taxi service. So people used to drive around in all sorts of states. I don't know if that's still the case today, but then from there, I got two offers. One was in a newspaper in Jamaica and the previous guys interviewing in Abu Dhabi said "you still fancy a job?" And we looked at it, not knowing much about Abu Dhabi and what the Gulf would be like. I went to Jamaica, enjoyed a really great pint of Red Stripe, and got offered a job. But at the same time, there was a drug Lord that was being extradited. So people were getting their arms macheted off in the streets. I didn't think that was the best environment for my wife at the time. So we kind of went for the Abu Dhabi gig and

I'm so glad I did because this part of the world has been such an education and such an opportunity. It's been brilliant.

So what were the eyebrow raisers when you first got to the middle east, then? What was as you expected and what wasn't as you expected?

What wasn't expected was how open and actually cosmopolitan it was. We've all, certainly back then had, stereotypical views of what life might be like over here. But when I got over, it was very open and that's even going back 12 years ago, these days even more open, with ladies' nights. There was a great hospitality scene. The thing that strikes you about this part of the world though, that, having grown up in Nottingham - which at one point I think was a knife crime capital of the UK. Because we like to keep it personal, is the safety, it is so safe out here. There's almost zero crime and when you've got kids that's a big factor, it's a big consideration. So it really surprised me just how cosmopolitan and open it actually was. And I've seen it over the last 12 years get better and better.

How long have you been in the middle east?

About 12 years now, or maybe it might be even 13 years. I spent four years on a newspaper in Abu Dhabi called The National. I graduated from the business desk to be the homepage editor and was in control of their of digital growth, it took me three years to persuade them to get a mobile site. They finally got that. And then I moved and spent four years as the editor in chief of The Times of Oman in Muskat, which is a little sleepy, shall we say, it was a lot slower, not quite as, vibrant is the wrong word. The pace of life was a lot slower, people very friendly, I really enjoyed the four years, my daughter was born there. We lived very close to the beach, which was a real privilege, and I really missed the ocean shall we say? And, then finally came back to Dubai and I've been here four or five years, spent two years shifting back and forth to Saudi Arabia. So, I got to know the kingdom a little bit, and got to work with some quite inspiring people there. And then finally Arabian Business for the last couple of years. Now I've launched my own business focused on mental health called mentl, for all the sub-editors out there, it's felt wrong but that's what we called ourselves.

That's interesting. Isn't it? When did you start to realize that workplace mental health was both a challenge for your colleagues, but also for management, and was also an opportunity? Rather than seeing this as a box-ticking exercise, one of the things I've been inspired by talking to you is it's not just about mitigating a lawsuit and ticking a box and saying, we care about our employees and colleagues' health. This is actually about culture. There's a huge opportunity here for companies that really embrace this because it frankly will make them more money. In the long term, it is doing the right thing by doing right by their colleagues. Is it not?

Yes. And I genuinely don't understand it. I have always lent in, as I say, even in those early days, the thing I liked was the human side of the job. So when I took the job on Arabian Business, I really wanted it to be a lot more human in focus because there were plenty of titles there to knock down, often that's what the media is accused of, pulling people down. I really wanted to embrace the mission of lifting up, whether that be equality, diversity, and inclusion, or whether that be ESG in the environment or helping startups. In terms of mental health, yes, I've had roles, let's say for legal reasons, let's say that over the 30 years where I've worked with some pretty toxic leaders I've seen the impact it's had on me. I've seen when the phone goes off your body tightens. I've seen the impact on young leadership, on young teams as well. And I've definitely been on a journey in terms of what leadership actually means. I know I've made all the same mistakes and probably been as bad as the people who were bosses to me - so there's a bit of karma about that perhaps. But, I learned from it and then the more you look at it and the more you do the research as a business journalist, it doesn't matter who you look at, whether it's PWC or McKinsey or EY, the evidence there is just irrefutable that you get this right, you make more money. And I don't understand why the chief finance officers in companies are not screaming about this, particularly in the days of, we've got to be more efficient. There's this endless need to make more and more and more and more profit shareholder demand is always...You can never satisfy that appetite. This is a really easy way of making more money and being a more sustainable company. I've written an article today based on an interview with a guy called Mark Mobius and he's an investor, he worked with a company called Temple Turner and now he's got Mark Mobius capital, but he took a hundred million dollar fund and he turned it into $40 billion. He's invested in more than five...

Sounds like a loser.

Yes, absolutely yes. He's got the same hairline as me. So, we're like brothers from, from another mother. He has invested in 5,000 companies, he's travelled a million miles around the world. So his business credentials are not bad. And he's literally just again, written a white paper, which is called 'ESG plus C' and C being the culture. And now he doesn't come at it from an evangelistic point of view that we must treat people right. It's not that, he's not a bleeding heart, well, we should hug everybody type person he's coming at it from a really analytical investment perspective that says if you don't get this right, that is a risk and I will not invest in your company. That is a risk to the long-term sustainability of your company and he is right. He now actually, in his investment portfolio, one of the things he has, he uses the Glassdoor score of a company, which is what employees say after they leave a company, and that I think should put terror into many HR departments and they go, well, our ability to unlock investment is connected to what employees say after they left us. I think that would frighten many HR departments...

I'm shaking in my boots now.

But if you think about it is a huge opportunity for the business world. I have stuff in my family life that has really woken me up to my own mental health and the need for us to all talk about mental health more. And so, there's a personal reason, but there is just a huge ROI on doing the right thing. As a business journalist, I want to try and communicate the business case to the business world. That you'll make more money by not being assholes. If I can say that!

So I was going to say dumb it down for our listeners about what your business does, but dumb it down for me. I haven't quite got my head around it, what is It?

Well in year one, we are focused on content. As a journalist, I'm a huge believer in the power of stories and storytelling, and behavioural science will tell us that's true too. People will remember much more about the story than a fact sheet. So, we are going to be telling lots of inspiring stories, trying to basically tackle the stigma of mental health head-on, which is why we're called mentl. We're not called brain sparkles or fluffy mind or something like that - there is genuinely a business called brain sparkles, by the way. We are very much like this is mentl, this is mental health.

So we want to speak to thought leaders, and business leaders, such as yourself Paul, and get them to tell their stories.

Can you get anyone Good?

Well, everyone suffers from mental health. So we need people like yourself. Yes. Well, there will be some people to relate to you Paul as well.

There won't be. I can assure you I'm a one-off, but anyway, proceed

Yes. It's that whole idea that we want to inspire people, give people help, normalize as well and just use the power of content to let everybody know that look, the cold hard stats from the World Health Organization is that it impacts one in four people. In the UAE for various different reasons, it's one in three and these are the people that they represent. The amount of money that's lost by the world on an annual basis through presenters and absenteeism and sickly unlike through mental health, 5 trillion a year anxiety and depression alone, 1 trillion a year. In the UAE in 2019, they lost 5 billion. That's a lot of money that's flowing out of businesses purely because they don't want to get into a space that we've always seemed to struggle to talk about. I want to have a lot more open and honest conversations about this because let's be fair, it impacts so many of us. If it's one in three, if it's not you, then who next to you is either going to suffer from it has suffered from it or is suffering from it. The likelihood is it will be you. My old man was a great man, had a good life built himself a business and came out of nothing, came out of abject poverty in the UK sink estate in Nottingham called Best Wood, which is slightly ironic. because there were no trees, just concrete. Built in the southeast global company operations around the world. 68 years old, as a successful business person with a great family, a good set of friends, everything the right way. He got hit with a mental health issue. Three months later, he was dead. And that really woke me up to the power of this and recognize that I've got a lot of stuff in my locker that I need to deal with. And I've got a lot of work to do on me and we all have, and there's nothing wrong with that. We spent so long focused on physical health and that's right, but why can't we talk about mental health? We know the benefits of physical health. We know the benefits of looking after ourselves. Why wouldn't we look after our mental health as well? I never understand this as well. Right? So take, for example, an employee and you pay them a hundred thousand pounds a year, I would say, which is obviously a big wage, a strong wage, but even if it was £50,000, if you, as an owner of a business

invested £50,000 in a piece of machinery, in a piece of technology, whether that be your manufacturing plant or something like that, you would not abuse that machinery to the point where it broke as soon as possible, you just wouldn't do it. You would maintain it. You would even employ engineers to look after it. Yet we live in a knowledge economy and instead we still burn people out and we think that we can just throw people away and then hire more people. It's unsustainable, and it's unsustainable for a number of reasons, see the great resignation, but equally, there's a guy called Gary Vee that talks about the great, I'm never going to come and work for your company in the first place. Kids don't want it. The Millennials and the Gen Z's don't want the same sort of treadmill and toxicity that we grew up on, and I don't blame them. Frankly, it wasn't fit for our purpose for us. If we'd had grown up in sort of empathetic, empowering leadership environments, goodness knows what could we have all achieved at our end of the spectrum. But, there are so many managers at my age who roll their eyes and go, well, we were miserable, they should be miserable too. But we raised them. We raised our children to expect more. We raised our children to be entitled to more, and frankly, it's just evolution. Things should change and should get better. So the world of work it's at an inflexion point, it's actually crossed an inflexion point. And I think we've got hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of zombie companies, companies who are walking to their own demise. If they don't really wake up to this, because it will kick them in the backside in five to 10 years' time, I guarantee it.

And frankly, there was an arrogance wasn't there, with employers where they did think that people were replaceable, they were sort of production bots. And if you don't like it we'll find someone who does. I think now you realize that actually hiring good people is actually incredibly difficult because you're looking to buy enthusiasm, creativity, ideas and drive. It's not about 37 and a half hours a week, is it? It's about results, and unless you have the right culture and the right people, you ain't going to get it.

Yes, it was interesting because PWC do a CEO survey every year for the middle east, and the findings were kind of almost contradictory in a way in that, if you were to ask CEOs, what's the thing they were most concerned about was, they said their ability to innovate their ability to deal with disruption, innovate, be agile and continue to evolve so they stay relevant. So they don't become Nokia and the smartphone or the Kodak and the digital camera. And the key to that is obviously the next generation of talent and bringing them through because if you can't see the next development in your given field, you're going to get left behind and then you will wither and die on the vine. We can see today the path to relevance is much quicker

than it was even back in, Nokia and Kodak's day, the minute that you've lost the public, you've lost the public, because there's all be another company that will capture the imagination much, much quicker. So the Millennials don't want it anymore. But then if you ask the CEO, the same survey also then found that the least priority had been given to things like ESG, equality and diversity, and wellbeing and mental health, which are all things that are really important to the Millennials and the Gen Z's and the general office. I think there's another survey in McKinsey survey that said the Gen Zs will be the first generation that values being valued over salary. So we've got these two things going on where CEOs know they're in trouble. They know they need to innovate. They know they need to develop and evolve. And what's worked for the last 20 years, isn't working anymore. But at the same time, they do not prioritize the things that are going to fix it. So they are looking down the barrel of an existential crisis and the pandemic has only just accelerated that. I still see companies that want to try and put things back into the box that they were all in five years ago, shall we say, in the pandemic, but that's not happening. There's no way you can do it. And if you want to live in the past, you will, but then you'll basically die in the past. And the companies that step up and innovate will, and attract that young talent, they'll be the ones that thrive moving forward because the kids as well have got more choices these days. Those generations have got a lot more choices than we ever had growing up. If I wanted to be a writer when I was in the UK, if I wanted to be a journalist, I have to go and work for somebody. Now I can, self-publish, I've got all these, one of the things I've actually started my own business is self-publishing. I've got all the social media channels, I've got all the digital tools, I can, I don't need to go to the recording studio. You've got your podcast equipment. It's very, very easy for individuals to strike out on their own these days, which is I think all to the good that's where I'm at. So, I want to use everything I've learned in journalism about telling human stories and connecting to people and getting people behind missions and causes and trying and convince the business world and the wider community that it's about time. We actually start taking our own mental health seriously because there are so many rewards if we do.

So how do you do that then? I was trying to think of a way of saying like, who's side are you on? If there's a big conference table in an office, are you on the side with the executives where you are helping them get the best out of their people? Or are you on the side of the employees, like a trade unionist speaking up for them? Or is it a bit of both? Who is going to read mentl? What's the audience?

Oh, it's everyone's platform, to be honest with you. From the employees up to the C-suite, every boss I've ever worked for who wasn't great, shall we say, terrified, absolutely terrified. I pity their mental health, and insecurity, so much pressure and pressure in the C-suite is such a real thing. We have insecure leaders who were never taught how to lead, we've grown up with this kind of superhuman culture that I must always be right and you dare not question me, and the only way that they can then deal with that is clinging to a hierarchical, commanded control management technique, rather than trying to be empathetic. They can't admit that they're wrong, or they can't admit that they don't know anything and how much pressure comes with that, how much stress and anxiety comes with living that lie, that everything I would absolutely tell you that I'm a big fan of Donald Rumsfeld, there are known unknowns and unknown unknowns. You've got to be open to that, and if you don't, then you're going to get caught blindsided. And then you're going to again, get defensive and again, aggressive as a leader, and you're going to have to slam down. And the only person who I know who is right all the time is my wife, outside of that we're all in trouble. So, in terms of talking to the C-suite and having the conversation with the C-suite about their own mental health, because it is tough at the top, they have got pressures on them and they do need to make decisions that employees, particularly entry-level employees and companies won't know, but that said, I think there are better ways for them to be, and we need the C-suite to embrace this because the only way this trickles down into companies is if it is championed and advocated from the very top. There's a great guy called Sir Ian Cheshire, I think he's the ex-chairman of Barclays, he's ex-chairman of King Fisher, and he now runs an organization called The Global Business Collaboration for Better Mental Health in the Workplace (the GBC). And he talks about the loneliness of the C-suite, it's a lot of pressure. I know people further down the hierarchy will look at them and go "Boohoo. They're getting paid extra wide". But one, they need to look after themselves; two, if they do, they'll be better leaders; three they'll create better cultures; four they'll get better performance, and then five they'll have better P and L. So then they can create themselves, a virtual circle where it's all good and then on the flip side of that, yes, the employees, they need help. They need less burnout. I do kind of jump from team to theme, but our employees, bosses companies, they have pastoral care. And we recognize this in legislation, in terms of physical, if you have more than 50 employees, you need physical first aiders. One of the things we want to campaign on is the fact that the companies should also have mental first aiders. And increasingly I think companies are worried about liability, but they're not going to be able to get away with that. We're actually beginning to see legislation emerging in the UK and emerging in the US and emerging in Europe, that's putting down in law that

employees have a care duty towards the mental health of their employees that said on the employee side as well, we all have a kind of personal responsibility to lean into our mental health and try and make that as good as we can. So there is the employer's responsibility, and then there is the responsibility of the employee to look after themselves as well. Very much like if an employee is out drinking every night and they're not looking after themselves and they're coming in absolutely knackered, then they need to have a look at their behaviour in the workplace. It's not necessarily all on the employer to fix those issues, and it's the same in the mental health space. But that said there is a long, long, long way to go for employers, for bosses to get this right. But if they get it right, they get it right for themselves, they're happier and that dovetails into family life that dovetails into community life and the same with your employees. You've got to remember so many of your employees as well now have got outside stress and inside stress. So you've got outside stress. We're living in a very polarized sort of toxic world, social media's not been particularly good on that front. And I don't need to get into grandiose on the statements of that. But if you are a parent, you are trying to raise a kid in today's world. You are up against some of the most incredibly sophisticated algorithms designed by addiction specialists in Silicon Valley. What chance do parents have when they're trying to get through the day-to-day? Especially right now, with the economies, the job, the cost of living, with inflation. Back when I was growing up jumpers for goalposts and all that sort of thing. We used to get more outside space, but equally, if we were struggling in school, if we were bullied at school and I'm happy to tell you that I was bullied at school, but your bedroom used to be a safe space for a child. These days it's one of the most dangerous places because that's where the hate can really reach in via social media, and when you see whistleblowers in the states talking about Instagram's algorithms, potentially harming teenage girls and them knowing about it, that's what the Senate hearings were in the US were being told. So yes, difficult days, and we can't just hide away, we're not pushing this under the carpet. The amount of stuff you have to push under the carpet, you'd have a massive mound in the middle of your living room these days. It's there and it's right in your face, it's a private pandemic and we've got to get it out of the private sphere and just be more open and honest with this because it's happening to everyone.

What's it like running a business? Because you were a journalist, you are sort of a gamekeeper now, everyone has an idea of what running a business is actually like and you are now literally running one, what's gone how you expected, and what's been an eyebrow-raiser?

Oh, my word. I don't think you've even scratched the surface of it yet. All the things that you take for granted that companies do for you when you join a company, whether that be your health in this part of the world, health insurance, or your business banking, all that kind of thing. Yes, there are so many things you have to think about that's been an eye opener. That's one aspect of it though, perhaps wasn't so surprising. And you go through these highs and lows. Some days I'm talking to the famous Paul Blanchard on a podcast pretending to be a media master, which is hilarious. On other days I'm just spending hours trying to open up a business bank account or get my business formation trade license across the line. In the world of work, in the corporate world, you sometimes get to pick and choose a little bit of what you want to do. But when you run your own business, you have to do it all - the stuff that you enjoy and the stuff you don't enjoy. I must admit this week's been one of those weeks where there've been a couple of days where I've just gone around, I've literally achieved nothing. I've spent hours online trying to do something and I've just got nowhere, and actually, by the end of the week, you have crossed that line and you have actually taken steps forwards. I've got a friend of mine, Derek who works for lots of startups and he talks about toxic positivity. You only ever hear the stories of the companies that succeed, and obviously, I believe I'm going to succeed. I've got to be incredibly passionate, but then the standard wisdom is that nine out of 10 will fail. In the startup scene, there's a huge mental health cost that comes from what's required to create a business, and I'm only just learning it. I'm at the bottom of the mountain and I've got Everest to climb. So yes, it's interesting, that said I'm loving it as an entrepreneur. I'm loving being out on my own. I get to create my day as I want, I've got a six-year-old daughter who's on a school holiday. So I get to down tools for an hour and go to the swimming pool with her, or when she's at school, I go to pick her up. So there are swings and roundabouts. Is it for everybody? I don't know. It's taken me until nearly 50 to do something like this, and I don't regret for a large part of working for other people in other newspapers. I've had some great teachers, and I've had some bad teachers who have taught me equally important lessons about what not to do, but yes. I got the calling and the opportunity has presented itself, shall we say, I somewhat got pushed off the cliff rather than left off the cliff. But then that's the universe telling you that it's time to follow your passion. I think, yes, the pandemic did wake us up, a lot of people up to the fact that have they got their priorities in life right. I'm not sure mine was. I think they are now. My priorities were right, did they have the opportunity to pursue them? Well, I'm now beginning to create my opportunity to pursue them. So I'm loving it, but it's not sweetness and light. It's not all a bed of roses every day, that's for sure.

Scott, that was a hugely interesting conversation. I wish you the very best of luck with your new venture. Thank you for your time.

You're very welcome.

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