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**Announcer**: *Motivations* feature interview: health, wealth, success, and inspiration.

**Cydney**: Hello, this is Cydney O’Sullivan with *Motivations Magazine*. My special guest today is Shep Hyken. He is a customer experience expert and the Chief Amazement Officer at Shepard Presentations. He is a New York Times and Wall Street Journal best-selling author and has been inducted into the National Speakers Association Hall of Fame for lifetime achievement in the speaking profession.

Shep works with companies and organizations that want to build loyal relationships with their customers and their employees. His articles have been read in hundreds of publications, and he is the author of *Moments of Magic*, *The Loyal Customer*, *The Cult of the Customer*, *The Amazement Revolution,* and *Amaze Every Customer Every Time*. He is also the creator of the Customer Focus Program, which helps clients develop a customer service culture and loyalty mindset.

Welcome, Shep.

**Shep**: Hey, that’s me to a tee right there, the perfect introduction.

**Cydney**: Tell us, how did you get started as a speaker and trainer? What inspired you to turn it into a career?

**Shep**: Well, I’m not really a very good trainer. I’ll admit that. I have people who do training for me. They take my speaking content and deliver it.

How did I get into this racket, this business? It’s a great business. Back in the day when I was just a kid, I did magic shows. I actually did birthday parties and eventually worked in night clubs. I also had a regular job, and I thought for sure I’d be working for this one company as I graduated college for the rest of my life. Just a few months after I graduated, they said they’re selling the company, and shortly thereafter, I did not have a job. I went and saw two motivational speakers, Zig Ziglar and Tom Hopkins.

**Cydney**: The best, Zig Ziglar.

**Shep**: Tom is still around. Zig unfortunately is no longer with us. But I saw those guys and I said, “Wow, you can do anything. You really can. I can even do what they’re doing. I can do that!” That’s how I got into the business. I said, “I’m going to write a speech.” I had the entertainment background, so I felt good about getting up in front of people, and that’s how it all started.

**Cydney**: That’s pretty amazing, because I think a lot of us will see a motivational or an inspirational speaker but not that many of us have the guts to get up and give it a try. What was it like when you first started? Weren’t you nervous?

**Shep**: Interestingly enough, even though I had performed for many years and worked in nightclubs and top audiences, I always was nervous. I don’t really want to call it stage fright. It was more nervousness, almost to the point where sometimes my legs would shake. I was that nervous.

When I started to speak, I felt those same nerves coming back, and here is how I overcame it: just be prepared, know your material. I learned very quickly that the worst thing that could happen would be to point out a fault, because the audience didn’t know what I was going to say next.

If I said something that was wrong, then they wouldn’t know – when I say “wrong,” wrong to my script, not wrong like inaccurate statistics or something. If I said something not quite the way I wanted to say it, they don’t know. Just keep going. That’s how it worked, and I started to feel more comfortable.

I learned two things. Number one, always be prepared. In other words, I don’t ever want to walk on stage and not know my material and not understand who my audience is. All the questions that you’d want to know about making that presentation a good one, I will not walk on stage unless I have that information, so I will have done my homework.

The other thing is I don’t like walking on stage tired. My philosophy typically when I’m traveling and working is “in bed by ten.” That’s it. It almost rhymes perfectly. I get a good night’s sleep. I get up. I like to work out a little bit in the morning. Then I go to work.

**Cydney**: It’s supposed to be good for your health too – isn’t it – getting to bed early.

**Shep**: It sure does get a bad habit, sometimes, doesn’t it?

**Cydney**: Yes, I’m a bit guilty of the late nights. Tell me what motivates you. What is it that keeps you going? Because how long have you been doing this now?

**Shep**: About 32 years, almost 33.

**Cydney**: How do you stay excited?

**Shep**: One of the things that I was always concerned with was getting bored with my speech. What I realized is if I can include some audience interaction, that makes it a little bit more entertaining for me because I never know how the audience member is going to react. That’s number one.

Number two, if I can change up the material… That might mean because I have a new client, new industry, maybe they sell something different than in the past, I’m able to learn about them and that makes it interesting. If I do a top ten list – which I like to do, like “Here are ten ways to make this happen” – and it’s a list that I use often, I try to swap out, every once in a while, one of the items for something new, or I just mix up the order to keep it fresh.

**Cydney**: You find that really getting to know your customers… Because customer service is really your strength, isn’t it? It’s your specialty.

**Shep**: That’s what I do for a living. That’s my expertise. At the end of the day, my goal is to be out there and do the best job I can. I need to be fresh. I need to be excited. I love what I do. I learn from every client that I work for. I think maybe what keeps me going is the fact that I learn and keep growing.

I read a tremendous amount. Today, I probably read fewer than normal articles. I probably read about eight or nine articles. Most of the time, I’ll read 12 or 15 articles, sometimes even 20 articles a day. I might not like them so I stop reading them but I actually put them in front of me.

I also read books, especially when I’m traveling. A great time to read a book is on an airplane because when you take off and land, you can’t use your computer. There is an extra 30 or 40 minutes easily that I get to read. I can read a book in about two to three hours, so there is a pretty good chance if I take a trip, within a week, I’ll have read another book. I probably read 40 to 50 books per year.

**Cydney**: Great. Did you take any courses on speed reading or anything, or is it just from practice?

**Shep**: I don’t even think it’s speed reading. I think when I find something I like I really slow down, but it’s real easy for me to go through a book and find the places that I like, find the parts that I like, find the information that I like. So I’m not going to say I read every book word for word as if you could test me on it tomorrow and I’d get an A, but there are certain parts, if they resonate with me, I’ll start making notes.

By the way, making notes does a couple of things. It keeps me engaged with the book. It keeps me interpreting things. More importantly, once I’ve taken all of those notes, I’ll go back and then I’ll pull two or three things out that I know that I’m going to try to do or to use, because if you read and write down or don’t ever take action, I don’t know if it’s procrastination, but you’re not going to get anywhere.

I’m a doer, so I want to find ROI in everything I do. The return on investment in a book is I need to find at least one idea that I’m going to use as a result of that book.

**Cydney**: Shep, you’ve written a lot of books. You must come up with ideas for books all the time. I’ve also written a lot of books. What is your technique for getting them finished?

**Shep**: I don’t believe you have to get them finished. I only think you have to get them 80% of the way there and hand it off to the editor. Let the editor finish it and make it pretty. Perfection is sometimes what gets in the way of the end of the project. I know that my strength is content, concept, and a little bit of clarity in writing. But my strength is not grammar, punctuation, and perfection of sentence structure.

In a book, I think you need to have more profession of that type than you do if you write short articles. I write articles – at least two per week, which is, by the way, where I get a lot of the information for the next book. It’s been almost not quite two years now since my last book came out, and I’m starting to think it’s time to get ready to write another one.

**Cydney**: You’ve taken your book to New York Times Bestseller. That is quite an achievement. Congratulations.

**Shep**: Thank you.

**Cydney**: What advice do you have for people to get their books out there and turn them into bestsellers?

**Shep**: Sell a lot of books. That’s what you’d expect me to say. There’s not much more to it than that, but there is more to it as far as the strategy goes. Here is the strategy. If you build it, they don’t come – unlike the movie *Field of Dreams* where if you build it, apparently they did come.

Here’s the thing. You have to have the product to begin with. Number two, you have to have a strategy. Hope is not a strategy. Just because you have it, it isn’t a strategy. What is your sales strategy? What is your platform? How many people are you going to speak to over the next year if you’re a speaker and you’re writing a book? How many audiences are you going to be in front of? How many clients do you have that might buy books in bulk?

Don’t start selling the book when it comes out; start selling the book six months before it comes out, because there is a pretty good chance that the book is finished months before it actually goes to publication. You can take the galley, if you will, and send it to your clients and say, “This is the book that is coming out in six months. How many of them do you want to buy? I’m going to give you a great deal.”

To my subscribers on my newsletter list – and I’m not sure how they price over there where you are, but where we are, my book was priced US $24.95; you can buy it from Amazon for a little less than that – what we said is this. Anybody who pays regular retail, I’ll pay the shipping, I’ll pay the tax, and also today, because the book isn’t coming out for a number of months, I’m going to give you a white paper that I wrote.

Some of the interviews – just like we’re doing here on audio – I have those saved. I’m going to give you some of those interviews so you have some collateral material just for signing up today and I save you postage and tax. So it’s a good deal. We sell thousands of books in advance that way.

**Cydney**: That’s good advice.

**Shep**: By the way, we take the orders, we compile the orders, and when the book finally does come out, we have the orders placed. We hire a fulfillment company to go into Amazon, to go into Barnes and Noble and place the orders. We sold thousands of books. Believe me, Amazon is happy to do this. They love it.

**Cydney**: Yes, I’ve worked with a lot of authors, and quite often they’ll say, “Isn’t that the publisher’s job?” We’re going to talk about this, but we were talking earlier about how really your success in life is going to come down to how engaged *you* get in selling yourself, right?

**Shep**: Right. The publisher’s job today is to produce an amazing looking book and an amazing book that you’ve written. I don’t want to call them just printers because some publishers, if you have the right author, will spend money and promote you, but most of us aren’t the right author.

I’m just a guy who talks about customer service and writes about customer service experience. I am not Ken Blanchard who wrote *The One Minute Manager* and a number of other mega bestsellers, so publishers aren’t going to put a lot of money behind it.

Frankly, I don’t like relying upon other people for my success, and maybe one of the secrets to my success is that I’m a doer – I mentioned that – and I’m not going to wait around for somebody else to do it for me, because if I have to rely on somebody else for my success and they don’t do the job, guess what? I’m not successful. Is it my fault? It is, because I relied upon somebody else and I didn’t take ownership.

**Cydney**: On that topic, do you have a life’s motto? Would you say there is a saying that you live to?

**Shep**: I have a personal life motto. It really has nothing to do with business, but from the standpoint from business, again, I’m a doer and I believe you move forward. I love having mentors. I’ve had a lot of mentors. A lot of people help me. I love mentoring and helping others.

My personal life motto – are you ready? – you can probably guess it because when we met, you probably found this will be congruent. “Have fun and make the kids smile.” You didn’t meet my kids, but I know their smile.

**Cydney**: Is that from your magic days, being a magician?

**Shep**: No, it’s what life is all about. There’s a big quote. I’m not going to give you the exact words but I’m going to tell you the gist of it. The great philosopher, songwriter, and one of the greatest musicians of all time, John Lennon of the Beatles, when he was about six years old, his mother said, “You want to grow up to be happy.”

Not that long after, his teacher at school said, “Here is the assignment. We want you to write a paper on what you want to be when you grow up” and he came back with a very short answer, “I want to be happy.” The teacher said, “You’ve misunderstood the assignment,” and John Lennon said, “You’ve misunderstood life.” How cool is that?

**Cydney**: It’s very cool.

**Shep**: It’s really cool. I think if you’re happy, happy doesn’t mean rich with money. Happy means rich with life. I feel lucky that I make enough money that I’m wealthy in many ways and experiences.

A friend of mine, Giovanni Livera, wrote a book called *Live a Thousand Years,* and he actually has a formula. You have your real age – which is what you actually are, when you were born and how many years you’ve been on this planet – but then you have your sage age, the wisdom and experience that you’ve gained. I took this assessment and came out at 880 years out of 1,000. He says, “Oh my God, you’re off the charts.”

Think about it. I have never gone bungee jumping before but I was over in your part of the world, so I went over to New Zealand and I went bungee jumping. I went paragliding off of a cliff. I don’t have a bucket list because I believe everything I’ve done has made me happy. The only thing I want to do more than what I do today is spend more time with my wife and my kids. Nothing else I want to do. However, put it in front of me, I’d love to do it. Does that make sense?

**Cydney**: Yes, I totally agree with you. I jumped off the cliff in New Zealand, too, in the paraglider. I was all ready to do the bungee jumping, but I looked at my kids and they were exhausted. But I will do it again.

**Shep**: No, you looked at the river and you said, “There is no way.”

**Cydney**: But when I go to the theme parks with my kids and they go on those really scary, horrible rides, I’ll actually go with them because it’s an adrenaline rush. It reminds me that we can do whatever we show up for. It’s just about facing your fears and doing it anyway.

**Shep**: Somebody asked me today in an interview if I would be willing to do a fire walk, because I’ve never done a fire walk. I said, “I don’t know. I think I’m a little worried about getting burned.” He said, “Come on, you’ve jumped out of an airplane. A fire walk has to be nothing.”

I said, “No, there is a difference. If I walk across the coals and I burn my feet, that hurts. I may have to go to the hospital, and it’s going to hurt for a while. If I jump out of a plane and the parachute doesn’t open, it’s over the second I hit the ground. I don’t think people even feel pain. It’s just over.”

**Cydney**: Fire walks are easy. Don’t worry. Go do it. It’s fun. Tell me, what is your typical day like? You’re a busy, busy man. How do you fit it all in?

**Shep**: There are two sides of my life. I’m either traveling speaking and moving pretty quick, and there it’s planes, trains, automobiles, taxi cabs, and stages. I’m on stage doing a speech. I go in usually the night before. I spend time with the client in the morning and do the speech and then fly on to the next city of fly home.

If I’m home – like today I’m home – I get up early in the morning. Usually I try to beat the alarm naturally. I get up at about 5:15-ish. I stretch a little bit, go work out. Sometimes I work out in the gym downstairs in our building. Other times – I still play ice hockey – I’ll go play hockey. My goal is five workouts per week, at least. Then I’ll go have a quick little breakfast. I’m in the office by 7:00 or 7:15 and I’m working.

I love the quiet time in the morning and the quiet time after everybody leaves, because I usually leave here around 6:30 or 7:00. I do some of my writing then. I do some of my best writing when I’m on the road – no interruptions. I’m in a hotel room or even on an airplane writing. I still have to write every week. I do at least two articles per week.

When I’m in the office, everything is scheduled. The goal is that I don’t make a phone call unless somebody is waiting for me on the other end of the phone. I’m not going to call and leave a bunch of messages. Everything is very productive. Everything is timed out, so it’s a very structured day.

I’m not typically structured, so my assistant help makes me structured. It gives me structure. It sets my appointments. I come in and I’m handed a slip of paper that has my calendar laid out in front of me. Fifteen minutes before every call, she comes in with a sheet of paper that says, “Here is who you’re talking to. Here is why you’re talking to them.” If it takes more prep than that, she’ll make sure I have that information ahead of time.

It’s very structured, and that’s good. All my calls, like I say, they’re waiting for me, so if I’m talking to a potential client, I’m not just calling and leaving a message. That client is waiting for me. They know I’m going to call at 2:00 in the afternoon, or they’re going to call me.

We do a lot of interviews. This is my third interview today. I believe part of my job is I’m a media company as much as I am anything else. I need to be in the media. I have to write. I have to create videos. I have to do my radio show. I’m doing your show for you. This is what I do for a living in order to get the exposure to get people to want to pick up the phone and call me.

**Cydney**: It’s good practice too, right? Again, it’s helping you know your content, know what people are interested in, what do people want to know.

**Shep**: Right. I love the questions. These questions are more about my life, career and general business, but the questions when I’m talking to an industry magazine, they’re going to ask me, “What are the latest trends in technology and customer service?” That sounds pretty boring to most people, but it’s pretty exciting to me. I may have to do a little extra research for that reporter. I don’t always need to have questions ahead of time, but if they want to send it ahead of time, I want to make sure I give them great answers.

**Cydney**: Tell me, what do you feel has been your greatest achievement?

**Shep**: Wow, my greatest achievement? When I saw that question, I wrote a few things down. This is going to sound really sappy: my wife and my kids – lucky enough to marry the right woman and just blessed enough to have three great kids.

I love that they’re very successful. My youngest one now is 20 years old. She is doing great in college. My other two are out of college. My one son is a musician down in New Orleans in the U.S., and he’s working hard to get by. My daughter up in New York now, I’m so proud of her. She graduated a little bit early, she moved to New York, and she’s managing two bands. We’re a musical family. I played the guitar all my life.

But what is really cool is when I look at my friends, they say, “Really, you let your kids do this.” I want my kids to do what they want to do. My daughter went to a very expensive private school for high school. Both of my daughters did. Both daughters are at expensive colleges. One graduated Boston University, and what does she do? She goes to New York to manage a band and she works in a restaurant to help pay the bills.

People say, “Wow, all that money spent on education and that’s what she does?” I say, “Are you kidding? All that money spent on education gave her the opportunity to learn about how to think, how to be independent, how to hit deadlines, how to make goals.” That’s what she is great at. She should have a chance to do what she wants to do, not what her parents want her to do. You know what? If she is successful at it, we’re 100% supportive. I think she’ll flourish because it’s what she wants.

My parents never criticized me. They weren’t sure exactly what I did for a living, because being a speaker wasn’t really a very popular thing back when I started. My parents never really quite understood it until they actually saw me do a presentation, probably a year and a half or two years into my career. I talked about it, but until they actually saw it, they didn’t know. As soon as they figured it out, they were so supportive. They were always supportive, but they were even more so. That’s what I want my kids to experience.

**Cydney**: Yes, I agree with you. I think one of the greatest things you can do is let your kids fully develop into who they are. They’re born with their little personalities, aren’t they?

**Shep**: Believe me, they’re all different. They are absolutely all different. It’s funny.

Professionally, hitting that New York Times Bestseller list was a pretty cool thing. Being inducted into the National Speakers Association Hall of Fame for lifetime achievement in the speaking industry is a very cool thing.

I remember getting a big job. I was talking about customer service to IBM, and in my mind, back in the 1980s, IBM was the number one company in the world in customer service. They hired me to speak. Disney hired me to speak. There are these milestone clients that are like, “Wow. I can’t believe that they’re actually hiring me.” How lucky I am to be able to do this, but that’s what we do. Those are some of the big milestones and accomplishments.

**Cydney**: Thank you for sharing that. I’m going to have to pull you back to the customer service experience, and you’re going to have to tell us now, what are the trends in customer service?

**Shep**: The trends in customer service? Number one, probably the biggest one, is the customer is smarter than ever. They know what good customer service is because everybody has been telling them, “We give great customer service,” and the ones that really do prove it. Now the customer’s expectations of the other companies that are making this promise that they’ll give service, the bar is set. They have to deliver. Customers know because businesses have educated them.

Number two, the customer has a voice that is louder than ever. That is through social media. If they’re not happy, they’re going to rant on social media. If they love you, they’re going to rave about you and they’re going to be your best word of mouth marketing. You have an opportunity to get these customers to love you and talk about you to the world. Of course, if there is a rant, or a problem, or a complaint, we help companies learn how they can turn that around and make it right.

Most important is to understand that that’s a big thing. The customer’s voice is louder and the customer is even smarter than ever before.

**Cydney**: I was just in the States, and I noticed they’re talking about a lot of companies that are in the business now of helping companies turn around the bad online media they’re getting.

**Shep**: Right. Some of the methods that they’re using I’m not crazy about, but here’s the thing. I would encourage companies to ask their customers to review them. The right way to do it is to say, “We want to be good enough that you would put a good review out there. That’s our goal. So tell us if we’re not doing a good job, so we can fix it, and when you’re finished doing business with us – if you’re a hotel, a restaurant, or even a manufacturer; you have ratings systems for everyone – go ahead and post a review. We would love your feedback and if there is anything wrong, let us know.”

My auto dealership that I buy my car and get my car serviced from, they want to have perfect tens. They make it real clear. “If we give you anything less than a perfect ten at any given time, would you please let us know, so we can fix it, because we want our ratings when we’re finished to be a ten.”

Sure, they’re pushing me a little bit, they’re prompting me a little bit, but they’ve also laid it out there because guess what? If they don’t give me that ten, I’m going to say, “That isn’t congruent with what you’re asking me to do.” You won’t believe how fast they’ll try and fix it.

**Cydney**: It’s a great way to do business – isn’t it? – to make sure that your customers are happy.

**Shep**: I walk into the hotel and there’s a sign that says, “We want you to leave a review on Trip Advisor” and that’s all it says – “Please leave a review.” I said, “What if it’s a bad review?” “We want you to leave a review no matter what.” The person behind the front desk didn’t quite say it this way but the interpretation is what I just said. “Our job is to make sure that you want to leave a good review.” So everybody is empowered to do that, making sure they’re taking care of their guests.

**Cydney**: When you were developing your skills and learning about everything, who were the role models or mentors? You already mentioned Zig Ziglar and Tom Hopkins. Who else has helped you along the way? Who has inspired you?

**Shep**: Believe it or not, my parents. Of course, that’s a sappy answer, but when I was 12 years old and I started my birthday party business, I learned about customer service and didn’t even know it was customer service. My mom said, “Make sure when you come home, you write a thank-you note to these parents who hired you to entertain for their kids.”

My dad said, “Make sure you show up early because you don’t want them worrying whether or not you’re going to show up or not. Don’t show up five minutes early. Show up 20 or 30 minutes early.” Little did I know those are all things that you do to create confidence.

My dad used to say a week after the show, after I wrote the thank-you note, I should call them to thank them and then ask them how I did – get feedback. I didn’t do anything as analytical as a Net Promoter Score or some fancy data analytic driven type of survey. I just want to know, “Did I do a good job? Were you happy with the job?”

Then my dad – of course, being the salesman that he was – he’d ask them, “Little Jimmy who you did the birthday party for, the little girl back there – his sister – when is her birthday party? And some of those parents, can I have their numbers so I can call them?” I did all that.

I learned how to run my business but then as I got into my business, my mentor was a gentleman named Bud Dietrich. Here is what he taught me. I think it applies to almost any type of business, but for the speaking business, he said, “The job isn’t doing the speech. It’s getting the speech.” Wow. For those that are in the manufacturing business and they’re making a product, the job isn’t to make a good product; the job is to sell the product that you’re making, because it doesn’t matter how good the product is if nobody is buying it. Right?

**Cydney**: Yes.

**Shep**: He was a great mentor. My friends, John **Farrar [? 28:25]** and Kim **Tucci [? 28:27]**, my brothers from another mother. They’re older than I am. I was 21 years old. I was working in a nightclub. I was thinking about going in the right business. These guys were so helpful. They owned the clubs and restaurants that I worked in, and we used to hang out a lot. They were older than me, and they took me under their wing.

I said, “Why are you so nice to me?” and I’ll never forget what Kim said. John was right there, nodding his head the whole time. Grown men typically don’t say these kinds of things and believe me, there was nothing funny going on here. They said, “Because we love you.” That’s cool. We were close friends. That’s all we were.

When I was 18 years old, I met Kim Tucci. Actually I met him before that but I didn’t realize it was him because his girlfriend who was closer to my age than his age wanted to learn how to play racquet ball, and we became friends. I met Kim. Kim is probably at least almost 20 years older than me.

But this was the thing. We’re like family here, and he said, “What we do for you, you need to do for others.” So I made sure I have been a mentor for many. People call me. They need help. I’m happy to give them my experience and share what I know.

**Cydney**: I totally agree with you, and I find that it’s a “the more you give, the more you get back” experience.

**Shep**: The law of reciprocity, except there’s a hitch, I think. The more you give, the more you get back, but if you keep score, you don’t get back as much. Because then there’s an expectation.

I give and forget; I receive and remember. I can’t remember who said that, but I learned it from Nino Cobain here in the U.S. who quoted somebody and the basic gist of it was when you give, forget, but when you receive, just remember. I do that. I won’t forget people who have taken care of me and done good things for me.

**Cydney**: I like to think that it might not come from that person. It might come from somebody else.

**Shep**: Yes, it’s good karma.

**Cydney**: Yes, that’s right. What has been one of the biggest challenges that you’ve had to get through, and what did you learn from that?

**Shep**: I’ve been very lucky. I haven’t had too many failures. That’s good. Anything that has been a failure, you learn from it. I’m in the kind of business that doesn’t take a lot of capital to start it, and building a website, if you get a bad website, you go and fix it. So it costs you a few thousand dollars.

But my biggest challenges have been mainly the fact that I was successful and when the economy hit, I recognized – this is important – if things start to slow down, you have to say to yourself, “Is this happening *to* me, or is it a result of something that I’m doing?” I said, “Okay, the economy is down, companies are losing confidence, they’re not hiring people like me. But I know some still are, so you know what I have to do? I just have to call more people to make up for the people who aren’t booking me.” Guess what? I’m working again.

Somebody once said, “It’s not what happens to you; it’s what you do about it.” I was talking to a gentleman, Scott Halford, who has written a book about activating your brain, and I said we can modify that to “It’s not what happens to you, it’s how you think about it.” Some people see things as a challenge and they’re miserable about it, but other people see a challenge as something that energizes them. Maybe I’m just wired that way – I don’t know – but I am energized by challenges.

**Cydney**: Obviously, you set yourself a lot of challenges. You have a very structured life, and what you achieve is quite extraordinary – if people knew everything that you get done. Talk to us about leadership because leadership is another one of your topics. What do you think are the strengths of successful people? What do you see when you’re out there teaching leadership?

**Shep**: Leadership really isn’t my topic, however, I talk to leadership about creating a culture. In a sense, I guess that kind of falls under leadership. My buddy Mike Sanborn said, “You don’t need a title to be a leader,” especially when it comes to customer service. You can be the role model other people aspire to be like or want to emulate simply by doing the right thing. That, to me, is a leadership skill.

Walt Disney, for example, walked across the theme park, and everybody who worked there said, “There’s Mr. Disney” and they were staring at him because he was an icon, a star. Even though he was the executive and he owned a theme park, it was a still big deal seeing the boss walk by. If he walked by a piece of paper and didn’t stoop down to pick it up and throw it away, he gave permission to everyone else to do the same. He actually wrote about this, and he specifically called it “stooping to excellence.”

When I was a kid, at age 14 or 15 years old, I worked in a gas station and I worked as a maintenance guy in a building. I remember trying to weed one day. These weeds were taller than I was, and I couldn’t seem to pull them through the fence. They were all stuck and winding themselves through the chain link fence.

I remember the guy who ran the business that owned the building. He was the president. He would drive up in his fancy car. He had a coat and tie on. He saw me struggling, and he came over. He took off his coat and his tie. He said, “This is how you do it.” He did it with me for 10 or 15 minutes, and I thought, “Wow.” He said, “I would never expect anybody to do anything that I wouldn’t be willing to do myself.” It wasn’t that he knew how to do everything, but I thought, “That is a life lesson.” Call it a leadership lesson.

I don’t need to be the perfect person in my office to be able to perfect something when I hand it off to somebody to do, but what I do know is I have knowledge enough about it to know what’s right and what is a good result. I surround myself with people who I can delegate to who will do a better job than me or allow me to do what I’m best at without getting mired down in some of the details and some of the administrative things that I probably shouldn’t be doing.

Example – call it leadership – I think this is a great personal leadership thing that anybody can do if they’re running their business, or they’re in a department and they’re a manager of any kind, or maybe they’re just doing what they’re supposed to be doing yet the find they’re distracted with many things. Take any activity inventory.

I learned this from Dan Sullivan. I go to a coach once per quarter, and I meet with Dan Sullivan or one of his coaches to make sure that I’m focused and doing the right thing. One of the things they suggested was take an activity inventory. At the end of the week, there were 45 things that I did. We got a big order. Oh, I’m excited, and I started packing the boxes up with books for this order. We sat down at the end of the week, and I had all 45 things. If I did it once, that was enough. If I did it ten times, I only wrote it down once.

My assistant and I sat down, and she said, “Shep, you packed a box of books. Do you really need to be packing a box of books? Shouldn’t I do that? You should be on the phone talking to clients, selling more books.”

“Oh, that’s a good idea.” I eliminated over 30 items from that list of 45 and then I empowered my assistant to protect me from ever doing those other 30 things again. That’s part of her or his job. I have a gentleman here. Danielle in my office is my main assistant but Evan also knows his job is to do certain things and make sure that I don’t do what I used to do that his job is to do now.

I think that’s a real important piece. I think leaders let people do things. They empower them to do things. That’s kind of what I’m talking about here.

**Cydney**: You think that a really important part of being successful is knowing where is your highest and best use of your time, making sure that you’re as productive as you can be.

**Shep**: Right, and that goes to what we’ve been talking about earlier. I asked a CEO once of a major company, “What is the most important job you do?” He said, “I defend a culture.” Leadership needs to define a culture, and they need to live that culture. They need to demonstrate that culture, and if they see anybody or the company itself going out of alignment, they need to bring it back in. That’s their job.

**Cydney**: When you’re out there and you’re working with all these companies and in your life experience, what do you see that is holding people back from achieving their goals? In my business, we’re helping people all the time to get what they want in life, but I find that a lot of times, it’s stuff going on in their head that is holding them back. Do you find that?

**Shep**: You won’t believe how many times people have said, “I’m afraid of success. What happens if the client says yes? What happens if all of a sudden, I have to do this?” That’s probably a little bit of a gross exaggeration. I sat next to a guy once on an airplane, and he has been struggling for a long time. I say, “I don’t get it, man. I’m telling you the same thing every time we talk. Why aren’t you taking action?” He said, “I’m afraid to. What happens if it works?”

“Wow. I’ve never had anybody tell me that before.” But Cydney, what happens if it works?

**Cydney**: Is it the fear of the unknown?

**Shep**: I think it’s the fear that if you are successful, how is that going to change you? I recently dealt with somebody and what was holding them back was their partner, their spouse. They said they just didn’t want to distance themselves too far. If they got too successful, they’d feel there was this gap. I said, “On the contrary, maybe that spouse can support you. Maybe that spouse can grow with you.”

She was concerned that he had a job that wasn’t quite up to par with where she was going and he was going to resent her for that success. People think that way and I say, “Oh, that’s sad. We have to get you out of that way of thinking.”

**Cydney**: What’s your advice for people when they’re stuck in that fear?

**Shep**: I don’t really like to give advice because advice is opinion, but I know this. My kids and my wife… My wife has been along for the ride. My wife has been my biggest supporter, my fan. She works with me, and even when she didn’t work with me and she was doing her job, I supported her every bit as much as she supported me.

My son is a musician as I mentioned. He’s 25 years old, and he’s gone to New Orleans. He put together a great band. He has a couple of CDs. It’s a hard, hard business, and I find myself, every once in a while, having to give him a pep talk. It’s amazing to me how he’ll fight me. Part of the reason he fights me is because he’s my son and it’s his dad giving him this pep talk. But I tell him, “This is the way I did it. This is the way I think. You don’t have to think this way, but you should take what I say as data and decide what you want to do with it rather than refute it.”

That’s how I do it. I think that sharing experience is far better than sharing opinion, because if you say, “What do you think of this idea?” and I say, “Cydney, that’s a great idea. You should definitely take your life savings and invest in this idea.” Then it doesn’t work and you come back and you say, “Shep, you said it was a good idea.” I’ll say, “Well, I told you I *thought* it was a good idea.”

But if you say, “Shep, what do you think of this idea?” and I say, “Cydney, you’re not going to believe this, but I did exactly that just last year and this is the result that I had. There were some issues along the way and this is how I resolved them,” now you’re going in saying, “Okay, Shep did this. Maybe it will work for me.” If you’re struggling, you come to me and say, “Shep, it’s not working,” and I’ll say, “Have you done this? This is what I did.” “Oh, I didn’t do that.” You’re dealing with data and not conjecture.

**Cydney**: That’s the great thing about having mentors, I find. We have mentors in our business, and quite often, our mentor will say to us, “When you hit this problem in the past, was there something you did that worked really well?” Sometimes it’s as simple as that, reminding you of what you’ve done that has worked well, and it gets you out of the rut. Sometimes it can be as simple as that, and we’ll say, “Oh yeah, we did this and it worked brilliantly and we’ll just do that again.”

But that’s the great thing about having somebody who is helping you from the outside, because when you’re in your issues, they seem so overwhelming.

**Shep**: Right. Not just from the outside. I have mentors in my speaking business who I admire. Even today, I’m in a mastermind group with about 18 other speakers, and there are a few people who we brainstorm on occasion together. Would you call them mentors or peers? We mentor each other – in a sense – and the only thing that makes us peers is that we’re both in the same business and we’re all successful but we do things so differently and we learn from each other.

If I was 20 years younger than the person I’m talking to, I might look at that person more as a mentor than a peer just because of the respect I have for the elders. By the way, don’t ever think that somebody who is young can’t mentor you and help you.

There is a guy, Jared Kleinert. You need to interview Jared Kleinert. This guy is a rock star. He is 19 years old. He decided to take a year off between high school and college. In that time, he has written a book. It’s coming out in July. It may be a New York Times Bestseller. It’s called *2 Billion Under 20*, about Millennials 20 years and younger who have done amazing things. He found 75 people to talk about the amazing things.

Even Jared, at 17 years old was working with 2 VC firms on funding his companies. This is a 17-year-old kid. Forbes called him the definition of the social entrepreneur at age 17. Can you imagine? He’s 19 now and I’m interviewing him for my radio show. He’s blowing me away and I’m thinking, “I’m talking to a guy who is 39, not 19, a person who is highly educated.”

This kid is a rock star. He wrote this book. He wanted to meet Tony Hsieh at Zappos, so he just called him up and he ended up staying with him. He wanted to work with Keith **Barazzi [? 43:51]**. He wanted to learn from this guy who has written best-selling books, so he went out to California and basically interned with him just so he can study at the feet of who he thought was the master.

This is what he called it. He said, “My life is an experiment. I love to try things. I decided I wanted to try different diets.” Not diet like “I want to go on a diet and lose weight.” He’s a trim, thin guy. He said, “I’m going to take time and try the vegan diet. Then I’m going to try this kind. I just want to see what it does because maybe I’ll find something better.”

Then he said something brilliant. I’m thinking he’s going to go through life experimenting his entire life. But no, he said, “Once I start to find the things that I like, then I’ll start to hone in on what my passion and what I really want to do is.” We don’t have to, at 19, hone in on that. We have the luxury when we’re younger to do those things. By the way, I believe even as we get older, we have some of that luxury if we’re willing to make the time and work for it.

**Cydney**: I think the young people have that advantage in that they’re not set in their ways. That’s fantastic. I definitely will be reaching out to him and see if we can get him an interview, too, because like you, I get really inspired. It’s not about age. It’s about people having an unfettered joy of life and getting out there and really trying things. With success comes failure, and that’s just part of the journey, right?

**Shep**: Failure is a great learning experience. Someone once said of my son that they admire him so. He took a risk. He left college to become a musician. What was cool is that this guy said to me, “I just admire your son because every day that he wakes up, it’s like a brand new day.” It really is for him, because who knows where he’s going to go or what he’s going to do?

He kind of has this idea. I remember he called me up one day and said, “Dad, I don’t have any more money left.” I said, “How much money?” He said, “Dad, I don’t have *any* money.” He said, “I even looked in the couch. I found 77 cents.” I said, “You need to go and get your guitar. Go down to Bourbon Street and play the guitar on the street and put a little tip jar out there.” He says, “Dad, I don’t have enough bus far to get me to Bourbon Street and when I get there, my guitar is not loud enough.”

Now he’s making excuses and that aggravated me. I may be getting off the track a little bit, but let me tell you what happened. This was a great thing. The first thing I did was I said, “I’m going to wire some money into your checking account, so go to the ATM.” He’s at an ATM where it doesn’t cost him anything to pull money out. I sent him $10. Did you hear that? $10. Not $100, not $500. I sent him $10.

**Cydney**: You’re tougher than I am.

**Shep**: I said, “I want you to walk to the ATM. I want you to take the $10 out. I want you to go buy some peanut butter and some bread so you have something to eat for the next couple of days.” That’s number one. Number two, I went to the music store – I play guitar myself – and I bought him a very inexpensive battery-powered amplifier for his guitar, so he could just plug his guitar into it.

That was the thing. He said, “I can’t play my acoustic because it can’t be heard, and I can’t play my electric because I can’t plug my amp in anywhere so that I can be heard.” I bought him the battery-powered amplified which cost about $80. I sent him two sets of batteries so when he ran out of batteries, he’d have more batteries, and then I put $2 – two $1 bills – on top of it all, wrapped it up, and I overnighted it to him.

I took my daughter out that day. We went to see a play at the theater. We went to a really nice dinner, and then we went to a sporting event. I spent hundreds of dollars that day on my daughter. I’m thinking I have to do something for my son, but I’m not going to give him money just to give him money.

He got this package. He opened up and said, “Dad, why did you send this?” I said, “Now you don’t have excuse. You’ll be heard. In case you run out of batteries, you have a second set of batteries. Go down to Bourbon Street and by the way, I understand bus fare is $1.25. Now you have $2. You have 75 cents left over. Stick it in the tip jar just to get things started. He calls me back the next day. “Dad, you’re not going to believe it. I made $60. I am back!”

He doesn’t really bother me for living money any more. If he wants to do a big project – like do a CD – he’ll ask me if I can help him out and front some of the money. Of course, I’m his dad. I love him, I’m going to help him, and he’s done some really great things. That was a tough thing to do as a parent, but what a great learning experience.

By the way, eventually he couldn’t afford his rent. He lived in a car for three months. That killed me because I told him, I will send you money to bring you home, but I’m not going to send you money for your lifestyle down there. He was a smart guy. Every night, he would go out and perform, and maybe he’d meet somebody and he’d have a place to stay that night. Otherwise, he parked his car on the college campus down at Tulane. He knew that was a safe lot to park in and he could just rest in his car.

He got up in the morning and he somehow managed to befriend the people in the gym – because they are beautiful facilities at these colleges – and they let him in. He’d shower. He’d work out. Then he’d go to the library there and he’d sit in a nice, cool air-conditioned library and start looking up the different clubs and cities so that he could start making a little bit of a plan on who he was going to go visit. That’s how he did it. Eventually, he made his money back and he got back into an apartment. That’s life lessons.

**Cydney**: Yes, and I think that’s that whole thing of it makes you stronger when you have to live through all those challenges. That’s how it was when I first moved to Australia. I was working in the markets, and I’d have a fantastic day just selling. I had to just sell all day long. You start to get so empowered because you realize that you can grow into being somebody who is responsible for your own financial well-being. From there, it grew and grew, so here I am today still selling.

**Shep**: And very successful and you have a great energy and an aura around you. People love to be around you.

**Cydney**: Thank you.

**Shep**: I think it’s not that you are successful and that’s why people want to be around you. You exude success and people pick up on it. Your enthusiasm is contagious.

**Cydney**: Thank you, Shep. Right back at you.

**Shep**: Thank you.

**Cydney**: We’re getting to the end of our time so I have a couple of really important questions that I wanted to ask you. One of them was what is a big “why” for what you do? What keeps you going in helping all these companies?

**Shep**: I love it, first of all. I learn so much. I think one of the things that drives me is that it’s something new – not all the time, but it’s always evolving. If you look at where I was maybe not last month, but how about last year? Where have I come from it?

By the way, I measure everything. I’m very clear about my goals, so I know where I come. If I want to try something, go out there and I want to work for a particular client, I will pick up the phone, just start talking to the client and say, “How can we work together?” That’s what keeps me going. It’s fresh. It’s new. It’s ever-evolving and I’m very fortunate to be able to do that. I think that’s part of it.

And I love it. I didn’t apply for a job. I didn’t apply for 20 jobs and then this is the only one that took me. This is something I decided I wanted to do.

**Cydney**: You’ve worked it, and you continue to evolve. That’s one of the things, when I met you and I started looking at all your marketing, I said, “Wow.” You’re very, very organized compared to most of the speakers out there. It really shows, your professionalism.

Tell me what’s next for you? Where are you going from here? What’s your big plan?

**Shep**: Currently, I’m the president of the National Speakers Association, which is a side occupation, it’s a volunteer thing. I’ve been on the board now for coming on ten years. I will become immediate past president, and with that title comes a lot less responsibility to the organization.

**Cydney**: Yes, you’ve been a hero taking that on.

**Shep**: Well, thank you. I’ve had to travel quite a bit. I basically find that certain days, I’ll spend a good chunk of my day on NSA activity. What I’m looking forward to doing is being able to shrink my day down to maybe save an hour or two per day to focus on my business, etc.

By the way, I love the Association but I knew coming in, I’m going to be devoting a tremendous amount of time so just get used to it. You’re going to add an extra two to three hours per day to your life in the office. You know what? It has been so gratifying. The people, like yourself, who as I travel around the world representing the National Speakers Association, it has been wonderful.

By the way, traveling around the world sounds like a luxury – and it can be but recognize all the business I had to turn down in order to be able to fly to Australia to speak at the conference for the Professional Speakers Association of Australia, or over to South Africa, over to Singapore, or over to Germany, and all the different countries that I’ve been to. In order to do that, I had to sacrifice income.

You know what? It was worth it. I learned a lot, met wonderful people. And I didn’t stop working in my business just because I was on the road. I still wrote articles, managed my social media, interacted with people all over the world, and I kept my marketing going. There is nothing else a speaker needs to know. No matter how successful and busy you are, do not stop marketing.

**Cydney**: That’s wonderful advice. I thank you very, very much for spending this time with us, Shep Hyken. Do you have any last words of wisdom for somebody who maybe has a big dream and they’re thinking about doing something different in their life? What has made the big difference for you?

**Shep**: Having a big dream, a dream is a goal without a deadline. So stop dreaming and make it a goal, number one. Make it somewhat attainable, meaning it’s not so far out there. I realize at my age if I decided I want to be a professional hockey player, I’m probably not going to be a professional hockey player, but it doesn’t mean I can’t play hockey and I can’t play in tournaments.

As it applies to business, as we set goals… Let’s even break it down to something even simpler. Let’s say we want to lose ten pounds, and if at the end of the year, we only lost eight and not ten, we can either celebrate that we lost the eight or we can gaff out over those last two pounds that we didn’t lose. I choose to celebrate the eight, and I think that’s a real important thing to look at.

As you try and aspire to do certain things, look how far you’ve gone by just putting it out there, because if you hadn’t put it out there to begin with, you wouldn’t have gotten to where you are.

**Cydney**: Awesome advice, and I so agree with you. I’m a big believer in set high goals and even if you only get halfway there, you make sure you celebrate.

**Shep**: Yes, you got halfway there. What happens if you didn’t set the goal at all, right?

**Cydney**: That’s right. Thank you so much. I will wrap it up. If anybody wants to come and find out more about Shep, I can highly recommend his website. He has all kinds of interviews on there. You can get links to his books. You can go to Amazon and find him on there. It’s Hyken.com, right Shep? Or is there another site that people should go to?

**Shep**: Hyken.com.

**Cydney**: Hyken.com.

**Shep**: More about me than you’ll ever want to learn.

**Cydney**: It’s a fantastic website. I compliment you on that. It has lots and lots of links to his interviews. How can they get access to your articles that you write on a regular basis?

**Shep**: They’re right there.

**Cydney**: Right there on the website.

**Shep**: You can subscribe to the newsletter or subscribe to the RSS feed to the blog. Just click on the link that says “Customer Service Blog.” By the way, I’m one of those junkies who collects URLs, so if you go to CustomerServiceArticles.com, that’s the kind of thing where it links straight to the articles. They’re all there.

I believe, once again, we talked about this earlier, the law of reciprocity – the more you give, the more you get. I give away tons of content. People say, “How can you give away so much of your information?” I shoot videos every week. People call me and say, “Thanks, we use your videos in our sales meetings every week when we meet with our salespeople.”

I’m think, “Boy, it would be nice if you hired me,” but no, I don’t say that. Guess what happens? Somebody calls me up and says, “We’ve been using your material for a year. We thought we might want to bring you in.” Well, there you go. It worked.

**Cydney**: Yes, fantastic. I’m sure that we can all get ideas from watching your videos. You must have learned over the years how to set them up properly so that they’re useful for the customer but also help to seed your business.

**Shep**: Here is what I would suggest. Go to my YouTube channel, which is YouTube.com/ShepHyken. I don’t care if you look at the videos to watch the videos for content… By the way, I’m not saying I’ve done this the right way but I looked on there today and I have 340 videos on there. That’s a lot of videos. I want to own my market, so I choose to use videos to help get me out there, and I also write ferociously. It’s all credibility. When they see you talking about it, I think it helps.

There is a video on there at the bottom that says “The personal side of Shep. This is where Shep lives, where Shep works” and you’ll see I have some information about how I set up my video studio. If anybody is a speaker and wants to learn that, check out that video. It’s on there.

**Cydney**: Awesome. Shep Hyken, thank you so much for your time. It’s always a pleasure catching up with you.

**Shep**: You too, Cydney.

**Cydney**: Everybody, definitely go and check him out. I’ll see you when I’m in the States or you’re in Australia.

**Shep**: I can’t wait.

**Cydney**: Thanks, Shep.