

Stretch Scott Sonenshein

[00:00:00]**Scott Sonenshein:** we're not always feeling like we're inadequate or we never have enough, or we need to wait until we have more. Instead, we look inward and we appreciate the abundance within us. We appreciate the things we already have and we're able to actually do more with what's right in hand, instead of worrying what's in someone else's hand.

Debbie Sorensen: That was Dr Scott Sonenshein on Psychologists Off the Clock

Diana Hill: We are four clinical psychologists, here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work, and health.

Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in Mile High Denver, Colorado.

Diana Hill: I'm Dr. Diana Hill practicing in seaside, Santa Barbara, California.

Yael Schonbrun: From coast to coast. I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book Of Act [00:01:00] Metaphors.

Debbie Sorensen: We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock.

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Debbie Sorensen: Praxis gets some of the best names in the field. People who do really amazing trainings and you can do them so easily from home right now. I know I've really enjoyed some of the trainings that I've done in the past, and there's some great ones on the lineup coming up.

Diana Hill: Yeah, just looking at it, the lineup. Well, you can always do act immersion with Steve Hayes. That's fantastic. If you want to take a deep dive into acceptance and commitment therapy, but I was also really excited to see. Jonathan Kanter Robyn Gobin and Daniel Rosen are doing a course from ally to anti-racist, which is a six week course using the contextual behavioral model of racism to cultivate personal and professional anti-racist action

I was also excited to [00:02:00] see Dennis Tirch and Laura Silberstein. Doing a foundations of compassion focused therapy course for those that want to learn more about CFT.

Debbie Sorensen: you'll see some of our old podcast guests that we've had on the show doing Praxis training. So check it out and you'll want to go through our website offtheclockpsych.com to register because you can get a \$25 off discount code for life training events.

Diana Hill: So make it a new intention in 2021. Check out Praxis CET.

Jill Stoddard: I am so excited to announce that the co-hosts of psychologists off the clock are hosting our first annual psychologists off the clock wise minds summit, how to adapt and thrive in today's challenging times. we have an amazing.

Lineup of speakers. We have Dr. Rick Hanson coming to talk about growing the good in your brain. Dr. Raphael Palayo is coming back . To answer our questions about how to sleep. We have Julie Lythcott-Haims who wrote how to be an adult. Who's coming to talk to us about empowering our [00:03:00] kids in challenging times and JG harbinger from the art of charm podcast.

Who's going to talk to us about conversations that connect and many, many more including presentations from all four of the POTC co-hosts. Our summit takes place on Friday, January 29th and Saturday, January 30th. The first 300 registrants will be able to register for free and we'll continue to release free tickets as we get donations and additional sponsors.

And after that, tickets will only be \$8 just to cover administrative fees. So we hope you will join us. We're really excited. You can check it out on our website at offtheclockpsych.com.

Debbie Sorensen: Hi, this is Debbie. I was really delighted to interview Dr. Scott Sonenshein on his book, which is called Stretch: Unlock the Power of Less and Achieve More Than You Ever Imagined.

I heard about this book through a friend and I read it and I was so excited when he said he [00:04:00] would come on the podcast, he's in a field that's slightly outside of ours. He's more in the organizational management realm. Um, and yet there was so much in this book that is absolutely applicable to my life, to my work, to my clients.

I just think. His work is really thought provoking and amazing. And I'm here with Jill today to introduce the episode by talking a little bit about what we both gained from this conversation. Jill, what'd you think?

Jill Stoddard: Well, I loved this episode. As I shared with you, before we hit record, I was furiously taking notes on, you know, five pages of my, my little notebook because I got so much out of it And, you know, one of the things that really struck me is at one point you give a personal example and, you know, you say something like, I know it's just a tiny example.

Like almost like apologetically. And I thought, but I think that's exactly right. Like to learn how to stretch is a skill, just like any other that needs to be developed over [00:05:00] time and starting small with something that feels manageable, seems like exactly the right way to like build your ability to stretch so that you can then start applying it and generalizing it into other domains.

Debbie Sorensen: Yes. , he writes about all of these. Concepts that are pretty big and important, like resourcefulness and really prioritizing what's important and looking at your values. And he gives really concrete advice for how to do this. And that includes small things like stretching yourself. Right. Sort of learning something that's outside of your direct.

Area of expertise. And I think sometimes that almost feels like a waste of time, right? Like I've got to just work really hard in my area and produce, produce, produce, but actually being a little bit of a dabbler and sort of loosening up on that and seeing what else is out there can be really helpful.

And I was just telling you, Jill, that I signed up for Masterclass recently, which I know [00:06:00] a lot of people are doing all of a sudden I've. Everybody's doing it. , but it's kind of fun because instead of just vegging watching TV or whatever, you can watch these experts. Talk about an area, you know, nothing about like I'm watching some cooking ones and some on writings, some really cool, interesting areas.

And I'm learning so much, but I'm not that interested in the ones that are more related to psychology because they're not stretching me as much. I'm more like, Oh, what does this person, what does Alice Waters think about going to the grocery store kind of thing?

Jill Stoddard: Yeah. I remember toward the beginning of the pandemic, I learned how to solve the Rubik's cube and that felt like a big stretch for me. but more recently. I've actually been doing less. So, you know, like I'd been reading and, and so reading is a stretch.

I read things that helped me learn. Like, so for example, I was just reading Stephen King's book on writing, which is about learning more about writing, but to be able to like sit on my sofa and read for a [00:07:00] couple of hours on a Saturday and not be filled with anxiety and guilt about all the things that I should be doing, that actually felt like a stretch for me.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Even. So the stretch is actually not producing more or doing more. It's like learning to kind of slow down and reorient.

Jill Stoddard: Right. And, and like being flexible in terms of the way you define success. He talks a lot about how there's this belief that more resources equal greater success. And that really what stretching is about is doing the best you can with the resources that you have. And that in many instances, there's evidence that more is not better.

And, and so, you know, being better about resources doesn't mean necessarily playing small, but it's that like how you define success has to do with your values and.

And I loved the conversation that you and he had about how this applies [00:08:00] to the podcast. And listeners can listen to that, but you know, that there's in, in a lot of the

endeavors we engage in, there is this idea of like leaning into like more and bigger, more numbers, more money, more this, more that.

And I loved the way that he really reoriented us to, to, to think about this in a different way.

Debbie Sorensen: yeah. And sort of staying true to yourself and what's really important to you instead of, I mean, I think it just gets you off that treadmill of feeling like you're always. Seeking and striving and you need more and more and more. And it's like at some point either you're never going to get there or you're going to like fizzle out.

But if you can instead focus on what really matters and just be resourceful with your strengths and with what you have, and then, you know, grow from there. You're in a very different frame of mind.

Jill Stoddard: And I also loved that. He talked about kind of going back to what you were saying about the masterclass and kind of dabbling in different things. It made me think about this tendency culturally, for us to [00:09:00] have our kids. You know, if your kid plays softball, you have to get the pitching coach and the batting coach and everything is all softball all the time.

And part of what he's saying, and I've heard this in other areas too, is that's not necessarily the way to go. And that that stretching means being able to learn a lot of different skills and a lot of different areas. Yes.

Debbie Sorensen: I mean, it has a parent doesn't that feel like such a relief? Cause sometimes I feel like, Oh my gosh, I'm supposed to be doing this. And it's like, or you don't have to. And that's okay. You know, there's some actual upsides to that to not putting, you know, 40 hours a week into your child, learning baseball.

Jill Stoddard: Yeah, totally.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I sure stretched a lot by reading this book. . And I hope you will enjoy the interview.

I'm here today with Scott Sonenshein, who is a Professor of Management at Rice University. He has a PhD in organizational [00:10:00] behavior from the University of Michigan on the academic side, Dr. Sonenshein does research on management and psychology. Including change creativity, personal growth, social issues, decision-making and influence, which has been published in top academic journals.

He does award-winning research, teaching and speaking, and has helped executives, entrepreneurs, and professionals in a variety of industries. He's also worked as a strategy consultant for major corporations and experienced the.com boom, while working for a Silicon. Valley startup back in the day, which I hope to ask you about, um, he's also the author of two best-selling books, *Stretch: Unlock the Power of Less and Achieve More Than You Ever Imagined*. And he also coauthored the book *Joy at Work* with Marie Kondo, and he

also has done quite a bit of writing for the general public in the New York Times, Time Magazine, Harvard Business Review, and has been [00:11:00] interviewed on.

National and local television and NPR, and has been featured in most major newspapers. Welcome to the podcast. Scott. I'm so happy that you're here with us.

Scott Sonenshein: Thanks so much for having me.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. So here's something that I think is interesting. Your background is really an organizational behavior and you're a professor of management at a business school.

Is that correct? Okay. And it's interesting because I'm a clinical psychologist, I'm a therapist and I've been really using your ideas with my clients left and right since I've been reading the book, I think I've mentioned it probably about five or six times to different people this week in my therapy sessions.

And not just because of work. I think it's because the ideas that you write about the concepts that you write about of stretching and the power of less are not just useful for running a business. They're also important for us all, as individuals living our lives. Do you find that to be the case yourself?

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah, absolutely [00:12:00] what I try and do in the, in the book. And all of my work is, well, my. Core expertise is in the area of organizational psychology. Many of the principles apply to other domains of life I've written, uh, and talked a lot about parenting, for example, which having a, both an eight and 13 year old daughter is, is always top of mind.

And I'm always looking for as much help and advice as I can get, uh, uh, on those, on those topics. So I think that, uh, stretching and resourcefulness is especially helpful. When you think about. Uh, children and their development children are naturally born resourceful, and it's a lot of our institutions like education and school systems and our businesses that kind of quashed out that resourcefulness.

So I think there's a lot of lessons there. I think there's a lot of lessons about relationships, which I also write about, uh, in, in stretch and talk about, uh, my wife and our relationship and how we've tried to be resourceful in lots of different ways. So resourcefulness itself is a, is a [00:13:00] concept that can be repurposed in.

All of the domains that we operate in.

Debbie Sorensen: I agree. And I'm hoping that today, as we go, we'll talk about some of those different domains, including relationships and parenting and some other areas of life, because it really does. I think that's what I'm finding is that it applies to all kinds of areas. And it's really been, uh, thought provoking for me in my own life.

And you know, here we are in this. Time of this pandemic. And I think resourcefulness is especially important as we have to stretch and grow and be really flexible with what life is throwing our way.

Scott Sonenshein: Hey, and I would say is if there's silver lining, obviously, uh, no one, uh, hopes that we, uh, you know, we'd be in this type of situation and there's a lot of pain and suffering that people are having right now. But one potential silver lining is that. This is an environment that is forcing us because of circumstances, because we can't do things the way that we're used to doing them, because we might be out of a [00:14:00] job or income might be a substantially decreased because of what's happening with the economy as well.

Our kids' schools, uh, you know, our virtual, uh, we're having to make these adjustments. But my, my hope is that. Uh, we're, we're having to stretch by, by default right now, our backs are against the wall and there's a reason. The cliché says necessity is the mother of invention because when your backs are against the wall that activates the creativity and the resourcefulness, but the potential silver lining is we might learn through the hardship and the constraints that we're facing right now, a durable mindset that we can stick with.

Even after the pandemic that teaches us a better way to live a better way to work a better way to approach the world. And so that would be kind of the one small silver lining. I would hope out of what's happening with the pandemic that as much pain and suffering is out there, that we might be able to teach yourself something that outlasts the pandemic.

And this long here [00:15:00] after the virus has, has dissipated.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I think there are some, some life lessons actually. Can I just offer a really. Simple quick day-to-day example of this. And you could tell me if you think this fits. So I, I like to cook, but I tend to be a bit of a, I'm not a super creative cook. I'm a bit of a by the book recipe follower. And I was constantly running to the grocery store before the pandemic to get things that I needed to cook recipes.

Um, probably twice a week. I'd go to the grocery store and often. I would just buy whatever it said to have in the recipe. And especially in the early days of the pandemic, you can't really do that. And so I would have to take a recipe and, you know, I wouldn't have half the ingredients, so I'd have to completely change it.

And it just became much more. Of a creative process for me and also just, okay, what do I have on hand and how can I use it? And I mean, that's such a tiny example. I know there's much bigger examples of people [00:16:00] adapting. Um, but I'm hoping that that skill will stick with me, that I can take recipes and just be a lot more loose and flexible and creative with what I'm doing in the kitchen.

Scott Sonenshein: Well, your, your, your intuition though is exactly right. I've, I've done, uh, quite a bit of research with, with food trucks actually, and looking at their resourcefulness in terms of how they're able to cook in such a small space without the usual equipment that you would have. In a regular restaurant and how they're playing with ingredients.

And in fact, if you go back to a world war two, when there was food rationing, because of the major challenges of, of those times, that's when the modern version of the meat Paul was actually invented because there wasn't enough meat. So you had to ration the meat and that's when you started adding the breadcrumbs and other ingredients that made the meatball actually better.

So it's. By doing this experimentation when you don't have the typical resources around you, you can innovate. And not only just get by with the constraint, you might actually do something even [00:17:00] better.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, something new and innovative. Yeah. Absolutely. So in stretch, you write about two mindsets. So let's, let's talk about this basic concept here from stretch. You talk about these two mindsets chasing and stretching. So what do you mean by chasing, which is sort of the opposite of, of what you're hoping for in your book?

Scott Sonenshein: Chasing is simply the idea that you believe you need more to do more. So if you want to solve your problem, it's all about the quantity of resources. So you want to improve schools, hire more teachers. You want to turn the round and underperforming project. Add some more team members increase the budget and it's the idea that to solve our problems, we just need more, but that's really misleading because oftentimes, and what the research bears out is that more resources don't actually lead to the best [00:18:00] results.

But. Chasing is something that is embedded in our culture. So it makes it very difficult because there's, there's almost this intuitive sense that says, well, yeah, of course, if you want to solve a problem, just, just throw more time at it, throw more money at it, throw more expertise at it. Uh, and so we have this, this belief that this is the key to all of our problems and it's not.

And then I would say on the. Psychological front there's there's there's aspects of this mindset that make it hard not to chase. And the big part of it is social comparisons. And you look at yourself and you compare yourself to your neighbors or your colleagues or your friends. And you think that you need the same amount of stuff, the same amount of resources, the same amount of anything in order to be, uh, to meet your, to meet your goals.

And that's a really dangerous place to be because. These comparisons are always going to leave you disappointed because it was kind of this funny anecdote and [00:19:00] study I talk about in the book about grass, which I think really captures the cultural embeddedness of chasing. And it's the idea that. In the suburbs, especially we tend to Ogle other people's grass and we think that their grass is always greener.

Um, and what's interesting is if you actually look at the physics of grass, when you're at your house and you are appearing over your fence and looking at your neighbor's grass from an angle, there's an. Are the official greenness that that angle creates that makes it appear that your neighbor's grass is actually greener than your grass.

So it really lends, lends credence to this cliché that the grass is always greener. On the other side, it literally is because of the way that you're looking at things. And the same thing goes for about how we think about our lives. When we look at other people and we make those social comparisons, we might look on our.

Our LinkedIn feed and see all these people getting promotions because social media [00:20:00] offers a very jaded perspective on other people. I mean, how many people do you

know that are broadcasting on LinkedIn that they just got fired? No, one's there? No one's talking about on their Facebook feed, how they're getting their oil changed, or they're going to the doctor.

It's all about all of these wonderful and amazing experience that they're having. And the research shows that the. Overwhelming preponderance of information that's shared on these platforms is positive. So as you start to kind of make sense of yourself in social comparisons, are there a way of making meaning?

We want to place ourselves in the world and as we start making sense of ourselves increasingly through social media, which is. More prevalent because of the pandemic. And we're not as connected and impersonal people were going to have a very jaded view of people and we're going to feel inadequate and we're going to feel like we need all of these, these things.

If we want to be successful, or we want to be happier, we want to be thriving in their lives. And chasing really feeds into that because it's this urge to constantly feel like we need more to do more.

[00:21:00] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, I think that's, we, we get this idea that everybody else has more and to get ahead, we need more. And I think in your work, there's a bit of a social commentary because you're challenging that that sort of cultural norm that really contributes to that way of thinking and yeah. It's very deeply embedded.

I think there are people whose entire job is to convince you that you need their resource and that you have to have more and more and more that this, this chasing you're always chasing something to kind of go against. That is a bit of a revolutionary concept.

Scott Sonenshein: Right. And it's a, it's an, it's an uphill battle, but it's a battle worth, worth, worth having, because chasing doesn't lead to better results. And it also leads to misery and it leads to us delaying things that we care about. I mean, how many times did people say if I only had more time or I had more money or had more expertise or I had better connections I could do.

Fill in the blank. And until I have those [00:22:00] things, I'm not going to do them. So what do I do? I do nothing. I just delay the things that I care about, the goals that I want to pursue, the experiences that I want to have, the relationships that I want to form, whatever they might be. I just wait until tomorrow, until that time comes.

When I feel like I have enough to go ahead and do it. But oftentimes that's an, that's an infinite weight and those things never come. And so we don't move any closer to the things that we care about.

Debbie Sorensen: Right, right. Yeah. Just waiting and not taking action. Well, there are some, absolutely some downsides of this growing too quickly and having the chasing mindset. And I would love if you'd share your experience in the.com era and Silicon Valley and what you noticed in that situation.

Scott Sonenshein: So I was working in Washington, DC and I, I got a phone call out of the blue from a recruiter in Silicon Valley. I had never. Been to California and experienced, [00:23:00] uh, what Silicon Valley was doing. And I was, I don't know, a year out of school or something. And they were making all of these overtures to get me to join this company.

I had never heard of an industry I didn't even know existed. And they said, just, just come out and see what this is like. And I get out there and. It's just kind of one of these crazy office environments where there's a lot of, lot of people around and lots of just seeming excitement seems like a really exciting place to be.

And then of course, they offer me more than double my salary, a bunch of stock options. They give me a bunch of people to manage and they give me a million dollar budget to spend. And so my 20. Two year old self or something. It's like, yeah, of course, this sounds amazing. How can I, how can I say no to this?

So three weeks later, I moved from Washington DC to San Francisco area and I, I started at this organization and. It was kind of almost this euphoric experience at first, because it was, it was like a big part of the, it was just like the money was just, [00:24:00] you just had all this money to spend. And I had no idea what I was doing.

I was only working for a year or so. And I, you know, first it was like, this is, this is amazing. This is, this is so fun. When else would I get an opportunity to do something like this? But after about six months, I really started getting perplexed because we were spending all of this money, but we had so little to show and in fact, We really seem to be good at two things, we seem to be really good at convincing people to write us checks, venture capitalist, and they wrote us tens and tens of millions of dollars of checks to finance this, this business.

But we were even better at spending that money because there was almost this magical formula that is, as soon as someone gave us money, we would spend it, they would give us more money. And the value of our company would go up. The value of our stock options would go up and it would be, you know, a kind of a win-win for everyone.

Of course until people stop writing checks and realized that we had nothing to show for it. And when we hit a bump and we had the, [00:25:00] um, uh, recession star, they then the.com bubble was beginning to, uh, to burst. No one wanted to send us any money and we had not learned. How to do anything productive with our resources.

All we learned how to do was acquire and spend resources that the business started tanking. And we started downsizing just as quickly as we grew. And we had nothing, nothing to show for it. And it was that experience that convinced me to head back to graduate school and really understood stand. Why is it that we have all these resources we had?

What seemed like. Everything in place. I mean, my entire group was, uh, it was like me and the entire, like graduating class of two years of this Stanford social psych PhD program. It was really smart people with just tons of cash floating around and we just amounted to nothing. And so why is it that some people in some organizations find success and meaning and growth, uh, with so little.

Whereas I'm at this [00:26:00] organization and we failed with so much, and that really inspired me to, to go on and get my PhD and research resourcefulness, understand the science of resourcefulness. And eventually that led me to writing stretch.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, it did really inspired. That experience seems to have really inspired your passion for this topic. And it's so interesting. Cause it just, it makes no sense why this was happening. It sounds too good to be true. And in the end it really was.

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah, no, it was, I mean, I, I was 22. I was really, really naive. You know, why, why, why would this company be throwing all of this money at me and having me be responsible for all of these things? And the answer is, um, that they had so much money to go around. It was very easy to squander then that's. That's another challenge of course, of chasing is that we don't appreciate what we do have.

We don't see the abundance within us. And we think that the abundance outside of us is going to be nonstop. And we're always going to be [00:27:00] the good times are always going to be rolling, but life for most people, if not for everyone. Just like for organizations is full of ups and downs, and we've got to learn how to, you know, weather, weather the bad times, just as much as we do have to learn how to enjoy the good times.

Diana Hill: We've had a number of guests on the show that we've been inspired by, and that are offering you our listeners discounts on their programs. If you go to our website offtheclockpsych.com, you'll be able to find coupon codes for the programs of Dr. Judson Brewer, Dr. Rick Hanson and Jen Lumenlun. So go check it out at, offtheclockpsych.com and start learning today.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, and let's talk about that other mindset, which is different from the chasing mindset, the stretching mindset and how that is different from chasing this sense of. You know, resourcefulness, tell us about stretching.

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah, stretching really is the mindset of being resourceful. The recognition that it's how you use your resources that matter. It's not [00:28:00] about the. Amount of resources you have. It's about what you're actually doing with those resources. It's about recognizing that constraints. It's not constraints are not something to be afraid of.

It's about embracing constraints and recognizing that we can get through constraints. We can even work better because of constraints because constraints give us. A license kind of like a permission slip to be able to do things more innovatively, more creatively to come up with novel solutions. So instead of trying to fight constraints with chasing and thinking, we need to overcome them.

We need to wait for a time when we can have more resources. With stretching, we embrace those constraints and we work better because of them because they, they literally make the brain more flexible, more open to new types of connections that allow for innovative solutions.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. In one of the quotes I wrote down from [00:29:00] your book was that it releases from releases us from the anxiety of never having enough. And I like that because I think there's almost a sense of freedom. And if we stop chasing and seeking more and more and more, we can focus on something that perhaps might be even more important.

Scott Sonenshein: Right. We're not, we're not always feeling like we're inadequate or we never have enough, or we need to wait until we have more. Instead, we look inward and we appreciate the abundance within us. We appreciate the things we already have and we're able to actually do more with what's right in hand, instead of worrying what's in someone else's hand.

Debbie Sorensen: Which leads me to one of the, the topics that you talk about is being frugal and frugality. And I think that's a, not often a prized trait in our world where people want to, as you say, you know, impress their neighbors and, and be in social comparison mode, but what are some of the benefits of [00:30:00] being a bit more frugal?

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah, and we should probably back up because when people talk about frugality, they often confuse it with being cheap and they're actually psychologically two very different type of experiences. When we're being cheap, it's a, it's a sense of pain from using resources. So it's any time we, we spend money, for example, there's almost a kind of a pain type feeling, kind of something in our stomach that, that feels wrong.

And that's, that's often not a very good way to live a life. You're you're not enjoying yourself. And you're, you're in this. The state of pain, frugality is actually about pleasure. It's about the pleasure you get from using resources wisely. That doesn't mean that. You don't appreciate nice things, but it does mean, for example, you want to get a good deal on something you don't want to just [00:31:00] squander money on something that you're not going to enjoy.

And when you do spend money, you're going to want to make sure that it's, it's not only something you enjoy, but that you got a good. Do you got a good price on it? Uh, it's being used in lots of different ways. You're getting a lot of use out of it, whatever that might be, but frugality is all about the pleasure of stewardship over our, our resources, as opposed to the pain of just using our resources.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I think that that's an important distinction. Thank you for making that. And I, I can see how that's, w that's an example of something that you can see on the organizational level, and then also. At the level of, you know, individual people and their day-to-day lives, you know, you think of those.com companies that were just blowing money, like crazy.

And then the companies that were more, um, just more thoughtful about their use, use of resources.

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah. And it's actually, I kind of go back and, and think about my, my mother on this one too, is, uh, [00:32:00] I remember as a, as a child, she would have one of these like accordion folders where she would. Clip these coupons from the, from the newspaper to save like 10 cents on a, on a can of beans and, uh, uh, you know, you know,

You know, my family was, was relatively well off and I was very fortunate for that, but that always struck me as interesting that you had, she would take part of her Sunday every week to literally take her scissors out and make this according of coupon so that when she would go to the grocery store and it would be all indexed by the, uh, topic, uh, the, the type of the type of food she would be shopping for.

She'd be able to kind of pull out her arsenal and save a few bucks. Uh, that's about, uh, frugality about kind of just that pleasure of having a good deal.

Debbie Sorensen: Hmm. Interesting. Yeah.

so we, we think about this sometimes on this podcast, I think we've been growing and, and we get more and more listeners over time and we have, I think this. Tension that you're talking about between [00:33:00] wanting to get more resources and kind of the latest, innovative thing and put more money into it and grow it and try to get more listeners.

And then at the same time, just sort of staying true to who we are and not trying to grow too fast because the more we grow, it takes more work and more, it's more demanding of us. And so, I don't know, I can relate to what you're talking about here, that the tension between. Chasing right. Chasing more listeners chasing, , more money coming in and that kind of thing versus slowing things down.

Do you have any words of wisdom for us?

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah, no, I think, I think it's a question that a lot of businesses face, which is how do we want to grow? And I think the way the star or the place to start is to ask what the purpose of that growth is. When we're, when we're stretching. And I should point out that. These are, you know, chasing and stretching are not individual differences.

They're their behaviors. And [00:34:00] sometimes we're more stretchy and sometimes we're more Chasey, but it's not like you're a stretcher. You're a stretcher. You're a chaser. That's not the way it is. These are, these are not fixed, fixed mindsets. These are, these are behaviors, not, not individual differences. So when we think about that at the organizational level, Some organizations, uh, even if they're usually stretchy, might end up finding themselves chasing in a, in a few areas, but about growth stretching is not about toning down our ambitions, deciding that we just should stay small. Stretching is also a pathway to success.

But the question you got to start with is how do you define success? Now, if you define success, as I want to think about impact, and I realized that if I've got more listeners out there. I'm going to be able to engage with more people and the ideas and the guests that I have on the show are going to have a bigger impact on their lives,

that sounds like responsible growth. Now, if you're growing, [00:35:00] because you say, uh, I want to be able to. Let people know that we've hit a certain audience number or you've had this amount of success or podcast, or you're supposed to have as many listeners as possible. Um, you know, those are, those would be more of the chasing type of growth.

So I think he should start off by saying, you know, what's the reason for the, for the growth and, uh, if it's about impact and helping other people, then it makes sense to go ahead and do that. If it's simply to put a trophy up on the wall to feel better because of what other podcasts might be doing or to even just get people to listen or to kind of get them signed up for the podcast, but not truly engaged with the material, just to inflate your, your listenership numbers.

That's, that's more of this, the Chasey type of growth.

Debbie Sorensen: thank you for the free consultation. Yeah. It's it's, it's very much values-based. What are we here for? What are we doing? And I think there's a there's you're right. It's not either. Or that there's this. Sense of kind of quality and quantity, [00:36:00] right? Like wanting to reach people and, but reach people who are going to actually want this and benefit from it and find it helpful versus just sheerly pursuing numbers for the sake of numbers.

Scott Sonenshein: Right. And you see this, you know, a lot on social media these days where people try and build up their followings to feel better for them about themselves to make it seem like they're more important than they are. And they're just getting a bunch of random people in there as opposed to thinking about what their purpose for doing any of this stuff is.

And if we start with our purpose and then growth growth is, is directed at something that we care about. And that's very consistent with being stretchy.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. You write about that in your book with Marie Kondo, the, um, the Joy Work book about cultivating a network, but the right network, instead of just the sheer number of people.

Scott Sonenshein: Right. I mean, the, the, the fact that a network has [00:37:00] tens of thousands of people who aren't close to you, don't care about you, won't help you when you need help. Just means that there's a lot of people who have signed up for your network. But that's not really a meaningful network, a smaller, more intimate network with people who genuinely care about you, people who you would help and people who would be very eager to help you.

That's a much more meaningful network.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Well, another area that you write about is that we tend to prize expertise in one small area, right? People who are the expert on this one field, but sometimes we can be a little bit narrow about that. And you advocate that there's some benefits of having a broader range of experiences and even sometimes an outsider's perspective.

Could you talk a little bit about that? Because I think actually sometimes. People might have this inclination to be a bit of a dabbler, but feel like that's not a good thing. Do you know what I mean?

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah. And so expertise is something that kind of [00:38:00] gets ingrained in our culture and that we feel like the people who on paper at least look like they have the most information, should be the ones who would be most helpful for solving our problems. And yeah, sometimes expertise is really good. I mean, there's no question that I would.

Not wanting to go see my accountant to get a tooth pulled out, nor would I, uh, go to my dentist to have my taxes done. Right. So there are, there is obviously a place for expertise, but I think we've taken this a little too far and Malcolm Gladwell in his book, outliers. Popularized, uh, Andrews Ericsson's research on deliberate practice.

And what Gladwell was writing about was, uh, Anderson's, uh, 10,000 hour rule, that the idea that if you want to be an expert at something you need to accrue approximately 10,000 hours of practice. And that works in, in some domains with a lot of people, misses that if you go back and you actually read the original research, that the [00:39:00] type of tasks that often get used in this type of research are very.

Kind of closed ended tasks. So one of the big studies of course, was about memorizing the number of digits of PI. How many, how many digits can you memorize? And people apparently can go out like five or 600 digits, which is just crazy. I think I probably would stop it at number 10. When you think about the type of problems that you'll people have, the type of challenges that we have now only on a day to day basis, but even some of the grander challenges that we have.

Some of our biggest social social challenges with our research actually shows is that people who have. Different types of experiences tend to be best at solving those problems. And so there's a really fascinating study looking at kind of 166 grand challenges. Some of society's biggest challenges and the research was asking a really simple question that you were the mosaic.

[00:40:00] Scott, why even bother asking this question. It was simply asking to what extent does a person's expertise in a given area. Predict how well they can solve a problem in that very same area. Duh, you know, of course the biologists are gonna solve the biology problems better than the engineers, but what's so fascinating about this research is the relationship was actually negative.

So the more expertise you have in an area, the less likely you were to solve a problem in that very same area. And that raises the question of why, because it's so counterintuitive, but what's happening is when we develop expertise, we become cognitively entrenched. We have, let's say let's call it tunnel vision.

We use the tools that we have. We use the knowledge schemers in very specific ways because that's, that's how we were trained. We can see new possibilities. But when it comes time to solving, especially grand challenges, we really need those new [00:41:00] possibilities. Those are the types of, uh, new knowledge that we need to solve to solve those types of things.

Um, so what I advocate for is instead of the 10,000 hour rule is what I call the multicontext or multi C rule, which is that your, your breadth of experience, it, it gives you a more

complicated understanding of things. You become, what we would call a boundary spanner. You can connect. Different clusters of knowledge together, see patterns in those clusters and then use those clusters and those connections between those clusters to solve novel problems.

And so multi-city executives, for example, actually tend to get compensated higher than. Executives who stay in a single domain area of expertise because organizations are valuing this breadth of experience. But too often, the narrative in our culture is you got to specialize. You got to do one thing and you gotta do one thing.

Well, and that certainly works in some industries, but there's plenty [00:42:00] of industries where you want to go the other direction. Then it's the breadth of experiences that really matters.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I could see how, how it limits your perspective if you're so entrenched in that one area that you lose the big picture and you get, you can get into the weeds sometimes. And I think there's something really great about this idea of multi, multi context. Multisim multicontext, which is just, you can see it from a different point of view. If you have this, this grander framework outside of the one area. So you've sold me that stretching the stretching mindset has a lot of wonderful qualities. Can you give some examples of ways people could practice moving from chasing to a stretching mindset in their lives?

You give some examples, quite a few examples in the book. Could you give us a couple of your thoughts about that?

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah. So first I would say is, right, right now we're in a situation where I think a lot of us are just being [00:43:00] forced to stretch because of circumstances. So what you could do is you could do a little journaling. Right. A couple of paragraphs about what it's like to work during the pandemic, what it's like to parent during the pandemic, what it's like to be in the relationship during the pandemic.

And then in a few years, when hopefully this pandemic is long gone, then we know that we have short memories and you're kind of feeling like you want to be a little Chasey and you're starting to make these social comparisons and starting to feel that you need more to do more. Pull out this journal and remind yourself of what you've been able to accomplish under these trying conditions.

So I think that's something that people can do can do right now. Other things that they can do is what we were just talking about. The multi-city rule is you can complicate your own experience. Isn't it? That doesn't mean you should go ahead and quit your job right now as a. Psychologist and decide to be an engineer.

But what it does mean is you can vicariously accrue new [00:44:00] experiences. So. Go improve your practice. For example, by spending time with people who are professionals in very different contexts. So go, go have a little virtual consult with an accountant and ask how they solve problems and kind of learn about how they're working.

Go talk to an engineer, go talk to a physician, go talk to a teacher. And so you can have kind of this kind of vicarious experiences by consulting an outsider and seeing how they might. Impact your own, your own work. And if you don't know anyone in these areas, just imagine what they might, what they might say, how they might weigh in on your problems.

Other things you can do is, you know, right now we tend to get stuck in, in routines. Uh, you can do what I like to call scramble, scramble up your routine, which is. You have a weekly meeting, it's always on a, on a Tuesday morning, make it on a Thursday afternoon or, uh, go ahead. And, uh, you know, we're, [00:45:00] we're mostly virtual right now, but, uh, try and change your platforms if you're actually seeing people in person change the seating arrangement around and see how these small things might give you new perspective on the type of problems that you're having.

Kind of a one that I think people really enjoy doing is just the idea of taking a break of thinking that we've always gotta be on. And, uh, what happens is the mind needs time to, to rest and reset and distractions actually. Yeah. Can be an Avenue to be more resourceful because it's another means of loosening the brain.

So it's okay to go ahead and occasionally do some work that you're overqualified for that doesn't require a lot of effort and Letcher, let your mind wander. There's there's not the sense that we've always got to be so focused on laser focused on a problem for me. I like to do a lot of walking and let my mind wander.

And that's where I get a lot of my ideas. Down dueling is another great way of, of freeing the mind, [00:46:00] uh, too.

Debbie Sorensen: Great. Very inspiring actually. And I think with some of the things you're talking about are so doable, even in the pandemic when things are harder to access, you know, I I'm. A real nerd for adult education courses, you know, you could take jam making and quilt making and all these random, you know, read Ulysses together with a group or whatever, floats your boat.

And it's hard to sometimes I think to find ways to bring variety in adventure when you're home all the time in a pandemic, but there's, there are things out there that just might be a little outside the box that people can do that would. Definitely shift their mindset and just shake things up. I think that's the bottom line, right?

Scott Sonenshein: Yeah. How many free lectures out there now that you have to maybe drive across town or you wouldn't even be in the right city to see these things that you can access? A lot of museums are offering virtual tours. So, you know, obviously we can't really travel right now and we miss that. But think about all of these [00:47:00] virtual experiences and then what you can do is you can go vicariously visit all of these countries and then.

Figure out, which is the one that you really do want to go visit in person, which you wouldn't have been able to do before the pandemic.

Debbie Sorensen: I want to ask you a couple of questions about your book with Marie Kondo, if that's okay. So to me, she's a bit of actually I think a mythical figure. I was kind of

tempted to spend the whole interview asking you questions about what it was like to work with her because she's such a fascinating person.

For those who are familiar with her, She, she has the, um, she's like the decluttering guru of the world. I mean, she's. Famous for helping people simplify declutter, you know, figure out what sparks joy. So in the process of collaborating with her, what was the most [00:48:00] important thing you took away from that?

Scott Sonenshein: Well, I'm going to, I'm going to answer this question in two ways, if that's okay. The first is going to be kind of a more silly surface level answer. And then the second is going to be a bit deeper if that's okay.

Debbie Sorensen: Great. I love it.

Scott Sonenshein: so the, the surface, the surface level answer is when Marie and I were we're first going to meet, uh, as a, as a professor, I'll tell you.

My office was a complete mess and obviously books are a very important part of my profession. There are important part of my identity and I had just the messiest bookshelves. You can imagine just hundreds and hundreds of books, double stacked, uh, all over the place. All, all messy and yeah. And I, I said to myself, if I'm going to go through with this, uh, with this collaboration, I need to really make sure that I kind of buy into the main premise of what she's trying to do at the physical level with, with tidying.

So I, I. Put all my books on the floor, just like [00:49:00] the practice guys. I picked each one up and had kind of a little conversation with it and asked if it sparked joy. And I got rid of, I'm not going to say I got rid of most of my books, but I got rid of about half of my books, which was, which was quite a lot and donated them and reorganize my bookshelves and I've kept them that way ever since.

And that was really joyful to me because I thought that. I would never be able to do this. I was going through books that I had since, uh, since college that I never read, uh, never planned on reading. And that was, that was really, uh, helpful. Well for me

Debbie Sorensen: and you've stuck with that. It sounds like you've.

Scott Sonenshein: I've stuck with it. I'm, I'm, I'm proud of my bookshelf right now. Uh, and, uh, yeah, so that's, that's really, that's really great now at a deeper level. What I've really learned from this collaboration is that. When you go through this process of, of tidying, it's really tapping into your kind of truest self it's.

It's a conversation, almost like an excavation [00:50:00] of what it is that you value, whether it is that you, that you stand for. It's not simply this surface level of. Straightening your things out and having a nice looking bookshelf or a nice looking home or whatever it might be. It's really about getting in conversation and dialogue with your true self.

And I think that's what makes the techniques that she writes about and that we talk about for work in, enjoy at work so powerful that this is something that I think when people might

pick up the book at first. They might not realize, but it's when you go through all of these techniques, you're like, wow, I have learned so much about myself.

This is not really a book about tidying. This is fundamentally a book about self discovery.

Debbie Sorensen: yes. And I think the meeting of minds between you and Marie Kondo in this particular book is really interesting because it. It kind of boils down to [00:51:00] this idea of just being really more intentional around our work related activities. And one area that is of personal interest to me is the idea of prioritizing our time.

And as you put it in the book, sort of reducing the activity clutter, right? So we get so busy and we're always doing one task after the next and they're piling up and sometimes it just feels urgent and we're multitasking and just doing too much. Um, and I love this idea of just being more intentional about how we use our time and prioritize, which.

What activity we should be doing? How, what advice do you have for people around how to be, I guess, how to use time better and to really prioritize what's important.

Scott Sonenshein: so I, I, I think the first thing is that activity, clutter, this, this idea that you're doing things that don't impact anyone [00:52:00] is. Probably life's biggest distraction that we don't want to engage with the hard projects. We might have, the challenges we have, the difficult conversations we might need to have.

So we throw ourselves into activity clutter, or we use activity clutter as a way of showing that we're really important or we're super busy and. You know, we're doing these things that, that aren't necessary. So we talk about three questions that you can ask about what you're doing to prioritize things.

And this really speaks to the intentionality. So the first thing is, look, we're at work. So we want to ask is, is what I'm doing necessary for my job. There were just some things, no matter what they are that we just have to do as part of our job, it would mean that we wouldn't have that job. So we just have to, we have to do those things.

Secondly we ask ourselves is doing this activity. Does it bring me, will bring me joy in the future. So I might not necessarily [00:53:00] enjoy it right now, but maybe it will teach me something. Maybe it will set me up for advancement in my career. Maybe it will help me grow in a, in a certain way. So that's that, that would be a second reason to go ahead and do something.

And then the third reason of course, is. Does it, does it spark joy itself is this intrinsically joyful for me to do, and we should keep that. And when people ask these three questions and you can go through a catalog of the different activities that you do at your work, what people realize is there's a lot of things that they're doing that don't fit into one of these three buckets.

They're doing it because it's the distraction. It's the ultimate form of procrastination they're doing it because they think it will make them, you know, Look important. And are they wanting to impress people? And this begins to parse down what it is we're doing. So the first

part of really getting a hold of our time is to make sure that we're not wasting it on things that aren't necessary for the job aren't helpful for the joyful future.

And we don't [00:54:00] enjoy doing. And once we, once we got we, we get that in line. Uh, we've, we've solved a big portion of the problem.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I think I can. This is just such wonderful advice. I think we often I see with my clients and myself too, of course, is that sometimes we do the things that sort of feel satisfying to get done in the short term and these sort of immediate tasks. You can check them off your list and for myself, sometimes I'll spend all this time doing that.

But then the big thing that actually really is important to me. Just there's no room left for it because I've been focusing on all these little tasks and there's something about just really asking yourself these hard questions that can help you recognize when that starting to happen when we're just filling it up.

Yeah.

Scott Sonenshein: yeah. I mean, what we do is if you think about another way of thinking about priorities is, is the focus on what's. Important and urgent. And if you're at the intersection of those two things [00:55:00] and that, that's what makes it to the top of your list. Once you kind of get rid of the activity clever, and then you think about what should we be focusing on first?

It's the important and urgent tasks. Oftentimes we conflate the two and we think that because something is due tomorrow, it's all of a sudden is the most important thing to do. And urgency and importance are two very different types of things. And obviously some things are both important and urgent, and that's what we should prioritize.

Debbie Sorensen: we had a time management expert on the podcast, Laura Vanderkam. I don't know if you've, if you're familiar with her work, but she writes a lot about this idea of intentional use of time and how. There's something about just paying attention to how we're using time in the first place that can really help us hone in on this.

It's a similar concept and we had her on the podcast a while ago. Um, really it's a challenge for a lot of us, I'd say.

Well, listeners can pick up your books, *Stretch: Unlock the Power of Less and Achieve More than you Ever Imagined* and *the Joy of Work*. [00:56:00] Um, Scott, where can folks find out more about you and your work?

Scott Sonenshein: The best resource is my website, which is. scottsonenschein.com, S C O T T S O N E N S H E I N. Calm. And I've got a bunch of articles out there about parenting and relationships working from home in the middle of the pandemic, lots of, lots of free content out there to apply these ideas to the problems, uh, uh, that we're facing.

And then, uh, on social media, on Twitter, I'm just at Scott Sonnenschein and Instagram. It's Scott dot Sonnenschein.

Debbie Sorensen: Wonderful. Well, I highly recommend that people look into your work and pick up your books because there's a lot of really fantastic ideas in there. So, Scott, thank you so much for joining me today.

Scott Sonenshein: Thanks so much again for having me, my pleasure. Thank you for listening to psychologist off the clock. If you enjoy our [00:57:00] podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patreon.

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