

## Transcription - Four Questions From A High School Principal

Okay, welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.

Today, we're going to talk about an article that was in the newspaper recently about a school principal, a high school principal, who waited 17 years and I use waited in inverted commas or let's say for whom it took 17 years before he actually got promoted into the Principal. 14 years I'm being corrected, he's been headmaster for 17 years, working for 14 years before being promoted or selected into that role in the public school system. Let me clarify that public school is in terms of government sponsored education rather than private schools, is how we approach it in this country. I know it's different in other countries, it's the other way around here.

The story is about this fellow and about his journey through life, and he is related to a very well known journalist in this country. And so there were comments from his brother as well, about their upbringing and the view of one journalist to another who was writing the story about this particular man.

But what intrigued us both in reading this article was the commitment that this fellow had to his career regardless of how long it took for him to reach the stage that he is at now, and that when he got to that stage, his utter complete commitment was to the school where he was and to making that an environment for developing kids. That is what he really wanted to have as part of his legacy of being an educator in this country.

One of the things that he talked about in the article is that he asks when he sees the kids in the morning, when he interacts with them, he asks them four questions and it's always the same four questions and has been for all of those years. I love these questions and that was the thing that resonated with me in the article, was these questions and I think that we could use them in our organizations all of the time.

And the four questions are: What did you have for breakfast? What time did you go to sleep last night? What exercise you're going to do this week? And what are you reading for pleasure at the moment?

I think these are four very interesting questions and they will tell you a lot about people and about their patterns and about their work life balance, all of the things that we've talked about in the past and will continue to talk about, I'm sure.

But the idea of the breakfast question first of all, is one that I started to think about as soon as I read it, because I know that in my early working career, so let's say early twenties to mid thirties, when I was starting out on the corporate ladder and you are establishing yourself in a role and establishing the career path that you're going to take as well, for me, that was a time where marriage came and family came as well, and so juggling all of those things.

The work side of things seemed to take more precedence as against personal stuff. So the family was obviously important as well, but I can remember a time where I didn't have breakfast and it was almost like a badge of honor. No, I didn't have any breakfast this morning, no time for breakfast. I know

I don't have breakfast, I don't do breakfast because I'm focused on work. I'm doing this, I've got traveling, I've always traveled for work, so it was about, you know, I can't have breakfast because I have to travel.

And I find myself 40 years later still doing the same thing sometimes. So this morning I haven't had breakfast, I know very bad, and it's not because I couldn't get up and I couldn't have it. But I tell myself this thing, I don't like to travel if I have just eaten and that's true, to a certain extent, I don't like to, she's laughing across the table. I'll be the same if I'm driving and today was the train ride, but if I'm driving any distance, I won't eat before I get in the car to drive, but when I have my two hour break, then I'll have something and it's a stupid thing to do really.

There are so many choices you can make about what you put into your body, it doesn't have to be breakfast in, inverted commas, I don't have to go and make the yoghurt and add walnuts and all the other things that go with it, you know, I could just have a drinkable yogurt and then I've had breakfast. For some reason that hangs over from my early career - she's just having the best time in this room and I will never live it down.

But I look at those questions. I haven't had breakfast this morning, so that will make me a little bit less on the ball than I should be because obviously my body's not got the fuel it needs to start up the day. So it's the wrong thing to do for a whole host of reasons that we won't go into now.

What time did I go to sleep last night? I actually went to sleep

earlier than I normally would because I knew I'd be up and about early and I was up early yesterday morning for some other stuff as well. So I went to sleep at about 11 and I was up at 5:30, so a reasonable amount of sleep.

What am I going to do for exercise this week? Well, because I was running late this morning, cause I missed the first train that I was going to get, I had to walk up a hill to get here where we're recording. So that's going to be my quota done. That's my exercise this week. Actually, I don't plan it as much as I used to, but when I was going to the gym really religiously every other day then I knew exactly what I was planning to do for exercise because I had a routine that of some days aerobic, some days just the resistance training. But these days I probably look at it in a broader sense. I probably would think about in a week. Yes, I should get some exercise. So mostly it has to do with walking so I'll park further away from where I'm going. So I've got a bit of a walk, I'll walk up here or I'll walk a different way to where I'm going or I'll get out at the farm and do some gardening or some other farm work and count that as my exercise for the week. But there again, just four questions, two of them I'm already failing on because I'm not concentrating on those things.

And the last thing about what are you reading for pleasure? I can actually honestly put up my hand and say that I always have something on the go that I'm reading for pleasure. I've set myself a target two years ago now, It's taken me two years to read all of the works of Robert Louis Stevenson. I have them on the kindle and I'm about, I think I'm 65% through, so I've probably still got another 12 months to go before I finish them all. But it's been a real target and a real joy for me to

read the whole works, such a different range of things that he wrote on and the opinions he had and the views he expressed and the way he expressed them. So I always have that.

But as you know from other podcasts, I really struggle with non pleasure reading. So I did the challenge earlier in the year where I had to read half an hour a day of something that was non fiction and I struggled and I said it to you all that I struggled to find something that was going to compel me to do that half hour reading every day. But it did set me on a path of reading that stuff. Although I haven't read any for a little bit of time, she's getting anxious now, I'd better let her say something, but in terms of those four questions, I just thought that they were excellent questions for us to look at ourselves and to look at our workforce. When she's had a chance to express herself, I'm actually going to pursue that and look at how that relates to how you feel about people when you ask those questions.

You may speak. 8.5 minutes monologue.

I think those questions are absolutely very relevant to work, very relevant to work. You think about it. In this article he gives an example of a one of the students, high school student, who got himself into trouble and went to the headmaster's office. Detention. It's cool. Oh, I hear that. Okay. And I've never had to go there, had to go to the Principal.

Anyhow, he asked this student those questions and I think the points are very valid, is that if you don't have breakfast, if you're not sleeping enough, if you're not looking at things outside your own work environment at work, you might be that

particular day a bit more snappy, you might be less tolerant of things than you normally would be. Your productivity might be waning. So these are very, very good advice and questions to ask yourself regularly when you see yourself not being yourself, is why is it that I'm doing those things, which is really good.

But on the career side, I think in this article, which I recommend you read, he talked about right from the beginning, he had this vision, he wanted to be in education. He wanted to be an educator. So much so that even at a very young age he would think, if I was running the school, who will I hire out of those people I'm observing? So that's good.

In this sense, he worked towards his goal despite obstacles. He had two accidents in his life, injuries in his life that other people would have used as an excuse. He didn't. Now, we're not saying everybody has to wait 14 years for the job if it's a passion, he stayed in his passion area, he stayed in education. He was a teacher who wanted to be a Principal so he could do more for the kids. He particularly wanted to help people in need. He's passionate about that, I guess it's that deep seated desire that you have for yourself of whatever it is, you keep it and despite all the obstacles that you continue with it and it pays off in the end. If you're doing it just for the career then of course you can move around to get to the top if that's what your aim is.

But the thing that also is very impressive is the results, the results speak for themselves both at school level and then how much satisfaction he would have in his mind. He didn't do it for that purpose by the sound of him but having left so much

behind through other people.

It's about finding your why. Because in all of that discussion, here is a man who at a very early age knew what his why was. His why was to be was the educator side of things, not to be the school principal, not to be the deputy principal, not to be a teacher, but to be an educator and that was his why and that hasn't changed. That's been his focus.

So if you're in the corporate world and you're looking at moving up the ladder, what's your why? Not being the ceo. That's not a why. It's a much deeper and much more fulfilling activity that you need to find and you need to find out what your why is and you need to be true to that. Because when you move away from what your why is, you lose satisfaction. You might move up the ladder, but you certainly lose satisfaction about what you're doing and how you're doing it.

And I can say that with experience because for many years, as you know, I've moved around in the corporate world, both as a paid employee and as a consultant. And I thought that that was my why, well I didn't really think about it, I just thought that was what you did for your career. I hadn't identified my why and I probably didn't really identify my why. I had an inkling of it in a couple of the roles that I had in the government sector. But I didn't really identify it until very much later when I looked at what is it that I really enjoy doing? What is it that I want to do? And you'll see from the website that I talk about, my why and my why is about bringing out the best in people, making people feel that they can do things better than they thought they could and how that happens.

That doesn't have a phrase that covers it. I'm not an educator in that sense because sometimes they know what they need to do. So I'm not teaching them anything and I'm not a facilitator because it's not always about the skills that they've got. Sometimes they do need to learn other stuff. It's about people.

So my why is about people and I was always trying to fit into, it was the square peg in a round hole, always trying to fit into a corporate or an organizational format that wanted me to do things in this certain way, because that was what the organization needed, not what the people needed. And my why is about people, so I needed to find an environment where my why, whatever we call it, could be utilized and people would find it and would know that they needed it, would be able to use it. It isn't in one industry. So what I find now is that my why covers all sorts of industries and all sorts of people I couldn't identify. I can say this is the kind of person that I can help because when I look at the people, they're all different and they're all doing things with different reasons..

They all have different whys, but my why helps them achieve their whys. So it comes back to the why I think, and we do have a podcast which I'll put at the bottom of this listing so that you can go back and you can see the Simon Sinek video and you can work out from him what your why is because I do think it's a very revealing exercise to know and to understand it and to start to think about it in terms of what you're doing with your career and where you're going.

We'll get back to the article. Yeah, but but I think it's relevant. It's the whole idea of this article apart from what a great guy, is the learning and this is the learning and he knew that at a very

young age or very early in career, that's what you want to do. But a lot of us don't and you do change with time as well. So your why will change. So you started that way but in this case he didn't, he knew all the way through.

I know people like that in a business sense. They knew which aspect of corporate they want to be and they're still in there and their career has been exactly as they envisaged and hoped and they were true to it. For some of us, it's what am I doing? What do I like about what I'm doing? What have I learned? And then keep evolving or changing.

So whatever you're doing, you're going to be working for the majority of your life, so you want it to be an enjoyment as well as the satisfaction factor. To me that's the most important. Of course the money is as you're going through a lot because you need to pay for things, but the satisfaction and if you keep reviewing that you can pursue it and do it. And he has proven that, he has proven that with very, very good results.

That probably leads onto the other thing that I noted about the questions. Those four questions give you some insight into the person that you are interacting with.

My reaction was, do we do this with our work colleagues and our team members? Do we do it with our families? Because what happened within the article when the journalist was talking to others, the views of others were reflecting that underlying care and concern and education in a certain way that this fellow was showing by asking those four questions. So what had happened was that it elicited this sense of pride that these other people were expressing about the subject of

the article and saying what they were most proud of in this person were things that he probably wouldn't have identified in ourselves.

And so then I started to think about well with people that I work with or my family members, if I thought about what am I proud of within that framework and I thought about a few people and I thought, well the one I probably can talk about most comfortably because I know he'll never listen to this, is my brother. What am I most proud of in terms of him?

He's done a whole host of things in his life. He's been a snow ski instructor, he's been a snow maker. He had the 1st 10 years of his life after he left school, he didn't see summer, he worked winter here and winter in the US for the ski seasons. But that's not the sum of him. He's always been very active, loves his cycling, still does cycling despite the knee reconstructions and all those sorts of things. He currently runs some goats on the farm and he makes chili sauce which he sells at the markets and he works part time at Bunnings. So if I look at him and I think what am I most proud of?

It's that he will do whatever it takes. He was a single parent. He brought up three kids on his own in a country town and had to work all hours to try and bring them up on his own, a long way from any sort of family, five hours from any sort of family support. So I guess in looking at those questions, thinking about his life, what I'm most proud of, what do I react to when I think about him, is that he was so very versatile and adaptable and he's prepared to try anything, give anything a go and if it doesn't work, well I'll move on to the next thing. You know, nothing stops him and he throws himself wholeheartedly into

everything that he does.

So he's known as the old man at Bunnings because he's a lot older than many of the staff but he never stops. He runs the whole time and then I go and they'll say, oh he just never stops, he's always there and the customers love him because he's prepared to share his knowledge and knows where things are or will suggest things that they can do. So it's about his why.

If I look at his why, it's about just enjoying life. He loves just being a part of whatever he's doing at the time. He wouldn't have fallen into the standard mould of looking at a career and working his way up and doing this and doing that. He tried that. That was what the ski industry was about, he was trying to find a place in. He was the first Australian to do a professional ski school management course in the U. S. And they were quite fascinated by this. And so there was a career path for him to do that, to combine the love of skiing with resort management I guess is the best way to describe it. But it wasn't for him and he recognized that early so he knew his why was about something other than the standard work environment.

But if I look at those questions, if I asked him those questions, on any given day he would say absolutely he's had breakfast every morning regardless of what time he gets up or what else he's doing. Food is high on the list. What time did you go to sleep the night before? Unless the Tour de France is on or the Giro d'Italia, which was just recently and he's got to stay up to watch a bike race, then he's very careful about what time he goes to sleep. So what is he doing for exercise this week?

Well you know, he never stops, runs the whole time. So it would be more about what are you doing for downtime? So I think that's probably interesting. Yeah. And if I ask him, what are you reading for pleasure? Well he would just look at me like I'm from Mars because reading is not something that he does. Sports section of the newspaper, sports news, no. He just doesn't like anything, maybe a cookbook. Okay. Yeah.

But they're just interesting questions because when you think about them in terms of someone you know who's at a different stage of life or has traveled a different path and you look at those questions, they still get an interesting range of responses to them that make you think more broadly about what they've done in their careers, what they're doing now, where they're heading and how they traveled that path.

So in terms of the questions, I think they're just the best questions to have.

I think we've probably covered that topic in reasonable detail for you, we'll leave it there. I will put the links for the article and for the Simon Sinek episode of the podcast, so you can look at your why as well. But for now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.