

Theresa Cantley:

Hello everyone and welcome back to another episode of the Your Next Best Step podcast, with me, your host, Theresa Cantley. I am joined today by another very, very, very special guest, Seamus Kelleher. Did I pronounce that right, Kelleher?

Seamus Kelleher:

Yes, very good.

Theresa Cantley:

Okay. And I am super, super excited to have him here. I met Seamus at one of my clients', and Seamus was actually a musician who was playing one night. One of the most phenomenal musicians I've ever seen. My client has an Irish pub and that was how I was first introduced to Seamus. My husband and I watched you and my husband was just like, "Oh my gosh, he is an amazing guitarist." But little did I know Seamus has another absolutely inspirational story and just is an amazing, amazing man. And I've gotten to have several conversations with him and I thought with his story and him sharing his story that he could help so many of my listeners, but just even beyond that, people that follow me on social media that will hear about this podcast and just my whole community. So, I'm going to be quiet and just shut up and I am going to let Seamus talk. So, Seamus, welcome.

Seamus Kelleher:

Thank you, Theresa, for having me. This is such an honor for me. I appreciate it.

Theresa Cantley:

Yes, it's an honor for me to have you here. Like I said, I met you as a musician, but little did I know that you are... I would call you a motivational speaker, a teacher, a guide, a mentor, a thriver and an inspiration. So, let's get into your background and a little bit about your story. I mean, when we first started talking, because we started talking about another project that we're going to be working on, but when I started to hear your story, I mean, it's just unbelievable. The odds that you've beaten and the things that you've gotten through and gotten over and how you are using that to help others and to really pay it forward in this world, in a time that we all really need help with this. So, why don't you tell us a little bit about your story?

Seamus Kelleher:

Well, I've been playing music professionally since I was 16 and I started back in Ireland in County Galway where I'm from. I was blessed to pick up the guitar, I think at age 14 and within a year I knew it's what I would be doing for the rest of my life. It's never changed, not even a bit. I did very well very quickly. My first band was about age 16 and a band called Spoonful. It was a great rock and roll band. And then quickly it went up the ranks and within a year I was opening up for bands like Thin Lizzy, the very famous Thin Lizzy from Boys Are Back In Town fame.

Theresa Cantley:

Oh yes, oh yes.

Seamus Kelleher:

And became good friends with them, I did several shows with them. Then I ended up with a band called Rock & Roll Circus, which was probably one of the best bands I was ever with. It was just phenomenal talent. They were all older than me at the time. I was 20, they would have been 25 or so. But there was a backstory to all that. I was from a very abusive school situation. Physically abusive. There was no sexual abuse, at least on my side of it, but physically they beat the hell out of us because the Catholic Church are run by the Archdiocese in Ireland at the time. I hated violence so that had a terrible impact on me. And it was daily that you'd get beaten and you just dreaded going into school every day.

Theresa Cantley:

Wow.

Seamus Kelleher:

That was every single day. Then, at the time Ireland was on the verge of a civil war with the sectarian violence between Catholics and Protestants and also then you add in the British Army in 1970. It was awful. Now, the violence in the North of Ireland was about 150 miles away from us but there was really fear of us spreading down to the South and-

Theresa Cantley:

Sure, sure.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, it was crazy. And then you had the Cold War threat. Then there was a lot of alcohol abuse. Both my parents were alcoholics. So, it was a tough time. So, there was a whole other story going on behind the façade of me being on stage all the time. Everybody dreamed of being a guitar player with a great rock and roll band. I was making a ton of money and playing to a thousand people every night, we were in the newspapers, we had a record out. So, living the dream by most people's standards. Yeah, a lot of kids that age they didn't worry about the North of Ireland but they didn't worry about anything else, but this was all getting to me. Anyway, my mom passed when I was 20, right at the height of the fame of the Rock & Roll Circus band. She was my best friend. She was just my... everything to me. So, I think that was a trigger for falling into a deep depression. I went back on the road. Well, I never got off the road. Even the day of her funeral I played a concert. But we were on the road and I had a nervous breakdown.

So, I spent five weeks in the hospital, the psychiatric hospital in Dublin, and thankfully... It was my dad that suggested that I do that. He wouldn't commit me. He said, "If you want to go, you go yourself." Because it was such a stigma at that stage, back in Ireland in particular, I'm sure everywhere, about spending time in a psychiatric hospital. I'll never forget what I said to him, Theresa. I said, "Dad, if we don't get the right help for me right now, I won't be here next week."

Theresa Cantley:

Oh, my.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah.

Theresa Cantley:

That's... wow.

Seamus Kelleher:

So that's kind of the start and-

Theresa Cantley:

It's a great thing that you got help because this world needs you so very much.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, and it's not like, "Woe is me." Everybody gets something. When I give my [inaudible 00:06:32], people see me and they see me kind of happy and the life I've lived. You know, I've done several thousand shows, okay? Carnegie Hall when I was 24. I've played all over the world and to this day, I was scheduled 200 shows this year, all over the country before COVID interrupted the plan. So, yeah, and I've dealt with depression and anxiety all my life. And for the most part, I've been able to overcome it. There's times it just rears its ugly head. Like the last time that was really bad was about seven years ago and I spent time in Horsham Clinic in PA, spent a week there, inpatient and then four weeks outpatient. But most of the time I can see the warning signs and I take steps to avoid getting into major problems.

I think the big thing and my big message... we'll probably talk more about this, is just be open to getting help because there is help available to people. 60 million people that suffer depression in America each year. It's probably a lot more. They're the people that diagnose. You can rest assured it's much closer to 25 million.

Theresa Cantley:

Yes, no, I definitely agree with you.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, but I think the staggering statistic is less than half get professional help, even though they've been diagnosed.

Theresa Cantley:

Right. And there definitely is. I mean, you mentioned this. For years there was a stigma surrounding... if you do have depression and you do have anxiety and you do go to get help... A lot of people wouldn't get help because there was such a stigma surrounding it, but even if you did go to get help, it's always like you have this label on you that there was something wrong with you. And I, myself, struggle with anxiety and you're right. It rears its ugly head and many, many, people that I've talked to that have said to me that they put off getting help and they put off trying to figure out how to deal with it and how to get better with it or get better from it. They put off getting help because they were afraid.

And you just can't be afraid because so often... My brother-in-law committed suicide. And so often, like I said, people don't want to get that help and they suffer in silence. And-

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, yeah. That's it. There was an article written about me a few years ago and it was called Suffering in Silence and that's definitely it. And the sad thing about this is, of the people suffering from depression, 90% of them can get a really good result from a therapy. Sometimes it could just be going to a therapist, maybe, just talking talking to somebody. Maybe that's all they need. Or else going to a psychiatrist and psychiatrists can prescribe meds and also look at what's going on chemically in the brain. What's

triggering some of the stuff that's going on. Since we're talking about that, I should always say the medication should only be done in consultation with a psychiatrist.

So some form of therapy, maybe medication if needed under the guide of a psychiatrist and then, if you're really bad, like me seven years ago or when I was 20, if you need hospitalization. And sometimes that's what you need, if you're really, really bad off. If you just can't put the pieces together and then you might become a danger to yourself. It [inaudible 00:10:22] gives you time to go through it. And the stigma, unfortunately it's there, but I think once realize that there is help available and that you don't have to live like that, that's an easy choice for me. I take the stigma. I don't care if people say, "Oh, that's Seamus Kelleher. He spent some time in Horsham. I saw him there seven years ago." But, he's looking up and the Seamus Kelleher that he's looking at is at the top of his game playing guitar to hundreds of people every night, you know?

Theresa Cantley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seamus Kelleher:

So I'll take stigma as long as I can get the Seamus Kelleher that's playing to those people every night doing what I love to do and being here for my kids and my wife. And what's just as important, I have an opportunity because I have a stage every night to show people that you can overcome this. I talk very publicly about it, Theresa, because one of my goals is... with all this motivational speaking and pretty much everything I do right now, even on my stage performances, is to do exactly what you talk about, to get rid of the stigma. And when people see me, I introduce the songs. "Oh, I wrote this song about my struggles with depression."

You see people nudging themselves and almost like shuffling and feeling uncomfortable, but if I told you the amount of times that I have people come up to me on a break and say, "Thank you for doing that. For the first time I felt a weight off my shoulders," by just somebody else... I didn't even try to help them at that stage, I'm just singing my song. But what I did was allow them to be open and open up to me and that's wonderful.

Theresa Cantley:

Yeah, they always say one of the human desires is that people want to know that you hear them. They want to know that what they're saying means something. So without even having that conversation... and that's one of the beauties about music is it's this language. Music just transcends cultures and languages and it enables you to speak to them without having that physical conversation and allowing them to... It's like what you were saying in the song had them think, "Wow, he understands me. He gets me." And that's the beginning to having that healing start.

Seamus Kelleher:

That's the beginning of the healing and when I know that I've really had an impact is when somebody comes up and says, "Can I talk to you for a minute." And yeah, that's a big step and I often tell them, because they say, "It's hard." And I say, "Yeah, but do you realize you're after taking a big step. I know how hard it is to walk up to a stranger," or even somebody that if they do know me. Let me give you this one example how this all works. About two years ago, I was playing down in, let's just say Maryland, right?

Theresa Cantley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seamus Kelleher:

And there was a guy there, John. Not his name, but he was a tremendous musician, very well-known. Better known than me and he come up to me at the end of the show and I was sure he was going to ask me about guitars because that everybody asks me about. I'm a decent guitar player that's what everybody asks me.

Theresa Cantley:

Decent? No, you're amazing.

Seamus Kelleher:

[inaudible 00:13:53] But anyway, so I was sure waiting for, "Is it a Fender Stratocaster? Is it a Tele..." All these names musicians use for guitars. And he said, "You know, Seamus, I've been having a hard time lately." And he said, "You're very public about your struggles." So I said... and I was just wrapping up the equipment and I had a two hour journey back home, but I said to him, I said, "Why don't we just go over there and talk?" And two hours later we finished and the poor guy had been going through... like in the depths of depression, you know?

Theresa Cantley:

Mm.

Seamus Kelleher:

And at the end of the conversation, I said, "John." I said, "If half of what you are telling me is true," I said, "Forget going to a doctor or therapist at this stage. You need to go see a psychiatrist because I am really worried about you, the state you're in right now." Said, "There's no kind of in between. You're at a stage..." I said, "I am not a doctor. I'm not trained. I have no training as a... But I said, "I am trained in suicide prevention and crisis intervention." And I said, "I recognize signs with you, right now, not just from my training, but from my own personal experience, that you need help." So I said, "We," and I always called it the Queen's we. I said, "We need to get you help." So just by that we, using the word we, it kind of shares the burden.

Now it's I'm in this fight with them. I'm the only person that he had ever talked to about this. Not his bandmates, not his girlfriend at the time and not his children. I was the first person. But I said, "John, you're after taking a huge step." So fast forward several months. It was hard to get him to see somebody. He was such a type A person. In addition to his music profile, he was also a very successful businessman. What I remember one day was one of the best texts I had that week, he said, "I'm on my way to the psychiatrist." So I just said, "Great." So the worst thing you can do is kind of pester somebody. I knew he was going so I had to kind of give him the time.

So several days later, he said, "The psychiatrist said what I'm going through is kind of normal. He said there's nothing crazy wrong with me. Suffering from depression and a little bit ADHD. He put me on a minor dose of medication." He said, "But already, I feel better." I said, "Of course you do." I said, "You've taken the first step." I said, "Buddy, it's only going to get better and better." And then I saw him. I was down in this place every two months, so let's just fast forward about four months and I saw him. Man, he looked so different, you know?

Theresa Cantley:

Really?

Seamus Kelleher:

The life was back in his face and I just started to smile when I saw him. He said, "You have no idea, buddy, what you did for me." And he said, "You know, life has changed." I said, "I didn't do anything, to be honest." I said, "I was like a traffic cop. I'm not trained to help you." I said, "All I did was point you in the direction of what you needed." I said, "You made the difference yourself. Always remember this." I said, "Because you may not be free of this forever. But you took that first step. You came to see me and talked to me. Always remember that moment because that's what's going to save you for the rest of your life. Because it won't be Seamus Kelleher, it'll be somebody else." And I said, "You've already taken a heroic step, for you. I know how proud you are. You're a great musician. Everybody knows you it was hard for you to do that." But you know what the wonderful thing is now? He comes in to see me on a regular basis. That's two years ago. The guy is amazing, right?

Theresa Cantley:

Yeah.

Seamus Kelleher:

He comes in to see me with his friends and he'll often be talking with his friends and he'll say, "Seamus." He said, "I'll never forget what you did for me." Now the important thing there is, it's not the accolades to Seamus. The important thing is he's now talking about it very openly and to me, that's a great accomplishment. If I accomplished something with him, because like I said, he made the difference himself by asking me. But the bigger thing that I'm trying to do with my career right now, as long long as God gives me, hopefully, many years to do it, is to kind of take it out of the shadows and have that conversation. It used to be if you ever wanted to get a little bit of quiet at the dinner table, say, "Anybody feeling depressed lately or stressed?" That'll suck the oxygen out of a room. Not so much nowadays.

We're in COVID, where everybody is feeling some kind of stress, between the election and COVID and some of what's been going on in this country. And this is not a political statement, it's just the reality that people are feeling stressed. People that I never thought would ever feel stress and the good thing is people are starting to talk a little bit more openly about it. You see it on TV all the time.

Theresa Cantley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). No, it's true and this is a good kind of segue into... A lot of small business owners have been dealing the impacts of COVID. I mean, everybody has. But a lot of small business owners that I know... that's who I work with, small business owners, local businesses owners. I've seen people shut their doors. I've seen people just lose... You and I had a conversation, you had 200 shows booked in the beginning of the year, for the year, and that all went away. And I know that a lot of businesses right now are really waiting to see what happens with the election, with cases going up, and we live in Pennsylvania. It's a lot of stress and you're right. They've talked about it on the news, the rate of depression and anxiety in the United States, it's just skyrocketing.

And people are starting to talk about it more because you can't really hide it. You can't run from it because there's so many things coming at you right now. And, like I said, between COVID, between the

social injustice we've experienced in this country with George Floyd and other things that have happened and just the protests and the rioting. It's a lot of heaviness, you know?

Seamus Kelleher:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Theresa Cantley:

A lot of people think, "Oh, I can deal with this," and right now, it's just a lot coming at you. And then at the same time, hearing, "You need to pivot your business. You need to pivot, pivot, pivot." So let's talk a little bit about, with everything that's been happening and dealing with the events of 2020. As I was telling everybody, "2020 is the year of clarity. The year of 20/20 vision." And it didn't look like what anybody thought it was going to look like. So let's talk a little bit about what you did to pivot and what that looked like and how that relates to the conversation that we're having and what you decided to do.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yep. And I kind of incorporate a few of the things that I did for my own mental wellness during this time. So we go back to March 14th, right? I had a show somewhere here in Pennsylvania. It might been at McCarthy's Red Stag Whiskey Pub. It was an amazing night and then I had... St. Patrick's month is for musicians like me. A portion of your salary, a significant portion of your salary. The next day, it all went up in smoke, right? Everything was shut down. Not just like a little bit. It was shut down and even then they made it clear it was going to be months before everything opened up. Turned out to be a lot longer. So I was devastated and I knew that I'm disposed to depression, I'm disposed to anxiety and addiction, right? I've been sober six years. So the last thing I needed was for me to go back drinking again.

But these were all kind of triggers, the loss, the hope, the sadness I was feeling, but I was able to draw on some of the things that I tell people to do during times like this. I say, "Yeah, it's very important to do a mental wellness check on yourself. Ask yourself, 'Are you feeling sad? Are you feeling hopeless? Is there self-loathing going on? Are you staying in bed all day long? Are you avoiding doing things that you used to do, like hanging out with people, eating, and sports, whatever it might be. Music, guitar playing, in my case.'" If you don't hear me playing guitar once a day, please call a doctor.

Anyway, but they're the warning signs, right? So how you can kind of get ahead of that a little bit and it's not a Pollyanna, "Oh, do these five things, you're fine." But doing these five things will help out under any circumstance, especially when things are changing by the moment. Put some routine in your day. Pick a time to get up every day. I do not allow myself to sleep past 9:30. Now, I stay up late at night, so 9:30 is a reasonable time for me. But it would be easy to try and stay in bed until 11:00 just so that I wouldn't have to deal with this, especially back in March. Not have to deal with the blackness of the whole situation because I wasn't just worried about myself, I was worried about my children and my wife and losing everything, right?

Theresa Cantley:

Yeah, yeah.

Seamus Kelleher:

I was looking at the house and saying, "How long can we keep this?" You know?

Theresa Cantley:

Yeah.

Seamus Kelleher:

And anyway, putting routine in your day, controlling the things you can control, like exercising a little bit. Right? Picking a time to share your meals together everyday. Once again, the routine. Like I said, the exercise thing. Picking some things that you can accomplish. Goals that you can accomplish. For me, I finished a book that I started 12 years ago.

Theresa Cantley:

Oh.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah. I said I have to do 10 pages every day. So I could accomplish that. I didn't do it every day, most days I did. So I don't need to go on and on. You get the idea. So there's some kind of fundamental things people can do. Now, in terms of pivoting, which is your original question. It's really important to realize we're in a period of change that's not going to stop changing for quite a while. It's going to evolve, right?

Theresa Cantley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seamus Kelleher:

And it doesn't have to be a bad thing. Now, I'm not saying it's not hard, but if you're a pub owner and that's your only kind of business, it's hard if your pub is shut down. There's not much you can do about it, but you can maybe start preparing for... "Well, you know, we know they're going to start doing take-out. How can we do that and how can we be different than the other guy down the street? I'm an Irish pub, maybe I can do whiskey making classes. Maybe I can do Irish foods or whatever." I'm just picking that because that's the world I know, right?

Theresa Cantley:

Yeah.

Seamus Kelleher:

But the same would apply to an Italian restaurant. There's one up the street here that's just done a fabulous job here. From two weeks after COVID, he was doing takeaway in a way that I'd never seen it done before. It was so cool. So that's kind of the pivot. Then it's probably good to give myself as an example. So I lost everything, right? But I did get a call about the fourth week in March from Texas A&M College of Medicine. Now I'd spoken there a few years ago as part of motivational speaking and they asked me to do a motivational talk for their staff and faculty. They said, "The staff and faculty are really struggling. They just need a pick-me-up, so can you do some of your messaging, but we want to hear some of your music as well." I said, "Absolutely." I said, "When do you want me to do it?" They said, "Tomorrow." So I said, "Holy crap, how can I..." Something like this can take... especially if it's geared for a special thing, it can take weeks, months to do, put together." I said, "Sure, I'll do it." That's part of the pivot, right? I made the decision I'm going to do it. Now-

Theresa Cantley:

Go with your gut.

Seamus Kelleher:

Now it was like, "How?" I stayed up late that night and I put a script together. Now, I had a lot of it already, but I had to make it address the moment but I gave it everything I got. I worked really, really hard and I rehearsed it. I was up in my bedroom walking around, pacing. Especially rehearsing my introduction. As you know, Theresa, that's the introduction that is always... That kind of sets the tone for everything.

Theresa Cantley:

Yes.

Seamus Kelleher:

Because if you kind of go, "blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," as I do, sometimes. So I made sure my introduction was good. And I knew it went very well and I got a lovely call later on that day, saying, "You have no idea. That really helped a lot of people today." They said, "Would you consider teaching a class for med students on mental wellness?" Because that was the topic for the Zoom call. And I said, "Sure." I said, "What are you looking?" Said, "It will be a two week class. An hour each day over a two week period." And they said, "It'll be 10 to 20 students each time." And I said, "Sure." I said, "When do you want me to start that?" And they said, "Could you do tomorrow?" At this stage my head is really spinning. But I used to be an adjunct professor at New York University in Media Studies and also at Fordham University. I think I'm an academic at heart.

So I wasn't too daunted by it, but it was just, I wanted it to be really good. So I said, "I'll give you the first week's syllabus. The second one you'll get tomorrow." And so I did and I've been doing that now ever since. So I think I've done eight classes so far, maybe more."

Theresa Cantley:

Oh, wow.

Seamus Kelleher:

And after about two months, they made me part of the adjunct faculty. So what am I? I'm an adjunct assistant professor at Texas A&M College of Medicine. Now if you had told me March 1st, "What would you like your career to be for the rest of your life?" I would say, "Well, first of all, I want to continue doing my music, but I really miss my teaching." And if you had asked me what were the chances I'd ever get back to teaching, I'd say, "That ship has sailed." So here I am, not just getting back to teaching but getting back to teaching at one of the best universities in the country, probably in the world, and a renowned medical school. And they're associated with a lot of other medical schools and that's opening up opportunities.

So, anyway, that's how it's good. So that's nice to have on my resume now and it's opening up other doors. But to make that happen, I had to learn all this technology, all this Zoom stuff. If you look here. I'm afraid to face my computer around because it's like a staging area for NASA. There's lights everywhere. I don't get to look this good naturally.

Theresa Cantley:

No, I get it. I know. I know. The lighting. I always try and have good lighting because it gets rid of the wrinkles.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah and I tried to put the camera up higher now so you're not seeing all this.

Theresa Cantley:

I know, I know.

Seamus Kelleher:

But anyway, the idea is... I had to do that. I went out. First thing I went down, started googling microphones and video cameras and all that. So every single day I was doing that in addition to improving my course, right? So that was my pivot, right? And there's things that terrified me. Like the first time I did a corporate thing for a big company and I was literally terrified. So I had to embrace the fear. There's a great book, something like Face the Fear and Do It Anyway or I forget the title [crosstalk 00:30:52]

Theresa Cantley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seamus Kelleher:

...something like that. But that's what I was doing. I was facing my fears and not just my fears. I might get the wrong word, but things, the unknown, you know? The uncertainty. I'm not the best techie guy in the world. I know enough to be dangerous, but I embrace it. There was a young kid in Ireland I reached out to, Shane Hennessey. Great, great guitar player. He's only 25 but I feel like we're soulmates, you know?

Theresa Cantley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seamus Kelleher:

So I still... every two weeks, I have an hour-long session with Shane where he teaches me technology. Later on this week, we're doing sound recording. But he's helped all my... mastered the lighting, mastered the video, and now I'm sharing that with others. Kind of trying to make their Zooms and their calls better. So-

Theresa Cantley:

No, you said something that was interesting about this time, right now, it's full of change and there's a lot of uncertainty and a lot of people are... and I think the universe is probably pointing you in a direction that it wanted you to go, which was the teaching and sharing your story. And I think a lot of people, particularly this year, I think people had gotten comfortable. They had gotten to a certain level in their life or businesses had gotten to a certain level in their business and in certain ways, they've gotten comfortable and all of this uncertainty and all of this change that has happened is actually pointing out where we've all kind of hindered our own growth. And it's whether or not, I believe, that you choose to see that, so that you can lean into that fear, not run from it.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah.

Theresa Cantley:

So that you can continue to move forward and that is, I think in a lot of ways, with your story, you've faced a lot of fears.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, you know, and Theresa, one of the things... I use the word Pollyanna a lot because sometimes I do get enthusiastic. I tend to be a bit on the manic side. I tend to be up and down. But it's not that every day was perfect. There was one day where... and I remember being honest with my students. I said, "I'm very low today." Just kind of that idea, "It's okay to be okay." What I tell people and this gets back to where I think it's good advice. It's okay to be not okay one day. Two days, hm. Three or four days in a row, you need to see somebody. It's time to get up. Because we are dealing with a lot of change and it's stretching us on every level and we've questioned all of the things that we thought were permanent are not so much anymore. Kind of what you were alluding to, the fact it can provide opportunity for growth. And even though you might be losing your house, you might be losing a lot of things. Your job, or whatever.

It doesn't seem that way and it's not like you're just painting it with this bright brush. "Oh, this is great. I just lost my job. I'll lose something else." It's not that easy. You still have to pay your bills, right? If you kind of say, "I am going to get through this. I'm going to get through it." And let me just bring up something. You and I discussed it a few minutes ago and I really like the idea, so I think we should share it with your wonderful audience. It's kind of the idea of mindfulness, right?

Theresa Cantley:

Mm, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Seamus Kelleher:

And I never really understood mindfulness. And this is even going back as recently as March. When I was in the hospital, they were talking about it all the time. So I knew it was important to discuss. So I at least bring it in as part of my teaching, but to be honest, I didn't fully understand it until my neighbor, Kira Kraiman, she's a wellness coach. She copied me on some email and she was talking about mindfulness. It was so lucid and so well-explained and I said, "Kira, Kira. I need you. Will you talk to my students?" I said, "I just talked about mindfulness yesterday." I said, "I've the right idea, but I wasn't able to put it. I need the context that you can." And she did and it was wonderful.

So let me just give you the core of what she said with mindfulness. You know, mindfulness is a way of, when stuff happens, when stuff comes at us, mindfulness is just a way of kind of saying, "Okay, this is happening." You allow yourself to react and to be, maybe, let's say for the instance, COVID. That's whatever, Saturday or Sunday, when the bottom fell out of my world. I was really, really angry. I had a tour booked this summer. 50 people going to Ireland, it was going to be one quarter, 25% of my salary for the year.

Theresa Cantley:

Wow.

Seamus Kelleher:

Gone, poof. Gone. I had to cancel it the next day. On and on and on. So my reaction was, "I am really mad." There'd be a lot more profanity involved if I really let myself go, but this is a family program so we won't do that. I was angry-

Theresa Cantley:

If you have children, please put your earbuds in.

Seamus Kelleher:

I was angry that I couldn't play music. I was angry that this was happening to my children, that I had to go down and get both of them, college-age kids, out of college and bring them home. And I was just so afraid for them, right? I was angry. I was angry at God. I was angry at everybody. But that was okay. That was the anger and that was my reaction. And this what Kira talks. It's okay to have that reaction when something happens. So my reaction was mad, angry. Angry at myself, in some ways, that I hadn't chosen another profession. And go through all those emotions. Then she said, "What's really important is how you respond." In other words, the reaction is the visceral thing that you have. It's like when somebody cuts you off on the highway, you know? They cut you off and the first thing you want to do is maybe flip them the bird or something like that.

That's your kind of reaction, but then the response should be, "That person is yelling at me. They don't even know me. In what world are they living in. What kind of stress are they having." And then you would respond. You kind of reframe what just happened and rather than react by giving the bird or worse, chasing them like I used to when I was a kid, I'd respond by just kind of going on and just feeling an empathy and hoping that that person is okay. And that's the same with the reaction to losing my work was really that anger, but then the response was, "Okay, how can I start..." even before the opportunity came with Texas A&M, I started the book and I started working writing songs again.

I did concerts from my porch. So that was the immediate thing and that was a good response. And I think that's very important. I'll share that link with you and if you want to share it with your people watching the podcast, you can at some point, and Kira just does a wonderful job. So the mindfulness is just giving you some space to process this, not being angry. Don't be judging yourself about what's going on. It's natural to feel the way you're feeling and the way you're reacting, but the way you're responding is kind of different. It comes from an old Buddhist idea. They talk about the first arrow and the second arrow and the idea is the first arrow comes at you, you have no control over that. It's just just coming at you. Boom, hits you and you're kind of... man. But then the second arrow is, you have an opportunity to respond differently to that, you know?

Theresa Cantley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Seamus Kelleher:

It's a wonderful kind of idea and I love it. The reason I put so much stress on it is it's worked for me. There's so many times that I just want to break out and get mad or something like that and I just reframe it and say, "You know, how can I respond to this? How can I turn this around into some... kind of reframe it." A different paradigm is a nice word for it. In other words, reframe it. Think of it as a picture frame. This is what happened. "Now how can I reframe this?" Because the reality is, Kira talks about this,

the stress that we are feeling, it's not the situation, it's just how we're responding to the situation, in some cases, is what's causing the stress. You now?

Theresa Cantley:

Yep, yeah.

Seamus Kelleher:

We can really control that much more than we give our selves credit for.

Theresa Cantley:

I always tell the people that I work with that you can't help your circumstances. We can't help that COVID happened. We can feel a certain way about it, but then the next decision that you make, if you continue to base it on circumstantial thinking, you're never going to get yourself out of being stuck. So you have to base it on, "Okay, what is going to move us closer to where we want to go?" And choose how you respond based on that. A lot of times, just a business, people think they base their where they want to go and what they want to do on their current circumstance. Which is like reacting to what's happening right now. And you can be mad about it. You can be upset about it. You can be frustrated with it, but then your next step is the response. How are you going to respond to it and you want to respond based on where you want to go or the difference that you can make or the opportunity, how you can move yourself forward. So it's the same kind of... It's bringing that mindfulness into how you're handling situations in your business.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, you're exactly right. And the other thing, it's okay to mourn the loss of something.

Theresa Cantley:

Absolutely.

Seamus Kelleher:

If your restaurant closed or if your business closed or if it's changed. If you're going into the office and let's say you're one of these people that love going in to the office. There are a few people that do like it.

Theresa Cantley:

Not me.

Seamus Kelleher:

But there are people that need that social interaction. So it's okay to mourn the loss of that, because the reality is, for some of these people, that they're not going to see those people at such an intricate level moving forward. So it's okay to kind of mourn the loss of something. It's very important in order to move forward, I think, to process that loss of whatever it is. But as you're doing that, it's also important to start reframing. Say, "Okay, I can't go into the office anymore. How can I do this?" And then, "So I know I'm going to be working from home. Not just during COVID, but moving forward. How can I extend my social circle so that I am seeing people." Maybe it's bridge or maybe it's card games or maybe it's music, whatever it's going to be. So you have to reframe things because it won't happen on it's own. So kind of

mourn the loss. Be mad, be angry. That's the reaction type of thing, but the response really should be building and, "Okay, I have to make the best."

You often people say, "I'll make the best of a bad situation." But I think that has kind of a negative connotation. It doesn't have to be a bad situation. Make the best of the situation that we're living in because we don't really control it, but what we can control is what lays ahead. But it does take a bit of work and there's a lot of anxiety associated with change and it's okay to do that. That's why it's really important. Like these kind of podcasts are wonderful. I have different groups that I deal with. I'm just starting a new organization called The Suicide Prevention Alliance where we'll helping people deal with suicide. There's eight people on the board and yesterday we had our first in person meeting. It was lovely. I needed that. We were out in Harrisburg and just to be among people, we were all socially distanced, but we're all on the same page and we're just propping each other up.

So don't try to do it on your own. Reach out to people, pick up the phone and not just on Facebook and social media. Social media is fine, it has the place, but there's nothing like picking up the phone. You can go grab a cup of coffee with somebody. Take a walk. But it's important.

Theresa Cantley:

Absolutely, absolutely. Well this has been an amazing, amazing discussion. But like I said, I have two more questions for you.

Seamus Kelleher:

Okay.

Theresa Cantley:

Didn't talk about before. That I asked all of my guests that join me on the podcast. But I just want to say thank you so very much. You have shared so many amazing nuggets to help people to get through these time and even any time of crisis. One of the things that you brought up is, whatever you're feeling, feel it. A lot of people try and push that down, but I think one of the... and Renee Brown talks about this in her books, being courageous means being vulnerable. And being able to say and recognize those feelings and being able to admit it and say, "I'm not feeling so good today." Or, "I'm feeling great today." But when it goes past a certain amount of time, yeah, then it's important to get help.

Seamus Kelleher:

She is amazing, by the way.

Theresa Cantley:

Renee Brown?

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah.

Theresa Cantley:

I love her. Oh my gosh, love her.

Seamus Kelleher:

[crosstalk 00:45:55]

Theresa Cantley:

I've read every single one of her books. She's awesome. All right, so, question number one. What was one of the most pivotal moments in your life that really helped you to move forward and to figure out what it was that you wanted to do or what your purpose is here?

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, I think that's kind of an easy one.

Theresa Cantley:

Kind of?

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, because it's coming up to the sixth anniversary of my sobriety. It was Halloween. We had a party here at the house in Doylestown. My kids were too old for trick-or-treating, so we had a party where we had all these fun games for them out the back. We have a big back yard. And I was drinking at the time, so I had a few whiskeys during the daytime before my wife got home from work, knowing that the few glasses of wine he'd have in the evening wouldn't be enough to keep me going and I also managed to sneak next door and have a drink with my friends, or two. So I wasn't drunk drunk or anything like that, but I definitely wasn't 100% sober. And Marybeth, my wife, said at about 10:00 before the parents came to pick up the kids, she said, "Maybe you should go up to bed. Probably best that the parents of the kids don't see you with a few drinks." It wasn't, in any way, nasty. I would have been way more drunk than that at other times.

So I said, "Sure." Went up to bed, fell asleep, woke up the next morning and I said to myself, "What am I doing?" As a kid, I worried about coming home from school. Was I going to get my sober mom or my not-so-sober mom. Would I have to find her next door getting a drink with the neighbor. Getting in my dad's car, knowing that he had too much to drink. And now I was doing the same thing. I was driving with my kids in the car. If somebody said, "What is the one thing you'd change in your life?" I'd say it was that. Driving when I saw drunk. To the best of my knowledge, I never got pulled over or hurt anybody, but I could have.

Theresa Cantley:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So that was when you got sober, but that's when you also got some more help, right?

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, all of the above. So that morning I picked up the phone to a friend of mine who'd been sober for 12 years and said, "Mike, I'm hurting, man. The drink is ruining my life. It's killing me slowly." And said, "Oh boy, come over," two hours later and that really was the beginning of my journey. We've met, I'd say, every few weeks for a year. Then gradually as I got stronger, then I started to think, "Okay, maybe there's a way to translate this into something else." And I decided not to go back to the corporate world because that had been causing me an awful lot of stress. I decided that maybe I'd go back to the music full time and dedicate the rest of my life to trying to help people going through the similar struggles. But that was it, really. That was a pivotal moment because I remember it so clearly.

I'm just thinking now, I know exactly what I was doing. I was by my night stand. I was just sitting there and I said, "I'm sentencing my kids to the same thing that I went through." I said, "Why would I ever want to go through that again?" You know?

Theresa Cantley:

Yeah. Oprah always says that life whispers to us constantly. It's whether or not we want to listen. And some people don't listen and then the whispers get louder until they smack you upside the head. Wow. That's a pivotal moment.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, it was.

Theresa Cantley:

And it brought you to this point where now you play... Like I said, you're an amazing musician and you're able to help others through sharing your own story.

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah.

Theresa Cantley:

All right, last question. What are you most grateful for?

Seamus Kelleher:

All the second chances I've been given. 12 years ago, I fell down two flights of stairs in Valley Forge, after a show. I'd been drinking way too much. I fractured my skull, bleeding on the brain and I was medevaced to the University of Pennsylvania Trauma Center and I was in ICU for three days. They didn't know if I was going to make it, but this thick Irish skull.

Theresa Cantley:

Wow.

Seamus Kelleher:

And go back to when my dad suggested I go to St. Patrick Psychiatric Hospital. So the theme is, I'm very thankful for the help I got when I needed it. I'm very grateful for that. Obviously, my wife, my kids, that's the greatest gift of all, but I think... because even before them, I'm grateful for just being able to get the help and that for whatever reason, I was open to getting the help. That's why I try to convince people, just open up your heart and mind. We all need something. So I'm very grateful that I got the help. It would be wrong to say I just got it six years ago. I got it many times. So there's a reason why... Statistically, I should have died many times over. So there must be some reason I'm still here. So I'm grateful for the help I got during those dark periods and for all the joy that I have right now. As soon as I finish this up, I get to go downstairs and play guitar for an hour. Just doing what I love.

Theresa Cantley:

Awesome.

Seamus Kelleher:

And my son is home today. The rest of them are all out at school or working. The two of us will sit down and chat and just all those little things that maybe I took for granted years ago, I'm grateful for all that. I could go on and on about what I'm grateful for, but I'm basically grateful for all the second chances I've gotten. And my goal is to be true to... I'm not the most religious person in the world, but be true to the Maker and maybe help some other people. If it's only one person, that's okay, but I hope it's a lot more people. My whole presentation is called Shine the Light and that's it. It's not this fancy thing. All it is is just kind of shining the light in the darkness for people that can't see the light and shine the light on people who are struggling from depression, anxiety, and other forms of mental illness and addiction. Shine the light forward so that we can just move forward and enjoy our time that we're given on this earth, that's it.

Theresa Cantley:

Well, you are quite a light in the lives of many, many people and you definitely have some guardian angels watching over you. But thank you, thank you, thank you again for sharing your story and for joining me on this podcast. You, like I said, I just think you're amazing and now that I've gotten to know you more, I'm just so honored to have you join me here, but I'm also just so grateful to have connected with you.

Seamus Kelleher:

Thank you, and if anybody needs, you can... whenever you're sending out the podcast, whenever you're doing it, if anybody needs to reach me, they can. You can give out my email. I'm easy enough to find. Seamus Kelleher will pop up anywhere. All my contact information is there. If anybody needs to give me a call or text me or whatever you want to do. I'll always be able to pick up the phone and sometimes it's just having a quick conversation, maybe a referral to somebody or something like that. But like I tell people, "Start the conversation. Don't be shy about starting a conversation." Because it can be life changing. It changed my life. I'm still here.

Theresa Cantley:

Absolutely and the world is so blessed because you're here. That was going to be my next thing, was to tell people how they could find you. So definitely we can share that in the show notes for anybody who is listening to this podcast on iTunes or Google Play or even going to my website, you will be able to download the transcript of this and we will also have the links that Seamus refers [crosstalk 00:55:42]

Seamus Kelleher:

Yeah, email on my website is always the best way and I'm always willing. The one thing I can absolutely promise, as long as I have my health, I'll be willing to take a call from somebody. And like I said, if it's just have a conversation and point them in the direction. I'm not a therapist. I'm not a counselor, but I can help. I can point you in the direction of somebody that can help you.

Theresa Cantley:

Yeah. As I said, you have a Ph.D in life. So that's all you need. All right, well thank you so much, Seamus, for joining us and I really, really appreciate it.

Seamus Kelleher:

This transcript was exported on Oct 14, 2020 - view latest version [here](#).

Same here. You made my day. I really enjoyed this.

Theresa Cantley:

Awesome, awesome. All righty.