#234 Good Stuff

Martin Farrell

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[00:00:00] **Susan:** today I am quite excited actually to have Martin Farrell on Life Beyond the Numbers. Martin, you're most welcome

[00:00:09] **Martin:** Oh, it's wonderful to be here. It's wonderful to be here. I'm quite excited too. In fact, I'm probably even more than quite excited. I've been thinking about this. It's been really helpful knowing that we're going to have this conversation because it's helped me think through what we're gonna be talking about.

So that in itself, it's already a result. I've been thinking through all these past years and what I might pass on. So thank you

[00:00:35] **Susan:** let's hope the thinking helped because I might have some curveball questions for you. But anyway,

[00:00:42] **Martin:** Come on, let's have 'em. Let's have 'em

[00:00:43] **Susan:** let's see where we go. So you said something there about passing it on

[00:00:49] **Martin:** This is, we hope, the first conversation in a series of passing it on. Now, the final chapter in your book, Good Leaders in Turbulent Times, which we will come back to- Yes, and there's a- Final chapter is called Passing It On.

And so I wondered if when you wrote that chapter, were you thinking about this?

Straight answer, no. but that chapter, chapter five you're referring to, was, of the same spirit as this podcast. Because what I discovered in coaching many UK charity chief executives who were in crisis, was that they wanted to pass something on. And these were people, remember, who were not just in a little bit of crisis, but they were at risk of losing their job.

They were at risk of losing their job because of all sorts of poor communication, or the money is disappearing, or whatever. Anyway, they were in deep doo-doo, deep crisis, thinking their reputation is trashed, they've got no income, "I'll never work again," all of that.



And the people whom I, wrote about, or wrote for, actually, all but 12 of them I did ghostwriting. One person wrote it himself and I edited it. They'd all been through their crises some years before, and I approached them and they said I would ... They would be delighted to pass it on. They would be delighted to take their painful experience and pass it on to others. So that was the thinking behind that.

So the book, as you may recall, is four chapters, which is a story of nine characters over seven years. And then the chapter five is different, 'cause they are real people, albeit anonymized, for perhaps obvious reasons. and it's all true what they said, and they wanted to pass it on.

we're now middle of 2026, and probably I was writing that three years ago. It was at that time that I had the first idea of a podcast, Passing It On, which is a play on...

not a play on words, but it's both passing on. I'm, all being well, Susan, I'm closer to passing on than you are. And I hope not very close, but I'm close to passing on. And life looks different when you get to your mid-70s, as I now am, 'cause you start thinking, "Holy Moses," "This is, I've got... What have I got? 10 years, 20 years, 15 years? it's time limited. What do I want to pass on? I'm going to pass on. So that's why we've got the it in the middle. Passing It On, passing stuff on, knowing that I'm gonna pass on. And it's refreshing, I find, admitting to myself that I shall pass on.

it's we all know that, but it starts becoming a reality. A sort of, not an ever-present reality. Well, it is an ever-present reality in my thoughts, and part of that exactly is the people in chapter five of the book. It feels very healthy to me to think, "What do I want to pass on?

What will I pass on to those people with whom I have contact?" I have contact with family. We have two children and, no grandchildren, but two children, and I've got lots of, friends and contacts. something gets passed on, and this is a way of thinking what else, to a broader audience, hopefully a broader audience, what could I pass on?

So I had that idea a few years ago and mentioned it to,in fact, to Nick Young, who was the, who wrote the forward for the book, and he said, "What a good idea. Yes, I... great idea." And then nothing happened because I couldn't really make it happen. And now we're making it happen, and that's wonderful.

so this is a great joy to me A great joy to me that we can do that so that people who are still, as it were, in the fight, in the fray, in the action of doing stuff for society and trying to do good things, that they, I, other guests, can do something to help them.



I'm done with being in the fray, really, in that fight, in that... I don't have the legs for it. I can't run that fast like I used to, but I can pass some things on, and that's something I can do at this point.

So the, my passion, my aspiration remains the same, but the form in which it's taking is changing

[00:05:11] **Susan:** So what is something someone passed on to you

[00:05:20] **Martin:** Oh, wow. what is something that someone passed on to me? That's a ... Is this a curved ball? I think this is a curved ball.

[00:05:29] **Susan:** I think it is, yeah

[00:05:30] **Martin:** Ooh. I think now... Oof. Okay, let's give this a try. I think my ancestors passed on to me, the passion that I feel for doing, I don't know what you call it, good stuff. 'Cause right from the age of 16, I remember it, "I've gotta help people. I've gotta be out there." And maybe that's not unusual for young people of that age. you want to make an impact. You wanna do good things. and so that's, in a way, what I've done since then, since I was 16. Now that's exactly 60 years ago. So I've done that. I started out with that aspiration, and I have done that, and I'm still doing that.

My dad was a probation officer. he died 25 years ago. He was a probation officer, which was... He was one of the first people to be trained at the LSE in probation when it was new after the war. And, then I think about it, "Why on earth did he do that?" And then I think of his father, father died when my dad was 14. So let's just ponder a moment what that does to a 14-year-old. Indeed, when his elder brother had died seven years before, so there was a lot of death around. His father died, and I've always thought I took on that mantle. So what has been passed on to me is whatever my grandfather, whom I never knew but I have pictures of, and he was buried three miles from here.

What did he pass on to me? He was buried in February, coming up 100 years ago. I imagine that I'm gonna go and sit by the graveside, which I've now managed to identify, which was pretty difficult, but we found it, and have another conversation with him. I do have conversations with him and my late uncle.

Because he,he died at the age of 40 something in, 100 years ago, and he would've had in living memory the Great Famine

And I think there is something going on here, 'cause it would have been his grandfather who would've been around at that time. But anyway, he would've heard stories about that, I'm sure. And then he came to England. and I'm guessing that he, along with many other Irish



immigrants of that time, would've had a pretty rotten time, 'cause they're delinquent, diseased, unhealthy, uneducated, were seen to be, and to some extent that was true because of their position in society.

he had enough money to come here, but that was about it. And, he rose above that, and I think my father took on a mantle from him, and I from my father. Because I've always had that, "Yeah, I've gotta do good stuff." I don't know where that came from. I've no idea.

So that is a hypothesis about the ancestors, but it's a hypothesis that sort of landed with me some years ago, and it seems to have resonance. It seems to still apply. I poke it and test it and look into it and think about my Irish ancestry, and I think that's something that I've picked up. So my entire career, actually, it seems to me, has come from that heritage.

So I think of ancestors a lot. I think also on my mother's side, but i- on my mother's side it's not so colorful or so tragic, in a way. and then I think about being a good ancestor What would it be like to be a good ancestor? If I think those four generations back, or even could I think of seven. My older brother, spent a lot of time doing the ancestry stuff. He can apply himself to it. I'm very interested in it, but I can't concentrate that long, and it's very detailed and quite laborious.

we have some even further, but if we think seven generations back and then we think seven generations forward, what kind of ancestor can I be? M- maybe through my family, but maybe through the acquaintances, through the people I have conversations with. What will be left in seven generations' time?

One of my great frustrations in life is I'm not gonna know. I want to know what's going to happen, and I'm not going to know what's going to happen. I want to know, in all the turbulence that we have, good leaders in turbulent times. All, the turbulence we have, where will that go? With AI and climate change and the world turbulence, where's that gonna go? I want to know. Maybe I'll know for 10, 15, 20 years, but it's really bloody annoying that I won't know beyond that. there we are. I have

[00:10:21] **Susan:** you don't know where this conversation's going to go, so

[00:10:24] **Martin:** We don't. Is it going all wrong already? Oh dear.

[00:10:27] **Susan:** No, but isn't, I suppose one of the things that, strikes me there with that, like what you say right at the end, is after a career of, say, 60 years work, living with, living in uncertainty must have been part and parcel of that career.

[00:10:48] **Martin:** Yeah



[00:10:49] **Susan:** Was it always so frustrating?

[00:10:53] **Martin:** I'm not sure I would choose the word frustrating. I would use the word It's always been turbulent. It's always been challenging. It's always been, wild waters. Maybe we come to that in a moment. and I think to the times when there's been most wild waters, like I'm going to drown kind of wild water.

I'm not gonna survive this, it's so terrible and rotten that, And I think of those times, and what the first and the major one of those turbulent times did is set me on the path of working independently. So whilst I count 16 as the time when I first started thinking about this stuff really, or that I remember, because I was in the church at the time.

That was a way of, in a way expressing my desire to be in touch with something, in the Baptist Church, and I think of it often and appreciate the people then who've helped me. And We'd go to the blind home to sing hymns on a Sunday. So it's pretty patronizing, but it was of its time really. We did good works. So I think of that time when I was 16.

But I think my career started after university when I was 22, s- when I traveled to Africa. I'd studied Southern African politics and the economics of,development, and went to Nairobi and then traveled over land. And it was cool. It was amazing. It was a p- a young man's adventure. And then worked in Johannesburg in a charity, which I did for no pay. I don't know how I survived actually. I think I got the equivalent of 50p a week or ... I don't know. I somehow managed that, and then traveled back all the way over land.

So I started working at that time. So of my career of 54 years, 27 of it has been working independently. And it was the crisis of redundancy which rocketed me into that.

I was at the British Red Cross, which my late mother, died 20 years ago, thought that ... She thought that was a proper job, 'cause she'd heard of the Red Cross and she thought,he's a manager. Oh, very important. He's a manager in the Red Cross. That's very good." Whereas the other things I'd done, she hadn't heard of the little puddle town community center, things like that. The other peripheral things I'd done. I'd done all sorts of things, all in the charity world. and, there was a structure review and

I thought I was, my name was on a ladder going up. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. But my name was on the head of a snake, and I went down, down, down. My post was made redundant. This was awful. It was awful. I'd somehow imagined that was the job for life. it was a humanitarian organization of great standing. This is my vehicle for, to do my stuff, and it didn't work out that way.



And then I went to a mental health charity, which was, after day three, it was awful. It was okay for the first few days, and then it was just really, really difficult. It was a silly job to take. I remember when I went for the interview, this is perhaps some learning.

I went for the interview. When I went in the lift, I remember it now, the lift to go downstairs, my shirt was bathed in sweat. By which I mean, I don't want to, make it too graphic, but anyway, the fact was I was so anxious that it wasn't just a little bit of, sweaty bits under the armpit. I was just drenched because I was trying so hard to get this job.

I wanted employment. "Well, I'm going to need to feed my kids. I need to pay my mortgage. I need to..." Yeah. and I knew it was the wrong job, but I tried so hard, and I came out, and I got the job. Two years later, I left after enormous pain, and pain with a settlement, which was enough to...

Well, I thought, "Okay, I don't need to work for a few months." What happened? I got employed after three weeks. And that was the beginning of my working independently career, 27 years ago, and what a good thing came out of that pain.

So that's, in a way, lesson number one. Yes, we will go through pain. There is suffering. Either it's of our own making, or it is what's delivered to us. I'm smacking my hands together 'cause it was like we get hit by something. But the pain that we feel isn't just that, it's what we make of it. And what I made of it was desperation and sleepless nights. lots, like two months. That's pretty rubbish. I don't know if any listeners to this will have had that kind of experience, but it's pretty rubbish. After a while, your brain starts going all over the place. I nearly crashed my motorbike coming home one time, and that was the point at when I thought, "I really need to do something here. This is getting serious." I fell asleep on my motorbike. I closed my eyes and started falling asleep on a 600cc motorbike. And I thought, "I've gotta do something." So that's when I said I want to leave, and then negotiated a settlement, or was offered a settlement.

So that, working independently, was a breath of fresh air. It was wonderful. What's the lesson in that? The lesson is that shit happens, Bad things happen, and it's how we react to them that what counts. It's how we react to them that what counts, and that suffering is something which one can learn to deploy, in a way. If we know how to suffer, we suffer less. We still suffer, Pain in life is obligatory. That's gonna happen in one way or another, but the suffering is optional, because it's how we respond to that pain that, that changes the dynamic.

And through my own efforts, through chance, through the help of dear friends and colleagues and so on, I then ended up having been in this locked, smelly room, as it were, of being contained. I was free. It was like going from a suffocating room to being into a field of fresh-mown grass. To take that further, with a cup of really good coffee, and with the smell of fresh bread. Yes, it was so exciting, and I had the freedom that I'd always craved, actually,



to go my own way. Or no, not go my own way, just go the way which drew me, and that's what I, that's what I did from 27 years ago.

[00:17:24] **Susan:** There's a few things in there, Martin, so that might be worth, from the listener's perspective, digging into a little deeper. And because in, in your book, Good Leaders in Turbulent Times,

[00:17:44] **Martin:** Subtitle: How to navigate wild waters at work. Wild waters, important. Maybe we'll come to that

[00:17:49] **Susan:** you are now the interviewing as well.

[00:17:53] **Martin:** am I? Oh, I'm sorry. Okay. Note to self, shut up.

[00:17:59] **Susan:** y- yeah, it's called Navigating ... the subtitle is Navigating Wild Waters at Work, and one of the things you say, "In order to operate well in turbulent times, you speak your truth, are vulnerable, and are tough." And you've talked about some of those turbulent times you've gone through there when in employment.

But also, you say in the book that your crisis can be a pivot point in your life, which you've also spoken to there, and crisis provokes insight under pressure, a powerful time of learning as well as painful. And I ... So I wonder with the redundancy, maybe we go to that first, 'cause you didn't see that coming, it sounds at

all.

[00:18:46] **Martin:** no. The

[00:18:47] **Susan:** So how did you navigate that at the time? Can you remember?

[00:18:56] **Martin:** I think,to say I was... the post was made redundant and then they said, "You're a jolly good chap. We like you really, and we're very sorry to make you redundant. We're going to give you a year's fixed term contract." So I had a year to get my house in order. So that was important framing really.

And what I did during that time was to ignore it really, and I wouldn't recommend that as a tactic. I don't think that's a tactic. Avoidance is a wonderful short-term remedy, but it doesn't work for tomorrow really. so I worked really hard. I was given specific projects. I think I was called head of projects or something, which was a made-up title.

So I was responsible for Scotland and Northern Ireland and refugees. Actually, I did a lot of work with refugees, which was very, memorable and inspiring, and I was told that it went



well. so I think I just avoided it, and I think this is an important point here, that all of us, typically our default position is to avoid.

There's pain and we avoid it, and we can do it by hard work, frenetic work, which I did for donkey's years. We can do it in obvious ways like drinking too much or eating too much or to all sorts of excesses, which we can all think about in order not to touch that pain, that discomfort, that distress.

Some of which is to do with the current thing, and some of it reminds us of what has happened before, and I think also reminds us of our ancestral pain. But that's a... perhaps there's a whole discussion around that. But, so there's the current, right? I just dropped the hammer on my toe. Ouch, the toe hurts. That's the current pain. But what do I make of that then is important. So we avoid, we run away from, and I think that's a failing, a tactic which is bound to fail

But so what I then started doing, and actually it was then, where are we, 10 years later. After I'd been working independently for 10, 11 years, I kind of was dep- well, I wasn't kind of, I was depressed and anxious, and basically I was just wrung out 'cause I said yes to everything. Someone said to me, "Martin, why do you say yes to everything? You could say N-O. It's actually only two letters. Yes is three letters." It didn't occur to me, and I think I was on a drug, which was a drug to be flattered, being asked to do work, and there was lots of work. This was in the 2000... the noughties. There was lots of work. and it just didn't occur to me to say no.

And when the point came when there was less work around, it never... it didn't collapse, but there was less work around, I remember this fear, thinking, "What will I do if I can't fill all my time frenetically with that stuff?" So it was partly that beginning to happen.

This is around 2010 when I was 60. So I had my 60th birthday. I had a big party, and I was like the six-year-old, who cried after the birthday party, 'cause I had the big party. It was a whole day of stuff, and I felt so deflated afterwards. What's next? It's the end of everything. I now look back to 60 and think people who are 60, even younger than that, some people, I'm told, are spring chickens. But at the time, of course, I thought, "It's the end. I'm an old bloke."

And, so then I was forced to start taking my inside seriously, not run away from them. Lesson here, don't leave it as long as I did because you might not die. you might just go through nine months of depression and anxiety like I did, which did feel like dying at times. But you don't have to put yourself through that. There are smarter ways. And when I say feels like dying, there were moments when, I'd be sleeping two hours a night or three hours a night, and if I went to sleep say at 12:00 or 1:00, I'd wake up at 3:00 and I'd know... And this was during wintertime.



It happened to be starting in the early autumn through until the end of the winter. And I remember I'd get up and walk along by the river. I lived close to the Thames, and I would walk to the local church, silent in the middle of the night, and I'd sit on the bench there. And as I walked by the river, I'd think, "Why don't I just jump in?"

I don't want to over-dramatize, but that's what I thought. And for me, as I think people who think of but don't take their own lives, it's because of what you know you will do to those you leave behind, as well as just being a chicken . it's probably going to be cold and nasty. but I absolutely thought that.

And that's also the story in one of the characters, Robin, in the book, who in the first... Sorry, in the second chapter. First chapter is a year ahead, where they're seeing the signs and they're not doing anything about it. Silly people. Like me, silly people. Then the second chapter is when each of the nine characters are in their deepest distress.

Robin is in his deepest distress. Hey-ho, he wakes up in the small hours and walks along by the canal and he thinks of jumping in. That's a direct reference to my experience, but he didn't. And what happened for that character, Robin, in the book, is there was an early morning dog walker who walked past who just said, "Are you all right, mate?" And gave him a kind look. And it was that sort of shifted him, and he thought, "No, I'm not gonna do that." He thought of his wife and da, da, da, da. Went back, threw away the, or disposed of, put it in the recycling actually, the note that he'd left for her. And the book leaves that hanging about whether that was a suicide note or just saying, "I've gone for a walk." It leaves that up to the reader to imagine.

And that was his turning point because of the attention of that early morning dog walker, and I think that's also a lesson, that we can be that for other people. We don't know the power that we might have of someone who's in a moment of difficulty, that we can help them in that way.

And that's what happened to Robin in the book, and that's what happened with me. For me, it was sitting by the church, which now looking back I realize, why the church? Why not outside the supermarket or something, or just in a park or... It was because of my longing for the spiritual dimension that I'd- Run away from or avoided or just ignored. I think ignored, and it was there as a teenager.

So there's a lesson that, why did I wait decades to start honoring that, to look at that? Now at the position where I'm not chasing work, I've got a state pension. I've got a bit of a pension from here and there, so that's okay, and I say that knowing that the number of people...

If anybody listens to this, some people will be in the position of mortgages and children and, financial pressure. I understand all that. but I'm not at that point now, so it's meant that



over the last years I've been able to honor that early impulse. So that's m- it's a kind of lesson to really honor that early impulse, which probably most of us submerge for a while.

Maybe like me, submerge for too long. Maybe not like me, suffer greatly and lay down physical ailments, maybe mental ailments, which are very difficult to recover from. so don't do that. find a way. Find a way of discovering that early impulses, whatever they were. Whatever they were.

I think back to that time of what they were for me, and I'm now in the fortunate position of being able to explore that, which is a gift of my age, really. age, lowercase A, in the time of the Age, capital A. Because here we are in these... I don't want to keep mentioning it, anyway. They are turbulent times. I'm not mentioning the title of the book yet again,

but, what is happening now, I think this is a shifting paradigm. we all think that. Climate, fascism, avoidance, pain, chaos. So in my age, the age I am, lowercase A, I want to spend my time addressing the issues of the Age, capital A, Age, as I can because I'm in- a position where I can do that, and it's not fulfilling for me simply to, sit in the park or whatever.

I like to... I do those things and just turn away. I'm not gonna turn away. I do sit, probably after this conversation, I shall go to the little café in the local park, and I delight in that, the rustle of the trees, seeing the river, seeing the ducks and geese and things squabbling with each other and trying to take off and landing, and seeing the prams and all of that.

So I take that time now. But I'm not turning away. I refuse to turn away 'cause I don't want to, 'cause it would be unhealthy. I want to respond to that, but in a way that accords with my own energy that I've now got. Physical energy, emotional energy.

So that's a lesson, in a way, for anybody, just to listen in whatever your life circumstances are, to listen to whatever that inner impulse is. Of course it's harder when you have demands upon you, family demands or whatever, and indeed parents' demands. My parents died 20 and 25 years ago. I understand what that's like. But find a way, otherwise you are going to be paying a price for it, which you then have to work through as I've done

[00:29:14] **Susan:** Yes, the period you talked about there was in your time of self-employment, in when you were free, as you

[00:29:24] **Martin:** Yay!

[00:29:25] **Susan:** to do your own thing. So I wanna take you back to the second crisis, which was, a- and this is what you said, "I knew it was the wrong job. It was a silly job to take."

[00:29:38] **Martin:** Did I say that?



and yet you spent two years there. and then you spoke of this desperation and sleepless nights Yeah

[00:29:46] **Susan:** and, a- and I've been through that too. It's not just listeners. I can share in that and know what that's like. And Why did it take two years to leave? Why did you take it? And I know you took it, actually, you took it because of family pressures there and mortgage and all of that. So it seemed like the right thing to do perhaps. Now, in hindsight, would you have taken that if you had your time over again? Maybe that far we go

[00:30:25] **Martin:** Oof hindsight. I probably would have taken it because the year that I was given was coming to an end. it was a month or two, and I thought, "What do I do if I don't have a job? I don't have any money." I was b- ridiculous, really. I thought, I don't know what to say. Oh, I'll take it, I'll take it."

I think the error was to stay that length of time. It became clear pretty soon, I'd said a few days, no it wasn't, it was a few months, when I thought, "This is just pretty awful." And people were warning me of particular senior people there and told me, "So and so, and so, and so, and so, and they left with quite serious mental breakdowns and, you'll be the flavor of the month for a month or two or three.

Just watch out." So people, staff there were saying that, and I didn't listen to that. I thought, "No, I can tough this through. I can tough this through." and that was unwise. Again, there's a character in the book just like that which reflects someone I supported who, is one of the people in the passing it on chapter where he says, "I just hung on too long.

Why did I not realize that I was just trying to prove that I could manage that?" And his professional background was one in which you toughed it through So that's the kind of person I am, so that's what I'm gonna do. And after more than one year, more than two years, that person then left, and then even some while later was still paying the price because he was deeply exhausted.

and I wanted to put that in the book 'cause I want that less, in a way, your question is inviting me to say what I'm saying. She's, "Don't leave it so long." Why two years, for goodness sake? It's ridiculous. and I paid the price of all the sleepless nights and the desperation and so on 'cause, when, famously fail faster.

if you take the job, okay, I've got the job. I can now save up a bit of money. Can I hang it as lo- a bit longer, and then I'm gonna find something else. I wasn't looking for anything else. But then it occurred to me that I could work independently. that's a good idea, but don't put up with that. You don't need to. You do need to look at your bank account. You don't wanna be probably, don't wanna have to not pay your mortgage if you've got one or not pay your rent or whatever. But it's painful when you're in entirely the wrong place for you. Maybe it's the right place for somebody else.



It was the wrong place for me at the wrong time and it turned into an open window of all the things that I've done since then. 'Cause it was three years after that, that I got a call from the UN. I'd been recommended by a former colleague. I was on a board and he was at that organization, and he said, "Would you mind if I recommend you to the UN?"

What? So I said, "Yeah." And three hours later, I got the call from UNV, United Nations Volunteers, saying, "We're looking for a facilitator in three weeks' time." Talk about the deep end. But I did that, and then started getting more calls from UN Climate Change, did something like 30 organizational retreats, with them, which then turned into loads of other international work, which has been thrilling and wonderful and, such excitement and so on.

Damn hard work. As Susan, you will know, it might look glitzy, but it's pretty hard when you get up at 4:00 in the morning, jump on my motorbike, get a plane at 7:00, go to Bonn, and at 9:00 I'm in the office, and they expect me to talk sense, insofar as I ever do. it's great to look back on, but at the time when the alarm goes on, you think, "Why am I doing this?"

But anyway, I did lots of that, and it was all great, until I just got exhausted, really. would you do it again is a kinda difficult question. I wouldn't have stayed there two years. I probably would've taken the job that wasn't a good one for me, and so on.

[00:34:28] **Susan:** So let's just, I wouldn't have stayed there two years. okay, I wonder what would've interrupted that, because in the book you, say that, and I'm assuming it was the same time, "When 25 years ago I was in crisis, I felt I was being constantly criticized. Someone said to me, 'Don't put up with being tolerated. Work somewhere where you are celebrated.'"

And I thought that's such a fantastic line, and I think, listening to what you've been saying there, we do put up with things. we do. We think, "Oh, it'll get better," or, "I'll bounce back," or, will leave," and we keep justifying our reasons for staying somewhere. And the other thing I've noticed myself in my own life, and maybe this is somewhat true for you too, Martin, is when we are in crisis- We're not very good at getting help or looking for help

then.

[00:35:20] **Martin:** In fact, and people stay away from us 'cause they can tell we're not ourselves. And it's a real paradox, of the human condition that when we most need others, we are pushing them away most

Yes. And that's one of the pieces of advice in one of the passing it on chapter something like, look after your network. Create a network when the sun is shining. Not because you're thinking, I'm gonna make friends so they're there for me when I fall over," but it's a good thing anyway because it's nourishing, it's fun, you can learn,



You can help other people, you can help them, and it's also when you need those people, they... Some of them are going to be there. Others may be distracted by their own concerns, but others will be there, and when I spoke to that person, He said, "Oh, that's the obvious thing to me." I hadn't done that.

I hadn't done that, but I had you to support me, and one or two friends, but I hadn't really nourished my network. So there's something really to do not in an instrumental way, as I've said, but because it's a good thing to do. You might be a natural networker. You might like to be in the company of people.

or it may come less naturally, but it's always a good thing to find common cause with people in your area, in your network, or, just so that people are there, And when the When it hits the fan, then you maybe can ask those people for help, because it is difficult, and I know that from all the people I've coached through crisis.

it's a very lonely place, and it's a place in which you feel useless. the world is telling me that I've not done this very well, whatever, and you could probably... we could all pick on something that we haven't done very well. But that one thing then turns into 100 things. It turns into, "I didn't do the budget right" into, "I'm a completely useless person, and what on earth am I doing running an organization?"

no one else will ever hire me

"No one will hire me. My reputation is trashed," which was something that a good friend from the Red Cross said to me at that time. He was senior in HR and so on, and I said, "Oh, I'm never gonna work again." He said, "Martin, people just move on. They'll look at you. They know that this stuff happens.

They want to know, did you have your hands in the till or do something else really naughty?" and they will convince themselves that they will just look at you, and your reputation will not be trashed. You stand with your reputation. And that was absolutely true. I remember him saying that, and thought, "Oh, thank you.

That was really helpful." And so your reputation will not be trashed, because people will look at you, and you can explain what happened insofar as that may be allowed by if you have any legal agreements or whatever.

But you can explain it honestly, and that's what people want to hear. Are you trustworthy? Let's make sure you didn't do anything really egregious and terrible. so I learnt that as well

[00:38:34] **Susan:** I think that can, backfire too, Martin.



[00:38:37] **Martin:** Go on

[00:38:38] **Susan:** had a, I had an incident where there was a position that was open, and I knew the person who was in charge there. and basically I ha- I was completely ... When you read the person's spec, there probably weren't many people that could have done that role.

So I went and had a conversation with this person that I knew, and I believe they didn't hire me because they knew I wouldn't put up with any crap. They knew that my governance and my ethics were so strong that,that, that would get in their way

[00:39:18] **Martin:** So they did not hire you because you were too good in that way?

[00:39:22] **Susan:** Yeah, I didn't even get shortlisted for an

[00:39:24] **Martin:** Oh

[00:39:26] **Susan:** And, but isn't it a good thing? it's a good thing as well, and I think that's the thing, isn't it? It's sometimes the signals, you talked about seeing the signs and not doing anything. Sometimes the signs take care of themselves as well.

[00:39:41] **Martin:** Yeah. yeah.

[00:39:42] **Susan:** and we look and go, 'Why didn't that happen, and why didn't I get it?'

But actually, it's probably a good thing. So I think it's also important to look at the things that didn't happen in our careers for us that we hoped would, and take a learning from that too

[00:39:58] **Martin:** Yeah. Yeah. Yes, I agree. And yeah, that's interesting when you say you didn't get hired 'cause you were too good. They didn't want that. Oh, I suppose it happens, yeah. But what didn't happen in our careers, that's interesting for me right now 'cause I think I'm aware of, oh, I didn't do that. I wasn't like a big thought leader.

I did what I was drawn to do, And so I look to people who I see as, thought leaders But, that, triggers me, and I just realized something in the last few months about, what do I learn from that painful triggering?

'Cause the people who trigger me, they're doing good stuff. it's good, but it's painful. Hang on. This is really weird. What's going on here? And I thought, this is a signal to me for the next decade or two about what I can do now. I can do that now. I didn't do it then because I was busy doing the stuff I was doing, which actually I was drawn to and liked to do, and people kept hiring me, so I suppose I was doing it okay.



But now I can do something different, to fulfill that,part of me which was not fulfilled during my career. And I feel, drawn to that, My intention is to do that in a way which is true to myself, that does not speak of ego, where there is due humility.

I want you to remind me of the quote you mentioned recently about humility. I wrote it down,

[00:41:34] **Susan:** Humility is not thinking less of ourselves, it's thinking of ourselves less

[00:41:39] **Martin:** Ah, there we are

[00:41:42] **Susan:** It's attributed to a Scottish mystic called Syd Banks

[00:41:46] **Martin:** Yeah. So not a kind of false humility, but just being who I am in a, a sort of humble way in that way. I can do that. I can do that now. And I want to do that in a way without trying, 'cause if I'm trying, it's, not working. The river doesn't try to flow downhill, it just goes.

so

[00:42:06] **Susan:** And we shouldn't have to try to be ourselves.

[00:42:09] **Martin:** exactly. Yeah. we can have intention and notice those things where we are trying, which are then telling us that there's something wrong here. why are you trying to make yourself into something that you're not inherently, and who inherently is more than good enough for you, and it's not the same as the next person

[00:42:30] **Susan:** or, and it's just life is harder than it needs to be, I

[00:42:34] **Martin:** And then it makes it hard because you're walking up a hill when you could walk round through the woods or something, which is your thing

[00:42:41] **Susan:** Or you've got the wrong size shoes on, whatever way we want to look at that

[00:42:45] **Martin:** Oh, okay

[00:42:46] **Susan:** I think the other thing that you say in your book, which I hope is coming across in this anyway as well, is that Nor are any of us alone. So while we are going through our stuff, so are many others on some, on that same day somewhere, albeit unbeknownst to us.



And I think that is, that's so critical for me looking back I think as you go through crisis or you're in crisis, you very much,you said it was a lonely place to be, you feel that. We feel useless. We feel all of those things. We feel alone. We isolate ourselves further than we need to. So if somebody's listening to this, Martin, now, how do you break that cycle?

[00:43:40] **Martin:** Hmm.

[00:43:40] **Susan:** it's fine for us to say, "You're not alone," but what helps you see you're not alone?

[00:43:47] **Martin:** Yeah. I'll think about that, and to say it brings to mind the person Who would send me chief executives in crisis, and she herself had supported loads and loads and loads of people. So she'd been on people's insides, as it were. And she said to me, I think this is also in the book somewhere, that

She would be at a conference of that organization, and she would know half the people in the room of 150 people. she'd had those conversations, and she would speak with them in the coffee break, and they would not refer to the conversation they'd had. So she said, "You never know who you're standing next to."

So she knew, because she'd had those conversations. You don't know who you're standing next to. So I think it behoves us, who have this spirit, to be open in a way to allow those people to speak. I was at an event, it was a sporting event, a sort of swimming thing I did a couple of weeks ago, teams of eight and, swimming an hour each over 24 hours.

It was all a bit wild. anyway, there's someone I was talking to there whom I didn't know well. I just knew her by sight, really, and she started telling me very substantial stuff of her life story. And at the end she said, "I don't really talk about this. I don't want to talk about this." And then carried on talking about it.

I did nothing special. Absolutely, I was just waiting to have my turn to get in the water and swim around for an hour. so I think that's something that we can do for other people, that they somehow know that it's okay To share those painful things. And if you are that person, know that there are people who are ready to listen, and that you might need to go to one or two people, because some people will be too preoccupied with their own stuff.

Maybe they're not listeners, maybe they're talkers, maybe they're... But there are people who are ready to listen. they might be friends, they might be professional colleagues, maybe out, someone out of the dynamic that you're in. Probably not to speak to someone in the dynamic because then it can get...



It's like shouting in a, bubble, and it all echoes around. But someone who's outside the dynamic, and find someone. And preferably don't allow yourself to get into that position, which I always say in the book, the ship's captain who the ship is washed up on the shore and he calls back to the lifeguard, "What do I do?

My ship is on the thing. The waves are crashing and everything. What do you do?" And the advice comes, "Do not allow your ship to get into this position." Right, okay. So best not to get into that position.

And if you're really desperate, find someone. If you're in the wild waters, then find a branch at the side or someone standing at the side.

The image, if I may, the image of wild waters, navigate wild waters at work, came from a real experience. We were in then Swaziland, it's now called Eswatini, a country in Southern Africa. And my friend there, who I've known for 50 years or something, we have birthdays very close to each other, and I visit from time to time.

It was around my 50th birthday, and she said, "Oh, day one. Why don't you go for a, go wild water rafting?" Okay. I thought, it'll be fun." It was extraordinary. It was eight hours. There was a point where I thought, I think I, I was in the water most of the time and, my wife was washed away and, the boat was above me and on top of me, and I had to push it out, and I knew that would push me under.

And there were real crocodiles, because they said, "If you come out of your boat, you must get back in your boat immediately because the crocodiles will get you." And I said at the end, "Oh, you were joking about the crocodiles, weren't you?" And he said, "Of course I'm not joking. This is Africa." I thought it was like the local leisure center.

But this was Africa, snappy crocodiles. So I drew on that experience- To think about leadership. And I talk about that experience and how the, there are direct parallels to leadership

and that's, I don't know why I'm saying this other than I wanted to say it, because wild waters, that, that image w- is a life memory for our children as well, who, "Wow, this is amazing." Certainly for my wife, who is not normally that sporty really. and it's a l- wonderful memory for us. and it fits very well the way our work lives are, the wild waters.

But yeah, parallels with leadership. You could do that again. I forgot what your question was

[00:48:21] **Susan:** Worth the risk, I would say. That's what it seems to be



[00:48:24] **Martin:** It's worth the risk. yeah, it's worth the risk. And particularly now in this capital A age, we have to be there for each other and with people because what we're heading into, I think, and I'm not being gloomy, I think I'm being rational.

there's a lot of really difficult times coming. At the time of this recording, we've just had two heat waves. I was in Paris last week working. I got rehired. Wow, that was pretty cool. Except it wasn't cool. It was 40.9 degrees in Paris, and the cooling did not work and, anyway, that was with climate modelers, and they're saying, "We've been telling you this for a long time, that this is happening."

This has never happened before in Paris to have two heat waves this time of year. We maybe have one every few years. So that's happening, and I think we're close to the point where we cannot mitigate any further, so we have to adapt. So Those of us who have whatever, heart or the intention or, feel inclined this way, we hang together.

As the cowboys said, "If we do not hang together, we will hang together." I don't know if anybody said that, but I remember it. So we've got to hang together, people. We've got to be together and be generous and thoughtful and kind to each other as best as we can, otherwise we will, hang together.

You're hearing me strangling myself here. So we don't want to do that. So even before we should have done all, and we should do that even more now because of the extremity of the times that we're living through

[00:50:00] **Susan:** So we are gone beyond

[00:50:04] **Martin:** Oh no. You can edit it down to five minutes. Come on.

[00:50:08] **Susan:** I can, of course I can. I want to leave you with a question while I leave you with a reflection as well, but I want you to come back. So you and I are hoping that we turn this into a series. That's our intention, that we will interview people about passing on the wisdom, the learnings, the insights from their own crises, from their own careers that they think other people can learn from.

So with that in mind, is there anything in particular, is there something that you really want to pass on to people? And while you're thinking about that, it may straight be there anyway, but just in case, I want to tell you what reading your book passed on to me.

[00:51:00] **Martin:** Oh, please do

[00:51:03] **Susan:** I've known Martin now for, I guess we've known each other for about 15 months.



We met at an event, and you can go and listen to another episode to hear a little bit about that event. If you like, I'll leave a link in the show notes. But we've spoken a lot, over the last 15 months or so. We've never had a recorded conversation. But I only recently read your book during the heatwave of last week.

I sat outside in the

How fitting. your, yes, the, in the turbulent times. And- What struck me was crisis coaching.

[00:51:43] **Martin:** Hmm

[00:51:43] **Susan:** ever since I began to work for myself, I wanted to help people in crisis, and I never once thought about calling myself a crisis coach.

[00:51:55] **Martin:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

[00:51:57] **Susan:** thought of that language.

It just didn't occur to me. And reading through your book and what's in there, and the experiences of people, A lot of it I've lived through too. I've had similar experiences, so it's very resonant with me. And- I suppose I see now as well why we relate so well to one another, why we get on so well with one another.

And maybe that's something as well for people is find people who you enjoy having conversations with.

[00:52:35] **Martin:** Yes

[00:52:36] **Susan:** throughout your career, gather people around you, and you talked about the network, and I would even say it's just that there is something that people have that you know instinctively you're drawn to them. So talk to them

[00:52:52] **Martin:** yes. And Susan, that's exactly what you did, 'cause it was a week after that meeting, that, you sent me a message "Oh, we met then, and I'd like to connect." I went, "Oh, wow. That's good. What..." And here we are. So but that was your impulse. So you followed that impulse.

You might not have followed your impulse, but you did follow your impulse, and there's others listening to this who might have some kind of impulse at the moment, "Maybe I can just connect with that person," and to quieten the voices that say, "Oh, they won't wanna speak with me. Oh, they'll be much too busy.



Oh, maybe I didn't, I just made it up. Oh, it's all one-sided." No, just take the chance. And you took the chance, and here we are.

Yeah. And yeah, so thank you, because we've had, I think, I know you're a Beyond the Numbers person, but I'm leading Beyond the Numbers, but I'm the one who counts our meetings, and I think we're now on 23.

I don't know if we count this one or not. Anyway, it's 23 or thereabouts. And numbers matter, and life beyond the numbers is even more important, and indeed, Leading Beyond the Numbers, the title of your wonderful book. because if leaders do that, they bring their whole person. They bring their whole person to it.

They don't just bring 20% or 50% of themselves, the doing, the mechanical parts. They bring their heart and soul, and the leaders that I remember, and maybe others remember, are those who were there in their entirety. And they could do the budgets and the PR and the whatever. But they were genuine, and they brought themselves to it.

Your question was what would I pass on, and I think three words come to mind which probably sum it up. And I'll say the three words and then say why I'm thinking of that. So courage, compassion, and wisdom, which is actually the title of a book which I would recommend listeners of this to also. We'll put it in the show notes,

I think I've got the words the right way round. we need courage to face what we're going into. We need personal courage to face what we're going into, and/or maybe are in. and the kind of tough, but not the kind of tough, "I'm bigger than you," blah, blah, blah kind of tough. That stupid kind of tough. No,the moral toughness- Compassion. And where does the compassion comes from? The compassion comes from deep inside. It's not something we manufacture, it's something we have and we can call upon by practice, by addressing our own struggles, our own concerns, our own issues. And then what I believe to be a natural, if you like, seed within us can then grow, and it gets stronger, and

It's real, and it's there, that compassion. So we really feel for each other, so we hang together like the cowboys. We hang together because we're expressing that compassion, which is wonderful for us and wonderful for other people. And then we don't hide our wisdom away. If we have wisdom, we share it. And it might not even be wisdom.

It might just be some good ideas. wisdom sounds wow, you've gotta sit on a mountaintop and be some kind of holy person. No, I think just we've all got that good stuff to pass on. But the book called Courage, Compassion and Good Stuff doesn't ring quite the same as Courage, Compassion and Wisdom.



So let's pass it on, and that's our endeavor, isn't it, Susan, in these podcasts. For those people who are in their retirement, at the end of their career, in that awkward age, between retiring and absolute- not doing anything at all. doing lots of maybe volunteer work or being called upon to do things, still being active.

those people, please pass that on. we want you to do that. We want you to do that for you, 'cause it's good for you, and we want it for those who are still engaged in civil society, who are working for humanity and, hand on heart, are doing what they believe to be the right thing. And so don't waste that.

[00:56:45] **Susan:** Please don't waste that. Pass that onMartin, thank you. Thank you for bringing this idea to me, and it was something I had been thinking about, was talking to people at the end of their careers to reflect on their careers. So it, it fits quite nicely,

[00:57:06] **Martin:** Hmm, hmm

[00:57:08] **Susan:** and it's actually really interesting, I think, to share this with somebody as well.

So it won't just be me, it'll be the two of us, navigating the wild waters of podcasting. And, and then thank you for being a guest. but not only thank you for being a guest, I think thank you for bringing yourself fully into this conversation. we touched on a couple of things that maybe you'd rather forget or leave in the past, and I think they're the things that help people.

And what's helpful for all of us to understand is that our moments of crisis or our moments of conflict or inner conflict, actually shine a light for other people to see a way through. And just to know that you weren't alone, that you're not going through this alone, that other people have walked alongside you, even if they're ahead of you, and also that Life is full of ups and downs.

it's not really meant to be a certain way. It all matters. It's all important. It's all part of who you are, and that's your wisdom. I think we don't need to hide those hard experiences away. You need to share them with the world if you can, because they help people.

[00:58:35] **Martin:** Yeah,

[00:58:36] **Susan:** They help people, and that is humility, because you're not thinking less of yourself, you're thinking of yourself less.

So you're offering yourself



[00:58:47] **Martin:** Hmm.

[00:58:47] **Susan:** and your experiences to hopefully be a life raft or a life buoy in the wild waters for someone else

[00:58:58] **Martin:** Yes. So you can become the remedy, for others, as I heard someone describe it. You go through your own pain, and you can become a remedy. And it reminds me of what someone said who I learned facilitation from. His name is George, and when I was going through this, he said,

I know a lot of people," he said, "who've been through really difficult times, and they've come out stronger." At that time, I couldn't really believe him, but I remember it very well, where I was standing, what he said. So you can be a remedy for others. So whoever's listening to this, You can get through it.

You can be a remedy for others. Also, as my wife said when I was in the middle of that, she said, "This will not go on forever." Now, is that wisdom? I don't know it was a statement of obvious truth, but at the time, it was exactly what I needed to hear. We were standing in the kitchen at the time. It won't go on forever.

[00:59:47] **Susan:** I think that is the other thing, that you sharing your crisis is not about you.

[00:59:52] **Martin:** yeah.

[00:59:53] **Susan:** other people, and that's ... Yeah, if you can do that, then get in touch with us.

I would say from a career perspective or a work perspective or a work-life fulfillment perspective, whatever way you want to look at it, reflection is a superpower.

[01:00:10] **Susan:** you talked a lot about avoiding things, and I think we avoid it because we know.

[01:00:14] **Martin:** Yeah.

[01:00:15] **Susan:** But it is, and that's what I would say to anyone, that, it's never too late to reflect. And, it's helpful. It's really helpful

Martin, look, it's been fantastic, and I look forward to seeing where this goes

[01:00:29] **Martin:** Yeah



[01:00:30] **Susan:** and who we might talk to and what we might learn along the way

[01:00:34] **Martin:** Yes, and future guests, wait for your invitation. And if you don't get an invitation, knock on our door

