

THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES

Episode 91

FINDING FRESH INSIGHTS AND INNOVATIONS IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Host **Shawn Nason**
Guest **Theo Edmonds**

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Shawn (00:01):

Welcome to the eighth season of the Combustion Chronicles podcast, where bold leaders combine with big ideas to make life better for all of us. I'm your host, Shawn Nason, CEO, and founder of MOFI. As a maverick-minded, human-obsessed experience evangelist, I believe the only way to build a sustainable and thriving business is to put people first. Throughout this season, we'll be connecting you the listener, with cutting edge leaders who are challenging old ways of thinking with bold new ideas, and a commitment to human-centric design. Experience matters, people matter, and revenue matters. That's why it's time to ignite a people-first experience revolution.

My guest today, Theo Edmonds, is the directing co-founder of CU Denver First Imagination Academy, which is a cultural analytics strategy and futurist innovation hub. In that role, he scouts out global networks of entrepreneurs, companies, scientists, artists, creative innovators, and change-makers of all kinds to find hidden opportunities that others miss. Theo is a skilled, energetic Cultural Futurist™, and innovator with 25 years of senior-level strategic, national, and international leadership experience spanning the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. His unconventional background lets him connect scholarly research with pop culture across scientific disciplines, data analytics, creativity, and cultural wellbeing in the places we work, learn, heal, and explore. Welcome to The Combustion Chronicles, Theo.

Theo (01:50):

It's great to be here, Shawn.

Shawn (01:52):

Well, it is so exciting to have you on here. I recently were introduced to you this past fall, and through a very dear friend of ours, I've started to really follow your work now, and I'm constantly amazed at the insights and the fresh insights you're always coming up with and your approach to innovation and all things. And you said that you grew up as, and I will quote a blind and one-eye neurodiverse queer kid in Appalachia. How does that background fuel your innovation insights?

Theo (02:30):

I think it's the, it's the core of the human experience that whatever we are kind of naturally born with, those are the tools that we begin working with and adapt and use as we go forward. Now, whether or not we allow those to be a strength or to be the source of weakness because we try to hide them is a different question. But, uh, if those are quite literally, um, the tools I was born with, I, I am blind in, in one eye. I am, uh, neurodiverse, although it was, it was as an adult, I was diagnosed with ADHD and definitely part of the queer community. And the other piece that I'll add to that is, is the Appalachia piece, because that comes along with, uh, an accent and a and a lot of other, a lot of other things that over the years I have gone from hiding as, uh, things that, uh, I thought other people would judged me for to things. Now I now see as my core source of my, uh, core strength and my insight into the ways I've navigated the world, and then how I see the future, uh, evolving because of that past.

Shawn (03:34):

And I appreciate it, the living in Cincinnati and all of my family living, um, in Eastern Kentucky. I appreciate it that you, um, are embracing that and, and living that in all aspects of, as you said, what you were born with and appreciate the neurodiversity as well. So, you know, one of our goals and my personal passions is to help organizations improve what we call the Experience Ecosystem™. And that includes everything from customer experience to where you're at in student experience, to vendors, to partners. But so often we have seen this pendulum swing lately to default in digital solutions. And the amazing thing is, you have built this imagination's Academy, right? And it's very non-digital. And you've pointed out that creativity without purpose isn't enough in today's digital world. So how can organizations keep their end goals in mind without stifling creativity?

Theo (04:50):

So, uh, let's unpack some of the definitions there. So I think in some ways, uh, I think I would maybe reframe them the, uh, imaginative academy just a bit in and say that it is, while we're not specifically focused on digital strategies, digital tools are the bread and butter of contemporary society. And so what we're focused on is the human interaction with those tools. And so if you kind of think about, uh, over the last few, few weeks with chatGPT, there's been, you know, a lot of hand ringing going on around what is it, what

is it gonna do to artists? What is it gonna do to writers? What is it gonna do to fill in the blank? And so what's really interesting to me about that is the cultural amnesia that seems to be taking place in that conversation, because this is one of the oldest conversations in human history, as long as there is been humans and devices that are innovative that we use, this is the conversation, let me break that down just a little bit further.

So when I talk about innovation, I've got a very precise definition of innovation that, that I work from. Number one, I think it has to involve something that changes the human relationship with time and distance. And so when you think about the wheel, you think about the airplane, the combustible engine, you think about the internet, all of those things changed our human relationship between time and distance. Think about Gen Z. They are, our first generation of fully digital natives, Gen Z has grown up at least those who have, you know, uh, who have access to the technology, which is, which is increasingly ubiquitous, has grown up being able to, in three minutes, unmediated by anybody except the technology itself has been able to explore their interest and a spice they heard about in Morocco to a punk band in a garage in Philadelphia, to a place that they're thinking about going in the Adirondacks on a vacation to go on a hike.

They can, from their bedrooms, from their, uh, co wherever they're working in the coffee shops, they can explore all of that in three minutes, mediated by nothing but their own questions, their own curiosity, their own creativity. And so as we think about time and distance for that group, what we're seeing in the neuroscience piece of it is, is getting really fascinating. And the wellbeing science piece of it, these two pieces called of wellbeing called, one is called hedonic wellbeing, the seeking the pleasure of avoiding a pain. The other one is called Eudonic Wellbeing, the making of Meaning, and just to stick with Gen Z. So when I talk about innovation being time and distance, time and distance for them is working fundamentally differently then it worked in the generations before. And so the implications of that from a technology standpoint are that they are, uh, engaging in more technology as they try to seek what they're doing.

But there's a downside to that. While they can access and, uh, condense time and distance into whatever their proximal physical space is, they're also probably becoming, scientifically speaking, less creative and less curious because of the way that something called hedonic adaptation works. On the Eudonic side, though, here's where I get really

excited about it. As they get older, gen Z turns 25 this year, the older oldest Gen Z or so, that's, you know, a quarter of a century old, they're not babies anymore, and they're 20% of our workforce by the year 2025. Very important to remember that global workforce. So in the eudaimonic activity, the making of meaning, we also see that this is a generation that is becoming more committed to social justice, economic justice, environmental justice, digital justice, etc. as they get older. So those are really long-term goals that require skill acquisition, require asking questions to bring about a future state that doesn't yet even exist.

And so all of that kind of activity in, the science, we see that when you're engaged in that kinda activity, you get more creative and more curious. So we've never seen a generation that's holding these two kinds of ideas such, uh, in such kind of strong radical kind of, uh, parts of the spectrum. So how they bring those two things together is a very human question. So when you talk about it being not digital, I would say that digital is human, but we too often get fascinated with the tech component because there is a, perhaps a, um, an economic ROI that's easily discernible around that tech component. But if you, even there, you look at, uh, 39% of the, of the startups that fail, fail because there's no market for their product, that sounds to me like a human question, not a technical question.

And so as we think about the integration of technologies into our lives in 1929, the Noble laureate economist, Roberts Schiller talks about how, uh, it wasn't the crash of 1929 that brought about the Great Recession. It was the way we told the stories about it that led to the recession. So, you know, like whether you're talking about Scott, Scott Galloway or anybody else, you see storytelling being a thing that we talk about in all these tech spaces, all these innovation spaces, all these venture capital spaces. So the human and the technical or really just kind of no different in some ways than when we first started using the wheel to condense time and time and distance to get done what we were trying to get done as humans.

Shawn (10:23):

So I love that play and not even play, but that change in shift of definition. And I actually want to go back now to a definition that I think we need to also set here. And this comes directly off of your website at Imaginative Academy. It says, culture shapes, business

people shape culture, artist shape change backed by science, grounded in courageous imagination. We are future proofing American innovation through creativity, workplace wellbeing, and cross culture collaboration. Can you tell us what courageous imagination is?

Theo (11:08):

I would love to explain that. So let's, let's take 'em separately before we put 'em together. Imagination is the precursor to creativity. All creativity, all human knowledge begins originally as imagination. And when we think about that being an imprecise thing or we can't really wrap our minds around it, or it's, or it's, or it's soft, I want you to kind of think about the web images coming back from space right now. It's probably one of the only moments in social media as I look across the board from a sociopolitical standpoint, that it doesn't matter if you're a sanitation worker in Durango, Colorado, a kid, in a school room in Inre County in southeastern Kentucky, or if you are a VC, executive, uh, or a hedge fund executive in New York looking for the next big bit. It's the one moment when we see these images come back from the web telescope.

You see everybody kind of like let their thing down, that they're trying to get everybody to believe it's just, and so they speak to us in a very profound way. And so I think about that a lot. And so what, what does that mean? and so when we think about imagination, that's imagination at play because it's reminding us that there is something that we have inside of us that is, that we know is there, but we are not connected to it anymore. And so we begin working to put ourselves back in connection toward it. The chair of the, uh, chamber of Commerce board here in Colorado, in Denver, George Sparks, he's also the CEO of the Na, a natural science museum here in town, and an MIT grad and, a whole lot of other things. So this is a scientist CEO, type, the chair of the board of the Chamber of Commerce.

He reminded us this year that, at the annual chamber luncheon, that everything, everything, whether you're talking about a nation and economy, a company, a technology, a bridge, a school, everything comes from only two places. The things that we bring out, the earth and human imagination, there is nothing else. And so if you put those two things together, what is the origin of story of both those things? It is stardust. And so I think when we see these images coming back from the web telescope, we are

connecting to something that is so inside of us, right down to a subatomic atomic level that it, that it reminds us to look up and kind of, kind of inhabit from the present in, in a different kind of way. And even if you need a scientific definition, kind of to, to see this, uh, you know, one of the more fascinating articles that I saw this year was around, you know, one of the core ideas around quantum mechanics is sometimes everything from a proton de electron is a wave.

Sometimes it's a particle. We don't know why. Some of the am I, uh, popular mechanic, uh, profiled, one of the big studies this year, and it was asking the question is, is there such a thing as objective reality from a quantum physics standpoint? And the answer is no, probably not. That once you start measuring something, focusing on something that makes it the reality. And so we see that, you know, there's dark matter and there's, and there's hard matter, there's waves, there's particles. So on a pure subatomic level, we are no different than what we see and what we experience in the laws of the universe. Now, the way we express that again comes from these materials, the tools we have available, the things that become out the earth and human imagination. And so everything that we know as our lives, as our economies was created by just those two things.

So imagination precursor the creativity. There's a lot of science behind it. Also, on the courage part, the courage piece is, is pretty profound because it also ha is grounded in science for us, science and art. Art, there's an art and science to everything. We artificially separated those things out. Art is one expression of an idea. Business is another expression of, creativity. Science expresses creativity again. So we've separated some things out we probably shouldn't have. And so when you think about courage, one of the reasons I started really focusing on courage is because in today's society, the way that we train ourselves to navigate has often been to be more, try to be more like everything we see around us, so that we fit in. And as you know, kind of going back to your first question about growing up in Houston, Kentucky, it's been a lot of years trying to do that.

And it had a deleterious effect on my own wellbeing. I know my black, uh, female executive colleagues have their versions of those story. Like we, we all actually all of us have a version of that story because we've been told to get along. You have to fit in. That probably is not good for innovation if we're, if we're being, if we're being truthful

about it. No, it's not. And so when we talk about courage, courage is the ability to ask the hard questions that may not be the popular questions. Courage becomes a thing that unlocks the imagination to go on, to become creativity, to go on and become innovation, and so forth. But when you think about courage, the reason we started really kind of focusing on that too is because in, the work we do at Imaginative Academy, there is the science of creativity.

And that's how we measure the, capacity of a group, a company, an ecosystem to come up with a novel idea, novel insider or reframe. That could be look a lot different ways. But then the ability to, for that to go beyond a latent capacity or the just the capacity to do it, for it to go beyond that latent capacity and get unlocked to go on to become enterprise wide value depends upon the group's ability to function as a group, to nurture it from the nascent novel idea and, and shepherd it all the way through into new economic or social value that takes courage, courage, and wellbeing are really closely connected in the workplace. And we started looking at courage, um, a little bit outta some data signals that we were seeing in relationship to allyship in the workplace. And we kept seeing the signals that told us that people who are identifying themselves as allies with the LGBT resource group or the Black resource group, the Hispanic Resource Group, what have you, that the people identifying themselves as ally within their companies, within those groups were the ones receiving the pro-social wellbeing benefit of allyship.

And so because we disaggregate all the data, we, uh, could also see that none of that was finding its way down in support or the flourishing of the group with whom the Alli allies say they're, they're allied with. And so we started trying to parse out how could we get a better measure around that. And, uh, we found some, uh, really fascinating research that actually comes out of some original work in research with the trans community. And what I was looking at is what we're measuring encourage is the how willing is somebody who sees no immediate payoff for them to spend their social capital in a group situation on behalf of another group with whom there's no immediate payoff. So when you think about psychological safety, Amy Edmondson outta Harvard, you know, some of the things that we hear out. So there's, there was a relationship here between the latent capacity that's sitting in all of our organizations, imagination, creativity, the wellbeing and the courage, and the courage of a group to be able to ask

the hard questions and to let themselves be seen that unlocks that, create that capacity for it to then move on to become enterprisewide innovation.

So courage and imagination are measurable. They're scientific concepts that come from across many disciplines, but there's also an art to both of those things. And it, and it's, that is distinctly human, and that's what we're focused on there.

Shawn (19:28):

Wow. All right, so let's now shift that into workplace cultures, right? So workplace cultures have shifted dramatically, um, as you know, Theo, from the pre covid days to where many organizations haven't changed their thinking. I actually read an article recently, um, where Spotify is doing away with meetings, which is gonna be interesting in this new concept, right? So how can leaders give them one piece of advice, bring fresh, culturally responsive perspectives to their associate and employee experience?

Theo (20:15):

I am a child of the eighties, and so I am going to, uh, kind of defer here and use one of the great philosophers of the eighties, Keanu Reeves, in bringing this idea forward. Here's what I mean by that. We have all these cognitive biases built into our brains that tells us that the thing we're looking at and the way we're defining it is true. When in reality, any research or any scientist who looks at the stuff will tell you it's never true, what you're doing is defining all, you're using, all of your lived experiences brought to that moment to define what you're looking at through actually through your lens, not through the lens of the thing you're trying to define. And so, the reason I bring up Keanu Reeves, and I'm writing a book right now called Ology, and Keanu Reeves uses the word whoa in 150 different ways depending on the context.

And so if you just, you could even Google it, uh, you know, and it'll come up and you just, like Keanu Reeves, whoa. And it'll, you, there's montage is made that you can see how he's used that term to mean surprise, to mean interest, to mean intrigue, to mean, you know, uh, consternation. It could mean a whole lot of different things. And what I love about that is with, with just one word, he has been able to really, uh, surface the nuances of the many different ways of reading a situation. And so I think that the one piece of advice to leaders is that, the humility to understand that your way of defining

things is only your way of defining things and that you have a lot of cognitive biases that you need to always be aware of and check for is going to open up a lot of things that are probably gonna be uncomfortable at first because it might be a little bit of a blow to your ego.

And we, and especially in the business world, we don't, you know, we've typically, we lack people to hold confident and sure. And so we get a lot of great performances of confidence and so forth. But I don't know if you've been paying attention to some of the movies been coming out on Netflix past year where we're all, you know, whether it's, whether it's were there right on down the line, confidence is sometimes being able to say that you know, where the frontiers of your knowledge are and that you can't get to the next place with just what you know. That's a humility piece. And I think we've made a pretty big mistake in the US of saying that humility is a weakness, that not being confident is a weakness. Anytime that I am working, say for example, with the Global Brain Capital Alliance, I work with, that's, you know, 20 or so, the top economist and the top neuroscientists in the world, they know where the frontiers of their knowledge are.

So they are not afraid to say on the economist side, for example, that GDP, while it, maybe interesting, is not a great indicator because just collecting a bunch of economic activity based on NACE codes or, or economic output from a historical standpoint in a world that is changing as fast as we are and looking at a lagging indicator that doesn't tell you exactly why something happened or the nuances are, it just tells you here what here was the thing that happened, doesn't tell you much about how to navigate toward the future. And so when the, I think the far up the food chain you go on, expertise in people who are really deeply sophisticated in their particular discipline, their particular silo, those are the people that have the greatest humility because they understand that it's only in weaving the things together across these different silos that we get to the next place. In today's world, that may not have always been the case, but in today's world, it certainly is.

Shawn (24:14):

I love whoa. And now that you have made me think through that, I'm like, now there needs to be a book, I guess in my daughter's term, I have a 14 year-old daughter, the term that they use now was slay.

Theo (24:27):

Yeah.

Shawn (24:27):

So slayology, I guess because I get sleigh for everything and I have to interpret it of what that means is this excitement, is this anger, right? So I love that perspective for sure. So we at MOFI say this a lot, that we are maverick-minded and human-obsessed. And I am all about thinking like, you maverick, I think you are truly a maverick in our world and I love it. And putting people first is everything that you are saying. So your background in the arts helps you see the world differently. Is it possible, in your opinion, to teach more black and white thinkers some MBAs or some leaders, as you were just talking about, for example, to be maverick-minded too, and to think like we think

Theo (25:20):

The way I think about the world that we're in today, uh, we have to ask ourselves what actually needs, uh, if it's to be contrary, is that valuable? Maybe in some context it absolutely is. But then in creativity science we talk about it being a maverick could produce divergent ideas, but there comes a point when you have to produce convergent goals. If you're building your personality, if you're building your reputation on just being contrary and always, and there's no proof over a course of a career that you've got the ability to execute and marshal vastly different thinking people toward a common goal, I wonder how successful you're actually being, maybe outside of your own brand. So I think that in the, in today's world, the social or social media landscape reinforces, uh, kind of that, that for a lot of people.

And one of the people that are really watch a lot, her name is Vivian Ming calls herself the, a mad sign. She's a neuro. I mean, like, this is accomplished incredible thinkers out there in the world. What Vivian was talking about really recently on a Sparks and Honey episode, I I heard her on, uh, was the fact that going back to cognitive biases, that, that we think that because we see something or read something that on online that we've got the full understanding of what that thing is, and then we start going around executing on that thing because of the cognitive biases that play in. And so, you know, like the, uh, a friend of mine in Louisville, Kentucky has on a, a thing on her door that says, please do not confuse your opinion from our law degree. And I, I think that there

is, there is a need for us to kind of reassess what is opinion? and what is a very well-thought out opposing view to the norms of society and any and all of that.

We have to disaggregate that quite a bit. I do think that beyond that, though, what is the more interesting question to me is this question of creativity. And the revenue models of media do not really lend themselves to the nuances of creativity. And because of the advances of neuroscience and cause of the advances in technology, uh, especially things like something called semantic distancing, where we have now big data approaches to help us understand by the analysis of say, a Warner Music, uh, portfolio of songs or continuum of poetry or the policies of a nation, how creative societies are because of big data analysis capabilities. Creativity can absolutely be nurtured in a way that unlocks it because it is not the province of just one group of people. And so you think about Rich Florida and urbanists like that, who have said, you know, the creative class, the creative economy.

And so we've used creativity as a thing that separates a group of people a separate and apart from the rest of the world, but that's just not how creativity works. Creativity is a human trait. It expresses itself one way in the yard, expresses itself another way in business. So research, etc. And so knowing that is present. if we're able to then quantify, identify where it exists, and then bring evidence-based strategies or at least an evidence-based idea. I live in a world of both art and science and we need both. Uh, but it brings that ev to unlocking that latent capacity that can absolutely be taught at an organizational level can be fostered. And that's the stuff that becomes innovation. There's a very famous researcher, uh, Margaret Bowen who is at the University of Sussex, and Dr. Bowen is, is well on her in her career.

I think she's probably in her seventies now, but she started writing about where human creativity and machine learning begin back in the seventies. And Dr. Bowden kind of puts this into three buckets. She says you know what, at the end of the day, all innovation and creativity fits in in one of three areas. One area she calls exploratory creativity. And that's where you have a defined discipline and it's characterized by a gatekeeper. So the gatekeeper is gonna tell you if the creative idea, the novel idea you've come up with is valuable or not. Because that's the two pieces of creativity, the novel idea and value creation. So the gatekeeper's really important. So if we're talking about a pharmacological intervention, it feels pretty important to me that we have a

gatekeeper that understands that what's being proposed is gonna kill a human being if it's introduced into a body.

But the further we get out from areas like that into sociocultural aspects where we all have different experiences in society based upon any number of sociocultural modifiers, mediators, who's the gatekeeper in that model? I, you know, I question, but most of our, hundred years of industrial economy has been built around this idea of this exploratory creativity column. We've built a society based on gatekeepers. And so that's where most of our innovation has come from. So we think because that is where it's mostly come from, lagging indicator looking back, that's where we need to be probably be doubling down on. And so we're filling this in society, we're filling this kind of grind of this happening again, time and distance has disappeared. New generations coming in with their ideas and they're mediated, they're, they've not been mediated with access to information that interests 'em in the same way the generations before, exploratory creativity.

Second, bucket she puts is combinatory creativity. So combinatory creativity is where I take an idea from over here and I take an idea from over here and I put them together. We've achieved the first level of creativity, novelty, but is it valuable? Maybe, maybe not. You know, and machine learning can do that all day long. And that's what it was designed to do is take two ideas, random ideas, and put 'em together. Yeah. But it doesn't fulfill the second part of creativity from a scientific definition. The value creation part. Maybe, maybe not. And where it accidentally maybe does those folks over in the exploratory column, those gatekeepers are gonna be more than happy to take that, that accidentally valuable novel idea and try to institutionalize it into the old structures just because they exist to reinforce revenue models in those old industrial economy models of universities, and companies that, that need some type of innovation. And so what that does, unfortunately, I think it kills innovation because it takes a spark of where we see value. And just because we see a spark that we immediately want to institutionalize it maybe everything doesn't need to be institutionalized. Maybe everything doesn't need to be turned into a company just because we have a design sprint that can turn an idea into a company.

I mean, for real, right? Third column though, she talks about exploratory commentary. Third column, third column, she calls transformational creativity. Economists also talk

about transformational. It's, it's weird. They, the two marry each other, uh, as an idea in very similar ways, but for different reasons. But Dr. Boone's, transformational creativity, this is where something comes along that introduces a concept, a twist that so foundationally changes the way that we develop and understand value to be created in that first exploratory column. Something so foundational is offered that those same value-creation algorithms don't work the same anymore. And so if you think about a really solid idea of that is, uh, and I know it's an overplayed one, but it's a, it's one that we all understand. So there's introduction to the iPhone. So you know, maybe we've got some folks who are around exponential technology and understand Moore's law and that kind of on, on the podcast before you have, you know, the microchip gets invented and then the value creation becomes that microchip gets turned into a computer and a TV and a phone and a GPS system.

But the iPhone comes along, all of these economic value-creation products disappear. And all of a sudden they're lines of code. And so something has so foundationally shifted that value creation model, at least from an economic standpoint in exploratory creativity that it just doesn't apply the same way anymore. And when that happens, there's a c another thing that you also have to look for, not only does it change a precept of how we understand value in that exploratory column in the transformational column, it's also going to introduce an idea or, or something that changes human behavior now, human behavior, economic behavior, social behavior. so it's a pretty high bar. It's very rare, but when it happens, it's powerful. And the thing is that transformational creativity is already happening all the time. In fact, all three of these, these are not mutually exclusive columns, right?

They're e each one of 'em. Yeah. And there's value to be had in each one of them. But in that transformational creativity, going back, I mentioned the, uh, Scott Galloway a moment ago and I, he and Care Swishers Pivot podcast is on I very much enjoy. I've first kind of heard this example from him and it makes a lot of sense to me because as a Cultural Futurist™, this is exactly the type of activity I engage in. So what Dr. Galloway talks about is like you take in the nineties and as organized religion was beginning to decline, you had the ubiquity of technology coming on an upswing and going from being something that's primarily academic to being in everybody's homes with us all having access to it. So what might have been, you know, mostly a prayer, uh, God will my child

who has this horrible disease survive becomes, hey Google, well my, what's the odds that my child will have?

So this instinct that we have to know the unknown gets mediated and transferred into this technological format. That's not to say that the spiritual piece is not still there because it is I'm not, it's not a binary that I'm saying, but these are cultural trends that were happening that enabled one of the largest companies in the world to happen. Because human instinct to know the unknown gets time and distance, uh, gets condensed into a technology. And so as when we think about like, you know, chat G B T and some of the other AI that's coming along and their ability to do natural language processing, there are other cultural trends that are happening that have nothing to do with technology right now. That human instincts to belong, to matter, to know the unknown will kick in and instinct will drive people to start pulling these cultural trends with nothing to do with each other together in their efforts to get done whatever they're trying to get done. Whether they're a hedge fund, uh, person or whether they're an artist, it really doesn't matter. Human instincts or human instincts. And so all of this is always happening in all the time. And so this transformation idea of transformational creativity is the bread and butter of a cultural future. But I look at it through, uh, triangulating different cultural trends and trying to understand what that means from a human standpoint.

Shawn (36:45):

Well, using a term that you used earlier, Theo, like, whoa, there is so much to unpack right there. I loved your quote that you said there. That said divergent ideas to convergent goals because I'm a divergent thinker, but also understand that we have business goals that we have to meet. Sure. And businesses have to do that. So you have 30 seconds to answer this one. So this one's gonna, what's the best advice you've ever received about leadership?

Theo (37:17):

Best advice I've ever received about leadership is that it is a dialogue, not a monologue.

Shawn (37:24):

I love that. A dialogue not a monologue. Well it's been my pleasure, Theo, having you here on the Question Chronicles, you've definitely got me thinking a lot and the creative juices going and tons of notes that I've taken, just from this. But it has come to that point in our episode where we do this thing called the combustion questions. And they are three randomly selected questions that I don't even know what they are, they're given to me, I would say by my human algorithm passed along to me. They're very simple. Have fun with them. Short answers to these. Are you ready for your three combustion questions?

Theo (38:03):

I'm a queer hillbilly. I was born. Ready. Let's go

Shawn (38:08):

So if you were a dog, which breed would you want to be?

Theo (38:12):

If I was a dog. I would want to be a beagle.

Shawn (38:16):

A beagle. Do I dare ask why?

Theo (38:19):

I loved the idea of Snoopy as a philosopher growing up.

Shawn (38:26):

Of course, uh, I should have thought of that one. Theo Alright, question number two. What's your favorite pancake topping?

Theo (38:36):

I don't like pancakes.

Shawn (38:38):

There you go. And we're not even gonna ask why on that one. We're just gonna leave that with, we don't like pancakes. All right, number three. What do you think about glue sticks?

Theo (38:51):

I think they should always be accompanied with glitter.

Shawn (38:56):

That's just like a drop the mic, that's another whoa. Or as my daughter would say, slay.

Theo (39:01):

I lived in New Orleans 13 years and, and you know, like blue glitter parades, glu glitter, you know, like, everything.

Shawn (39:10):

Awesome.

Theo (39:11):

Even as a contemporary artist, spectacle has always been something that I enjoy. You know, I grew up also through the years with a lot of, uh, drag queens around me.

Shawn (39:23):

More glue the better, right? Yeah. Well, again, Theo, thank you so much, and thank you for this amazing wisdom and knowledge that you presented to us through humility. I really do appreciate that from today. So thank you. Stay safe and be well my friend.

Theo (39:40):

All right, Shawn, thanks for the opportunity and I hope I've, uh, there's some things here that people will find useful.

Shawn (39:46):

Thanks so much for listening to this episode of The Combustion Chronicles. If you've enjoyed this episode, please take a few minutes to subscribe, rate and review.

Remember that I'm always looking to meet more big-thinking Mavericks, so let's keep the conversation going by connecting on LinkedIn. If you want to discover more about human-obsessed, maverick-minded Experience Ecosystems™, go to, HOME - MOFI where you'll find ideas and resources to help you ignite your own experience revolution, or go to experienceevangelists.com to learn more about my mission, to challenge leaders to blow up outdated, siloed systems and rebuild them with an aligned human-first approach. As always, stay safe, be well, and keep blowing shit up.