

MAN ON FIRE PRESENTS  
**THE COMBUSTION  
CHRONICLES**

**EPISODE TWENTY-EIGHT  
SOARING WITH DRAGONS**

HOST: MICHAEL HARPER  
GUEST: SHAWN NASON

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**Shawn:** Welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast, where bold leaders combined with big ideas to create game-changing disruption. I'm Shawn Nason, founder of Man on Fire, and your host for *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast. Throughout this series, we're bringing together the most unique and influential minds we could find to have honest conversations about not being okay with the status quo, blowing shit up, and working together to influence our shared future. We believe that when bold leaders ignite consumer-centric ideas with passion and grit, the result is an explosion that creates a better world for all of us. I'm here with my co-host Michael Harper. Chief of radical experiences at MOFI.

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**Michael:** Hello, everybody. This is Michael Harper, and it is my pleasure today to be able to interview Shawn Nason, who is the host and the founder of this podcast. And as we're looking into our fourth season already, it is a great opportunity to pause and look back on the first three seasons that we've been able to put together as we look at blowing shit up to help the world look differently by looking at the world differently.

So, at first we always start our podcasts with a little bit of biography about our guests. So, let's kick off with a chance to be able to look at Shawn's background and some of you might be a little bit surprised to learn that his background really is finance, and that he worked in the finance department with the Walt Disney Company and found his role in being able to lead creatively through finance, and from there jumped ship into Humana and into healthcare.

And at that point, he fell in love with human-centered design and innovation, but he decided that he needed to reinvent what that could mean and how it affects people. And he took that into higher education and did a stint in higher education for a while and realized, and we joke about this all the time, that the best way to get fired from an institution of higher education is to stand up to all the professors and tell them that they should do away with tenure to be able to innovate in the higher education space.

And so, that was a short-lived opportunity and thank goodness that he's moved on to other fun things back into the healthcare space, and then looking to anyone anywhere to be able to think differently about their situation. But not just to think about innovation for innovation's sake but to think of it as a strategic moment, to be able to look at growth and scalability through that strategy. Looking at insights and looking at what we can do to blow shit up and to make things bigger. So, welcome to your own frickin' podcast, Shawn Nason.

**Shawn:** Yeah, it's great to be here.

**Michael:** So, let's start with *The Combustion Chronicles*. You were sitting around one day as you do dreaming about bigger things, in a pandemic, and really just kind of woke up one day and said, "Hey, let's do a podcast." So, talk us through why in the heck did you want to do a podcast? What impact did you think it might have on the world, and what's been your experience from a high level?

**Shawn:** Yeah. You know, really what the world didn't need is another podcast. Let's be real. There's tons of them and some amazing ones out there. But what I realized is that I've been privileged over my, you know, 20-something years in the world of working to meet some amazing people, and some people whose journeys who haven't been shared or who haven't had the voice or the outlet to do it, and what a better time. We're sitting in the middle of a pandemic. We're all in lockdown. Let's start reaching out. And, you know, not many podcasts, Michael, get to start off with your very first episode being Arianna Huffington, and talking about an amazing disrupter, who has become an amazing friend and brought more people into the network that we're in. Every one of these episodes have been truly, I think, heartfelt, and my hope is through *The Combustion Chronicles* is that people feel the emotion in it in the true sense of humanism in it. So, it's been great. It's kind of scary to think that we are starting Season 4 this year. And we've got an amazing list of guests that I won't give up here, but it's been a great journey.

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**Michael:** And what about the process? So, you went from, "Hey, I think we should have a podcast," to having podcasts recorded and we're launching within a matter of a couple of weeks, I think maybe three weeks to be exact. And I think that's important to talk about because I think that goes into living our mindsets, which we talk a lot about. So, just in terms of the process, and I'll be honest, that you started asking people to join in for the podcast and started planning for them to be recorded before we had a name for the podcast or an explanation of what the podcast was going to be about.

**Shawn:** Yeah, I don't know what you're talking about, Michael. People that know me, I'm a huge planner.

**Michael:** Right?

**Shawn:** And people that also know me know that that was the line of bullshit to know that, actually, the planner is Michael. And yeah, I said we were gonna do this and I remember, Jared,

our producer, he said to me, "Yeah, Shawn, if we can get five or six of them lined up, we can start and get it going." And I remember calling him and saying, "Hey, Jared, I'm gonna bring a whole team and we're gonna record over two days. Oh, and by the way I think we have 14 or 15 confirmed ready to go." And he was blown away and the fact that over two trips to Phoenix, we recorded 30 podcasts by the end of the summer. We did it safely, so if anyone asks we locked ourselves in a house in an Airbnb, and we did this. But we did 30. And looking back on that, that's crazy, knowing that really, it was just waking up one morning and going, "Hey, I wanna do a podcast," and called you Michael, and said, "I think we're gonna do a podcast. "

**Michael:** Why is that important, though? Why is it important to have made the podcast happen so quickly as a part of the mindsets, especially during the pandemic, as you were talking about?

**Shawn:** Well, I think during the pandemic, the world felt like we just had to stop, and we couldn't do anything. And yet, during this pandemic, let's be real, we launched a podcast, and Michael, you and I, along with, you know, Robin Glasgow, we wrote a book. It gave us time to be in the creative space in something that people saw as something so negative, and it is. It's horrific, and you know, hundreds of thousands of lives lost during this pandemic. We still found that place to be able to disrupt and move and move at speeds that we were used to moving. So, we had an obstacle in front of us, and we figured out how to move and go around that obstacle, not ignoring it but just saying, "No, we can still do this."

**Michael:** So, we moved quickly making the podcast happen. That meant that we didn't put a ton of thought into it. We did our due diligence, as we always do, and then we moved quickly, and we hoped that there would be an impact. We didn't do market studies to figure out that impact. So, now that you're looking back, what's the impact been, and how does that compare to what you'd hoped would come from it?

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**Shawn:** I think the impact has been more internal-facing than even external-facing. That as a team, I think it stretched us. It challenged us. And I remember recently, Matt Wollman, who was the executive producer of the podcast, I said to him, "Remember, I am not an expert in this. So, whatever you guys think we need to do, let's go do." I just wanted to do it. I wanted to put a voice out there that was gonna be different than any other podcast I had seen, and I hope that it has been, and I hope that's been the impact.

**Michael:** So, what about all of the guests? There's been 30-ish guests on the first three seasons of *The Combustion Chronicles*, and thinking back over all of those guests, what one or two

themes pop out for you that you remember hearing that you really think can make a difference in the world?

[00:09:02]

**Shawn:** I think the first one is connection. That is humans, whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, I realized that we in our world, in our country, in our own ecosystem, we've missed connection, and I think if we look back in 20 or 30 years on the pandemic in 2020, and us launching *The Combustion Chronicles*, what we should learn from that is that we as humans need connection, no matter what it is. I think the other big theme that I really appreciated about each of our guests, and that is failure is okay and disrupting is okay, but it doesn't mean that it's always gonna be easy.

**Michael:** It's not easy, and I heard that too, and in this whole conversation about disruption, I am not the naturally disruptive person, and we talk about it all the time. We talk about the role of risk and the role of return on your investment of that risk and whether it's worth it or not and I am very clear that I am not that person that loves the risk, and yet throughout this conversation, I hope that people no matter where they are on the risk scale, no matter whether they're the type that can make huge bets and see if they'd pull them off or if they're people that would rather put the five cents at a time into the slot machine, that there's some piece of this disruption message that they can take away and do something with.

**Shawn:** Well, yes. Two things from what you said there, Michael. That's the reason that you and Robin and I wrote the book this year, released *Kiss Your Dragons*, that no matter where you are on that spectrum, you can do that. And in our world, you're a far end of one spectrum, I'm at the other end of the spectrum, and Robin tends to lean towards me a little bit more. But I also really appreciate, you know, a very good friend of ours, Michael, my mentor, who I've learned so much from and Sean Slovenski did an episode with us. He said a quote, and I saw it come back up on another podcast last year, where it said, "Being a disruptor sounds good, but it doesn't always make you popular."

**Michael:** Right.

**Shawn:** And I remember when he said that, and I think he even said that to us when we did the *Disruptor Connection* through the Disruptor League, that the work that we have done, that you've been on this journey with me, Michael, has not always been popular and not always been easy. And when we look back on partners that we've worked with, those in the Fortune 500 and just recently some partners we've worked with, what I've realized is it's been about the

relationships and the impact that we've had there. It's not about a business KPI, although their powerful, great, as are business results, but we've had life-changing relationships with people, and yeah, this isn't always gonna be easy, and you know it. You've been on the journey a long time with me.

[00:12:28]

**Michael:** Well, let's talk about the book a little bit. The book is called *Kiss Your Dragons: Radical Relationships, Bold Heart Sets, and Changing the World*.

**Shawn:** Now, let's be real, Michael. I really wanted to call it "Kiss Your Grits," but you guys wouldn't let me do that from the days of Alice for those of you that remember that.

**Michael:** It is not "Kiss Your Grits."

**Shawn:** Flo... We could not say that.

**Michael:** We could not.

**Shawn:** *Kiss Your Dragons*.

**Michael:** *Kiss Your Dragons*, and not to give too much away from the book, but it does start with a really important conversation about what we call radical relationships and I think that's at the heart of who you are, and at the heart of who MOFI is, so I want to read an excerpt from the book that talks about radical relationships and just get your quick reaction to it, because radical relations are so important to what we do. The book says, "Radical relationships are profound. They happen between people in communities that may appear to have little in common. The conversations that happen are raw, real, authentic, and transparent. To engage, you have to first understand that the other person or people are holding on to something that you need to learn or experience, and you have to be fully open to changing your mindsets, heartsets, values, and behaviors based on what you learn or experience."

**Shawn:** This goes back to a couple of years ago. I can't tell you... It was in 2019 when Michael, you and I spent over 200 nights on the road together. And I can't tell you what hotel it was in, because I don't remember. If we were even in the United States... We could have been traveling abroad, as we did. We got in an elevator one day and you just looked at me, and it had been a hard week. I do remember that, it had been a hard week and you said to me, "Can we please go a day without having any new best friends?"

**Michael:** That is true.

**Shawn:** And I remember laughing and then looking at you, and you kind of just went, "Ughh." Because you knew that although that was a request, that that wouldn't stop me from having a new best friend if that opportunity had come about that day. And that sums up to me what radical relationships is, is you have to be willing to be open, to explore, to lean into moments when you don't feel like it, when you may be tired, when you may need something else, or you just wanna be quiet. And then that's when that moment happens and I can go back, oh my gosh, over so many friends in my life, that if it wasn't for that moment of me leaning in and accepting that moment, we would not be in a relationship today with that person or a friendship with that person and that is hard. Listen, I'm not gonna lie. The concepts that we wrote in *Kiss Your Dragons* is not for the faint of heart.

And I even know that, you know, we took a moment and actually wrote a warning in the book, right? Like, "If you're not willing to do this, don't read this book." Because this is not easy because it goes to the core of who you are as a human being. And guess what? Sometimes in radical relationships, you get a broken heart, and you have to work through that. And you walked through a journey with me recently where I didn't know it, but let's talk about that, that was a radical relationship that happened from four years ago, a very dear friend of both mine and Michael's, and our family, and our business, Annette Logan called me one morning and she said... it was a Saturday morning and so when Annette calls on a Saturday morning at 10:00, and she's on the west coast at 7:00 her time, I pick up the phone. She's a CEO of Cure 4 The Kids in Las Vegas.

I didn't know - it's in the middle of a pandemic, something might have happened – and I picked up the phone and she said, "I don't know why I'm calling, but I'm calling you to find out if you're okay." She said there's very few people in my life that this happens with. "But I need to know if you're okay." And she said, "I just need to know, are you experiencing a broken heart right now?" And it was at a time, Michael, when I had told you, I didn't know how to explain what was going on or what was going on in my life. But when she spoke it, like, I went to the core, I went, "Yes, I am, and here's why." That's radical relationships. But at the same time, I picked up the phone and called her to say, "Are you okay?" You know, through this whole pandemic as a healthcare CEO, and the team that you and I both love dearly, Michael, and we've done a lot for wanting to know that they're okay, that's radical relationships.

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**Michael:** You know, another theme of the book that comes out strongly is, you say that when you start a relationship, that there's no reason in mind, that there doesn't have to be a reason to have a relationship and I think that's one of the radical statements in the book that you don't need that, you don't need a purpose for that radical relationship.

**Shawn:** No, and I will attribute that to my mother, who, I don't know how many times in my childhood, my brother can tell you that we would come home, and the furniture in our house would be gone, or in our bedroom. But we'd come home, and no furniture there, and I'd be like, "Where's my bed?" And my mom would be like, "Oh, well, there was a family that needed it." My mother ran a very successful big social agency and had a heart of gold, and I think that comes back to how I lean into relationships. I just, I don't need to know why, some of it, depending on how you live your life, some of it people say is intuition, gut, a higher being, but I'm a firm believer that if a door is open and someone is placed in my life, that I need to walk through it until that door is closed.

**Michael:** And then how often somehow that relationship come into some kind of play in your life in enormous ways.

**Shawn:** I think being able to lean into that type of relationship is why I have the people around me I do today and the doors that get opened.

**Michael:** And that's the radical part of the relationship, right?

**Shawn:** Yeah.

**Michael:** It's one thing to have a business relationship, it's one thing to have a personal relationship. The radical is that piece of, this is not someone I would normally want to be in the same room with. I am leaning in and saying and doing things that I don't wanna do, all for the sake of something great for the world can come from it.

**Shawn:** I don't know that I know the difference between a business relationship and a personal relationship.

**Michael:** Yes, that is a big difference between you and the rest of the world.

**Shawn:** I hear you say this, Michael, when we work with people, that MOFI and Shawn Nason are not for everybody, because there is no...and I'm not saying it's right or wrong or indifferent, but in my world, there are no boundaries there. If I'm there, I'm there for you personally. I'm there for you, for your business. I'm there... and all of the intentions. Remember, my life beginning career was a pastor. My heart is to help people and to see people succeed even before myself.

**Michael:** This *Kiss Your Dragons* theme, this is a business book, life book, everything book. What the heck does "kiss your dragons" actually mean?

**Shawn:** Well, I think this leans into what we've talked about for years, Michael, that, you know, we taught mindsets and we leaned into these mindsets for a lot of years...

**Michael:** That were groundbreaking, by the way.

[00:20:21]

**Shawn:** ...that were groundbreaking. And, you know, I remember speaking at conferences, when we could speak in rooms and people coming to us and talking about them. But as we leaned into stuff, and the whole "kiss your dragons" is, you know, the world is taught to slay your dragons, which to me means if I say my dragon, that means to run from that fear, or to kill that fear, or to run from that risk, or to kill that risk, or whatever it might be. And there's a great movie by DreamWorks, *How to Train Your Dragon*.

And this whole concept of, instead of slaying your dragon, what if you kissed your dragon? If you leaned into it, you leaned into your fears, you leaned into the risks that you're scared of, you leaned into the dark side of yourself that maybe people don't even want to know about, and you kissed it? And then in that principle, what we talked about and dug into and learned is that dragons hang out in swarms. It's what they're called, it's a swarm. And that's their safe place. And so, when you go back to that movie and you see it, there were all types of dragons that hung out together, that all had their own special superpower. But they were a swarm and they stuck together. And what 2020 exposed to us, to me, is that no matter who you are, you need a swarm. If it's 1 person or 10 people, you need a swarm.

And that was the whole impetus to this book, that we leaned into these radical relationships, these heartsets, but we leaned into our swarm, and we hung out with our swarm. And this is

written to business leaders, to CEOs, to C-suites, to innovation, to experience, to design people. Because let's get real, in the world, and you talked about it, Michael, probably my greatest, I won't even call it failure because it was a huge learning moment, is when I talked about doing away with tenure and higher ed, and let's be clear, I still think we need to do away with tenure and higher ed, is that in that moment, I needed a swarm. I needed to lean in, and I didn't have a swarm. And so, this is for every business leader to go to learn how to be leaders, because it's not just my voice. That's what I love about the book. It's your voice from a different perspective, and it's Robin's voice from a female's perspective, from a black woman's perspective, who was a C-suite in corporate America, and what she had to go through. So, three very different stories sharing how you can actually lean in and kiss your dragons.

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**Michael:** Yes, and we can't wait to get it out into the world, and in our world, it's not about getting thought leadership out to be able to say, "This is what you should do." It's about getting thought leadership out there so we can start talking about it. So, I'm looking forward to the conversation. I'm looking forward to how it hits people and what conversations come from it, because I think it's gonna be different for every person, just like it is for all three authors, is a different experience.

**Shawn:** Well, and I think two things is we didn't write this book to be a *New York Times* bestseller. I don't care about that. But the team that we surrounded ourselves with, Michael, that helped us bring the book to life, what I keep hearing from them as it progresses, and through that whole time is the emotion and the feeling that you feel, and that there's emotion in the book, and that's what's important, is that you identify with one of our three stories, and you feel it to the core of who you are, and you just start to lean into it.

**Michael:** So, let's take the podcast, stack the book on top of it, those two things combined, plus everything else that's happening with your world, what is your hope for the world? What is that call to action of what people can do to take this message of disruption and all the themes that go through it, go through the podcast, go through the book? How does that all turn into something that people can get off their butts and start doing?

[00:25:11]

**Shawn:** Yeah, so let's be real. We live in a world that is very, very divided, and nothing is gonna change until we change as human beings, and all of this work that we're doing is to put a mirror on us as each individual as a human. And I don't mean to say this in a mushy kind of way, but damn it if we could just lead with love first, and empathy, and compassion, and care.

**Michael:** Humanity.

**Shawn:** Humanity! It's funny because when I say these statements, I hear Diana Ross singing and “reach out and touch somebody's hand” in my head. When are we gonna do that? When are we gonna reach out and touch someone's hand that may be a different color or a different way of thinking and sit down and have a real conversation with them? That's what I hope all this work brings to life.

**Michael:** And at the very least have a conversation about it.

**Shawn:** To have a conversation. I'm not saying that you have to change or that you're right or you're wrong, but let's have a conversation and not get angry with each other and, you know, call each other names or whatever it is. And again, why we went back to the book, right? Like, it wasn't mindsets we talked about, we talked about heart. And a lot of us need, me included, have some heart issues that we need to deal with to be able to move forward in this world.

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**Michael:** So, the book's coming out, where can people go to find it?

**Shawn:** So, they can go to Amazon or you can go to [manonfire.co](http://manonfire.co). We will get it to you. And if you can't afford it, call me. Like, we will get this in your hands. So, we're really excited about it.

**Michael:** So, all of the episodes of *The Combustion Chronicles* for the first three seasons and also into the fourth season end with an opportunity to answer three “Combustion Questions”, and so we always talk about how there's been an algorithm that's figured out or a random way to figure out which questions come up for which person. And I do not think we can get away with ending this episode in any other way, so I did manage to pull together three “Combustion Questions” for you.

**Shawn:** I'm sure your data insights and algorithms are powerful.

**Michael:** Are you ready for your “Combustion Questions”, Shawn?

**Shawn:** I am.

**Michael:** Question number one. What is your all-time favorite television show, all-time? So, you have to think back all the way to, like, early childhood, all the way to what you could be streaming today, favorite all-time show.

**Shawn:** Who killed J.R? *Dallas*. Southfork, right? We all wanted to live in that house. Yeah, J.R., Patrick, Sue Ellen.

**Michael:** All of the drama that we have to talk about every week.

**Shawn:** That's right.

**Michael:** I can go along with that.

**Shawn:** Now, my wife would tell you that my favorite TV show is the *Real Housewives* series on *Bravo* but *Dallas*.

**Michael:** But all-time is *Dallas*.

**Shawn:** All-time is *Dallas*.

**Michael:** All right, "Combustion Question" number two. Who or where would you haunt if you were a ghost?

**Shawn:** Where? Anybody that knows me, let's start with the where, it would be in a Casino in Las Vegas. And the who would I haunt would be all the players that don't really know how to play in Vegas and lose their money, especially those that sit at the "War" table. I would haunt them.

[00:28:47]

**Michael:** There actually is a card game in Las Vegas where you play "War".

**Shawn:** And you bet money on it that we played as five-year-old children.

**Michael:** Not a good idea.

**Shawn:** Not a good idea.

**Michael:** Not a good idea. So, they deserve to be haunted.

**Shawn:** They deserve to be haunted.

**Michael:** Yes. All right. Last question. What do you think about roadkill?

**Shawn:** I hate it. I don't like it on my car.

**Michael:** Does it at least make you sad?

**Shawn:** I can't get past the fact that I don't like blood. So, when I see roadkill, the blood, just... so, I don't know that it makes me sad, it just grosses me out.

**Michael:** There you go. Either way, roadkill is not a good idea.

**Shawn:** Not a good idea.

**Michael:** Not a good idea. Well, thank you for the conversation and we are looking forward to Season 4 of *The Combustion Chronicles* and not just the conversations that we get to have, but the impact as well, and hopefully, in small or big ways, somebody somewhere is going to be affected in ways that could actually make a difference.

**Shawn:** Yes, that's what I hope.

**Michael:** So, thank you all for joining us, and we'll look forward to kicking off Season 4 with you.

**Shawn:** Awesome. Bye

**Shawn:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of "The Combustion Chronicles." None of this is possible without you the listener. If you'd like to keep the conversation going, look up Man on Fire on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and at [manonfire.co](http://manonfire.co). Give us a shout. Let us know what you think. And please, subscribe, rate, and review if you like what we're doing and if you don't do it anyways. And remember, always stay safe and be well.