

THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES

WITH SHAWN NASON

PRESENTS

KISS YOUR *Dragons*:

Embrace the Messiness of Swarms

WITH
AUTHORS: Shawn Nason
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Shawn: Welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast, where bold leaders combine with big ideas to create game-changing disruption. I'm Shawn Nason, your host for navigating the upside-down world of disruption. We're excited to depart from our usual programming for a few weeks to present a special mini-series based on my new book, *Kiss Your Dragons: Radical Relationships, Bold Heartsets and Changing the World*. Throughout these mini-episodes, I'm joined by my co-authors Robin Glasco and Michael Harper. Together we'll be digging into the heartsets and mindsets featured in the book and getting real about our personal journeys that led us to launch all of this into the world. Like it or not, you've got some dragons in your life that need kissing. So, pucker up and let's have some explosive conversations.

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Shawn: On this episode, we're gonna be talking about finding your swarm. And let's define what a swarm is because I don't think most people really understand that. "A group of dragons is called a swarm. And if you don't have a swarm, get a swarm", right? That's what we're talking about here. "We all need people who have got our backs. Imagine what our workplaces, our communities, and our world would look like and feel like if we knew we could trust the others were looking out for us. As humans, we're not meant to navigate our lives alone. Introvert or extrovert, we still need human connection". And then we go on to say here, you guys, it says, "We've all heard the saying birds of a feather flock together. So finding other people who have battled and befriended similar dragons makes sense."

"Like a lot of other professions, the work of disruption can be lonely, and we've learned this". So I wanna talk about that because there's a saying that I've heard a lot lately, that your vibe attracts your tribe, right? And I can say that because I'm Native American. So I have a tribe, right? People we surround ourselves with, typically, in our lives have been people that...I don't wanna say "yes men" or "yes women", but agree with you, don't push you too much. That's that tribe feeling, right? A swarm is a step further than that, right? And that is surrounding yourself with people that don't always agree with you, definitely don't always look like you, and always push you to be a better person. And I really want us to talk about that because, again, we've talked about where we are in society today. Imagine if we all just did that, what a different place we could be.

Robin: So, yeah, you have a tribe, I have a tribe, he has a tribe, wouldn't you like to have a tribe too? But it's when we start co-mingling our different tribes. You know, I think since we've met, I've lived in East and West, and so, I have a group of friends in each of those different places, sometimes they cross-pollinate. And there are girlfriends, there's guy friends, I have gay friends,

I have work friends, I have work gay friends. And I have people that I call my board so that when, you know, if I'm making a life decision or those sorts of things. But I kind of have collected a unique group of folks in my life that literally are my swarm, and there are times when they do cross-pollinate, and I have looked forward to those times. And it also is kind of weird, too, I feel like because I know them, that they should know each other. But, you know, for me, I just embrace the difference, and they're not all the same.

Shawn: And Robin, I've had...are fortunate, Michael and I, to know E.J. and Kennedy.

Robin: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Shawn: They are definitely not your tribe, they're your swarm, because I have seen them push on you, right?

Robin: Oh, yes.

Shawn: But share a little bit more about that, because you have this very tight-knit group of sisters, you call them, that you are a tribe, but you guys are definitely a swarm. And the power of that, personally, in your life. But I just know that particular piece really well in your life.

Robin: I'll headline with this. So E.J. and Kennedy are my best friends. Kennedy is my ultimate best friend, and we couldn't be any different. She doesn't cuss.

Shawn: She used to.

Robin: She used to. She has never had a drink of anything with any alcohol in it, and I might've had some this morning. And she loves to shop. I do not love to shop. But, you know, there are some similarities of things that we have in common, and E.J. kind of sits in the middle, and she is incredibly risk averse. She's Nigerian, and so there's a lot of rules around how you act, what you do, that sort of thing. And there's another group of us that we couldn't be any different. And people outside looking in might think, "Oh, group of all African-American women."

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Actually, so there were seven of us. There were only two of us that are African-American. E.J. is Nigerian and born in London. Kennedy's actually Puerto Rican. And you keep kind of going on and on and on, and we bring just very different experiences. And we are the poster children for

truth-telling in that you are not safe...if you want to come for, you know, someone just to give you a pat on the back and a "Attagirl" and "You're doing a great job," that's not where you go.

Shawn: That's not that group.

Robin: That's not where you go. But it is 100% love. 100% love. There are times you want to, you know, push them in, you know, oncoming traffic and then go rush to their aid.

Shawn: Yeah. And I remember a very specific time in your life where you lost one of them in the group. And I saw you guys just come together in such a powerful way, and it really birthed this thing inside of you all that said, "We have to talk more about this."

Robin: Right, right. So there were seven of us, so now there are six. And so, one of them died during childbirth. Her daughter will be three in September, and, actually, her middle child actually just graduated from college last weekend. And when we found out that she was on life support and likely not going to make it, I got on the first plane. I was in the middle of a workshop, got on the first plane out there, didn't make it in time. But we came from different parts of the country and just took up vigil, and her remaining kids, her two oldest and the young one that survived, "Yup, what do you need?" That's what we do. We come, we take over. And what didn't sit well is that, in this day and age, you could have someone who could die during childbirth. And so, we felt that we needed to honor her and honor her legacy, and make sure that her story never goes stale, and talk about things that aren't discussed in women for women, people of color, and other vulnerable communities. And so, that's when *The Pink Couch* was birthed in that having these uncomfortable conversations that just don't get the airtime that white heterosexual males tend to take up a lot of the airspace on TV. And so, we just start having these conversations, whether it's about equity, whether it's about human trafficking, race, suicide. We have very uncomfortable conversations. And in her honor, because had we known that women of color are four times more likely to die in childbirth, she would be alive today. She would be alive today.

Shawn: Yes. She would be alive. And you talked about, for those of you...I don't wanna just skirt over it. You started something called *The Pink Couch*. You, and E.J. and Kennedy came to me and said, "Shawn, will you join with us?" And I said absolutely. So, *The Pink Couch* is out there. You can follow it on Instagram, on all the social medias. And from that...and Michael, I want to switch then to this because that actually drove something in us to do something within our organization at MOFI to really blow the shit out of diversity and inclusion. And I think that is a real powerful moment about finding your swarm, right, because we took something on that

traditionally wouldn't do it. And you were very passionate about it, and I still remember when we did the virtual conference last year, your speech, because you actually stood up and said, "I'm a racist."

Michael: I am. Yup.

Shawn: And I remembered with...

Robin: Yeah.

Shawn: And she's still got this look on her face like, "No, he's not." But I think that is the power of the difference between a vibe and a tribe and a swarm, right? Because you shared very openly, and I still struggle with that, calling you a racist, that's...but I...

Robin: Can I give the preamble of how that came to be?

Shawn: Yeah.

Robin: Because we're sitting at dinner and we're talking about the conference that we were working together on, and I said, "You know, we need to be very honest and have very honest conversations, and it would be great if we could get someone up there that was a racist and talked about their story." And he said, "Yeah." I said, you know, "Do we know any?" He's like, "I'm a racist." And I'm like, "Who can we get?" He was like, "No, I'm a racist." And I was like, "I'm sitting here breaking bread with a racist."

Shawn: But in your form.

Robin: Right.

Michael: And more specifically, it's less important to say that I'm a racist and more important to say that I've absolutely participated in racist behavior. I've absolutely had racist thoughts, and within the past two weeks, right? It's not something that, as a white heterosexual, that I can claim of, "Oh, no, I'm not a racist. If I were alive during slavery time, then I would not be that person who owned slaves." Of course, I would've. I would've gone with what was happening in the norm because that's a lot of who I am. And I think a lot of us fall into that category. And so, for me, that's the starting place for me to launch into a deeper conversation of saying, okay, I do have thoughts that are biased towards a group of people, and be it race or class or whatever

ethnographic group we get into. But for me, that's the starting place. That's the launch pad of, if I can understand that in myself, then I have the opportunity to change that behavior through conversation, through that honest, authentic moment.

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Robin: And I just have to... for people who are listening to this, this is the guy that when we are in a group or we're planning something, the first one to raise the flag that there's too many white people in here. We need to find...and actively, without hesitancy, and that's where the disconnect... The person that when we were...when George Floyd happened, and I was getting on the calls from the team, and I was like, "I'm really surprised I didn't hear from Michael." And it just was more so just a surprise, and then when you and I connected, I don't know, maybe it was, I don't know, how many days later, you had spent that weekend forming a barrier between the people who were protesting and the police. And that's who you are. And so to hear you say, "I'm a racist," and even, like, two weeks ago to have the... But it's real. That is real. I mean, it's human, and it's natural. So for people, anyone to say, "I'm the least racist person," I'm like, "Bullshit. Yeah, you are. Yeah, you are."

Michael: No, and I think for me that's that big differentiator between a tribe and a swarm.

Shawn: Yeah, absolutely.

Michael: You know, you find your people, you're in your tribe, you're feeling good about being a part of that group, you know, you're all, whatever it is that brings you together. You're missing something. It's an echo chamber, as far as I'm concerned, or it can be an echo chamber, let's put it that way. It doesn't have to be, but it certainly can be. And so, for me, finding that swarm is finding that voice that you're intentionally not wanting to hear in the moment, and then figuring out what you're going to learn from them. And one of the stories that was most powerful for me, it was just when you and I were together, Shawn, and I was ranting and raving about some political something.

And I said, "I don't understand how that person can claim to be a person of faith and believe that." And there was this pause, and you said, "Well, you realize he thinks that about you too, right?" Yeah. Okay. You know, in my world, this is very clearly what it's like to be this, this, and this. And there's a whole-nother-world out there that I know that I need to be a part of for me to be able to be a whole person, to be a contributing-to-society person, to be someone that people want to be around.

Robin: Yeah.

Shawn: Well, and I think, for those of you that don't know that are watching this or are listening to this, we're sitting inside of a church, recording this, right?

Robin: Hell, yeah.

Shawn: Wouldn't it be great if this conversation we're having right now could be happening in every church?

Michael: Well, and just to be clear, in this church, this is nothing like my church.

Shawn: That's right.

Michael: Nothing. I could walk in here, and I wouldn't even be sure if it's a church.

Robin: Right, right.

Shawn: Yeah. Right?

Robin: Or mine.

Shawn: Yeah. Right? Or vice versa. I could walk into your church that you grew up... But, again, that's the power of the swarm, and that's the power that... Again, we've talked about why we wrote the book, why radical relationships. It is this whole, you know, and Ed, our symbolism right here, right? Like, how do we form a swarm? I think that's a good thing, and I know we're doing some learning modules around this too, but I would also say that forming your swarm is not always easy.

Michael: Or quick.

Shawn: Or quick, right?

Robin: No.

Shawn: Any advice you guys would give on forming your swarm?

Robin: I'd love to hear what you have to say.

Michael: Step one for me is that you have to admit that you don't know what you're doing in your swarm search.

Shawn: Ooh, say that again. Say that again.

Michael: That's being a little bit snarky, but you have to admit that you don't know what you're doing in your search for a swarm. That you need to take a step back and pretend like you don't have your act together, pretend like you don't know what you're doing, and just be open to what comes your way.

Robin: Right, right.

Michael: And I think step two then is to maybe look at your world and look where the gaps are. And then step three is to get out there and figure out how you can make connections, long-term connections, with people that need to be in that swarm with you. Because anyone can have a short-term conversation. I'm the king of short-term conversations. Give me somebody in the elevator, I can chat them up, no problem. Those longer-term relationships, that's a whole different story for me.

Robin: Yeah.

Shawn: Wow.

Robin: And it's interesting for me when I think about my swarm, it is not with a conscious thought. It is with a "that person has an interesting story," or "I would love to learn something I know nothing at all about." And so, for me, I've always had that curiosity. I've kind of gone from extrovert to introvert to extrovert in different settings, which I don't think is as important because these could be one-on-one conversations that can happen over social media, or it can happen in person, in zooming these past 18 months, whatever. And so, for me, it's always been, I think because I was an army brat, and I've lived in so many different places from Washington D.C., Fort Knox, Kentucky, Denver, Boulder, you know, the Bay Area, Danville, and now back to Boston, if I hadn't said that, and D.C. and back again. And I've met so many different people with different backgrounds that I just don't know any different, and very similar to you, I'm like...I just crave to have just a different conversation with someone...

Shawn: But let's be real, that's not the norm.

Robin: No, heck no. Heck no. Heck no.

Shawn: But, like, the three of our approach to finding the swarm is not the norm. It is much easier for people to go be with people that look the same, sound the same, act the same. And, you know, the community I live in is very much that community, right? And so I still remember the day that we moved in to that community almost seven years ago, and I think at that moment I had pink hair. I may have had blue hair. And it was that moment when we get out of the car and, like, everyone was standing, like, in their yards. Right? And we did get a lot of baked goods because I think everyone wanted to get an up-close and personal look at this freak, right, that they call a freak. But that's what I love, the beauty of the three of us is that we've leaned into it, but, again, I think we have to say this. It's not always easy.

Robin: No.

Shawn: It's gonna be difficult at times, and there's going to be pain in that. But when you find your right swarm, at the end of it, the beauty of it is so much more powerful.

Robin: Absolutely. Absolutely. And one last thing that I'll say is that if you do not have someone in your tribe, your swarm, that is a convener...because I think you're a convener. I'm a convener, you are a convener. And if you're able to, "Oh, I have this person in my swarm that you need to connect to," and vice versa, you know, "Have you talked to, have you...?" you do that a lot, particularly when we were in conferences of just kind of that matchmaker, if that happens and then kind of sit back and watch stuff go. And I think having that convener, for those of you who may not be as forward-leaning in terms of finding your swarm but having that convener who can help make that a little easier for you, if that's not a natural thing, so.

Shawn: I love it. Michael, last thought around finding your swarm?

Michael: You gotta be open to it.

Shawn: Yeah. And I would ditto that. So thanks again, you guys.

Robin: Thank you.

Shawn: Thanks so much for listening to this special presentation of *The Combustion Chronicles* featuring the lessons and stories behind our new book, *Kiss Your Dragons: Radical Relationships, Bold Heartsets, and Changing the World*, which is available now at Amazon. If you'd like to bring *Kiss Your Dragons* into your life or workplace, head to ShawnNason.com, where you can check out our resource kit for teams, a free book club discussion guide, and information about self-paced and in-person training. If you're ready to dive deeper with us, you can also learn more about our mastermind group and personal coaching. And don't forget to connect with us on Facebook, Instagram, and Clubhouse so we can continue the conversation about radical relationships, challenging the status quo, and being the people the world needs us to be. Thanks for joining us . . . Now get out there and kiss some dragons!