

THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES

**EPISODE SIXTY-FOUR
S'MORES, TAYLOR SWIFT,
AND STANDING OUT AS A MAVERICK**

**HOST: SHAWN NASON
GUEST: BILLY SAMOA SALEEBEY**

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Shawn: Welcome to the sixth 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 an experience evangelist, I believe the only way to build a sustainable and thriving business is by putting people first.

This season is all about human-obsessed, maverick-minded influencers who are changing the business landscape by standing up for what's right, prioritizing relationships over transactions, and taking a few risks along the way.

Mavericks think differently. And, human-obsessed mavericks take all of that mavericky stuff up a notch. Filled with empathy, these special mavericks put their heads and hearts into action to think bigger and more boldly about changing the world each and every day.

Ready to blow up the status quo and ignite a people-first experience revolution? Yeah, me too. Let's do this.

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Shawn: On this episode of *The Combustion Chronicles*, we have Billy Samoa Saleebey. Billy is an entrepreneur, podcast host, and award-winning filmmaker. He has led learning and development organizations for some of the most disruptive companies in the world, including Tesla, where he was head of global sales and product training. He's currently CEO and co-founder of Podify, a podcast agency that provides production and promotion services to companies and individuals who want to create podcasts. He also hosts two podcasts *For the Love of Podcast*, which is about the medium, and *Insight Out* where he interviews world changers, entrepreneurs, and thought leaders to uncover powerful insights listeners can apply in their own lives. Welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles*, Billy.

Billy: Thanks for having me, Shawn. I'm super excited. Let's do this man.

Shawn: Yeah, man. So, you know as a podcast host and a fan myself, I love that you've been leaning into podcasting over the last few years, but I have to ask something right off the bat. You're a graduate of the Prestigious Loyola Marymount University Film School. Why did you make the switch to podcasting and what do podcasts offer the world that films don't?

Billy: It kind of happened by accident. I mean, I got out of film school, I made a movie, I spent seven years of my life doing that and realized that independent filmmaking, while I loved the journey, it wasn't necessarily going to give me the financial wellbeing that I needed. So I kind of found myself in corporate which I did

for 10 years. And when I got out of corporate, I got the itch to get back into something creative. And because I had so much background in learning and development and teaching, I was like, okay, how can I capitalize on this growing industry of podcasting while also leverage my innate sort of inquisitive nature where I love asking questions and also scratch the itch where I want to empower other people and podcasting just blends all those things. It just felt right at the time. So in 2019, I started my own show and haven't looked back since.

Shawn: And not only did you start your own show *Insight Out*, but I believe I saw today where it's in the top 1% of podcasts globally. So congratulations on all the great work you're doing there.

And to me, one of the best things though about podcasts, Billy, is that they celebrate this concept that we call mavericks within our organization MOFI, and as I speak, and those are people who don't always color inside the lines. So having maverick mindsets is also a common trait shared by startup founders, of course. So I loved the episode of *Insight Out* where you interviewed startup guru, Steve Hoffman, who talked about founders need to spend 80% of their time building a team, not just thinking about an idea. So how can you build a team of mavericks and don't you need somebody on the team who is not a rule breaker?

Billy: I mean, you could build a team where there's somebody, that's not a rule-breaker, but I think the through-line here is that we need more people who think differently. Because life is full of people who conform to what other people are doing because it is the path of least resistance. And we, as human beings want to be safe, we want to avoid risk and therefore we're gonna do what we see other people doing. When you look at the visionaries and the people scattered throughout history who have done something noteworthy almost without exception, they've gone against the grain. And to your point, they're a maverick. And because they're a maverick, they stand out, they do something in a new, different or unique way.

When I worked for Tesla, one of the things that really resonated with me is this idea of first principles thinking, and the idea behind that is don't just assume that because something already exists, that it should exist in that same way. A car is a great example, just because a car's been built a certain way for 100 years, doesn't mean it needs to continue to be built in that same way. And so looking at things from the ground up and having a first principles mindset will allow you to really build things, not through iteration and trying to incrementally improve on what

already exists, but thinking about how can I do this in a way that is completely different? And a lot of times it'll blow people's minds because they're not used to it.

[05:20]

Shawn: Wow. I love that. And you even talked about on a recent episode of *Insight Out*, Elon Musk's, you know secrets to success. And I think you're hinting at that with what you're talking about. Could you share a couple more of those secrets that you try to emulate in your own life?

Billy: Above all else, you have to have a customer mindset. And what he talks about is delight the customer. So what goes into delighting the customer? I mean, I'm a big believer in the wow experience, which is you do something to make your customers literally say to themselves "Wow." An example, you know, as a Tesla employee, I had the opportunity to get a ridiculously good deal on a Model X, I had a Model X. So it's Christmas time, and I had a Model X a couple years ago and the car literally dances to Christmas music, the doors go up and down, the windows go up and down, the lights go flicker on and off, it blasts this music. I mean, how many cars have done this, right? So that's one thing is you gotta delight the customer.

The second thing is, remember that when you build anything worthwhile, you have to make sure that you're asking the hard questions along the way, and are you doing it in the best possible way? And one of the things that stood out with Elon and I had a high enough level position to where I was on conference calls with him, and he was brilliant at asking hard questions about why we do this. Why do we do it that way? Why do we do it this way? And challenging people, and I'm not gonna even say it in a nice way, because it wasn't necessarily in a nice way. He challenged people to get past what they perceived as obstacles or barriers. Oh, we can't find a parking space for all of the cars we need to be delivered because that area doesn't have any parking places. Okay. This is limited thinking. What's the solution we could find to that?

So I think we have to be willing to ask the hard questions along the way. And then the last thing I'll share is, you know, when you work for a company like Tesla, there's brilliant people all around you. But the thing to remember about brilliant people is they're not brilliant because they worked at a certain company or they have this degree. They're brilliant because they're brilliant. And I think the sooner you could find out if they possess the ability to do brilliant things, that's when you're gonna start to assemble the right team, going back to this idea of like it's all about the team. I agree with Steve's thought, it really is all about the team. So

brilliant people do brilliant things, they don't necessarily have a brilliant degree or have worked for brilliant companies. They have a track record of doing things that are exceptional. And when they've done things that are exceptional and you could pull that out of them through asking the right questions and asking how they solve problems, asking how they think about certain things, then you're gonna start to identify the right people to put in your squad.

Shawn: All three points I wrote them all down. The customer mindset, ask the hard questions, brilliant people. I love when you were talking about you call it, delight your customer. We have three experience principles. I mean we're a human-obsessed, maverick-minded, experience design firm, that's what we do. And ours are know me, surprise me, and make it easy for me.

And to be honest with you, a lot of people talk about delight me and you said that you know, with Elon and I never liked the word delight me. And so that's when we started using the word surprise me. And that comes back to my Disney days and working at Disney and being a Disney Imagineer that I wanted to surprise people with those wow experiences. Right? I love this and I love what you said with all of that.

Billy: Let me just say one thing about the surprise me thing, this is what people will share because we have, when we're surprised we carry a cognitive burden on our brains that's like almost overwhelming. And in order to lighten that burden, we want to share it. This is why viral videos are often things that surprise you, that are shocking in some way. And yeah, I mean, look, you touched on Disney. Part of the beauty of Disney and when I interviewed somebody that worked very closely with Michael Eisner, is he related it to like a pointillist painting. All of these little things add up and you back up from this pointillist painting, it creates this beautiful piece of art, but any one detail may get forgotten. But when you surprise somebody, when you give somebody something that they can feel this almost obligation, this duty to share it, things become viral as a result.

Shawn: Yeah. And you even said that at Tesla your mission was, and I'm gonna quote this, "To ensure all our global sales teams receive the training and development necessary to perform at an exceptional level so they were equipped to exceed sales targets while delighting (or surprising) our customers with a world-class experience." And you're talking my language because I put out a newsletter called *Experience Matters*, my partner and I host a show called *Experience Friday Live*. And I love the focus on equipping salespeople. So what's the secret to creating a positive employee experience that leads to a positive customer experience?

[10:26]

Billy: Well, I think it starts with being a human, as strange as that may sound, you gotta talk to people on a human level. I think people are smart and savvy enough to understand when they're being sold and realize when somebody has ulterior motives, and they're not looking out for your best interest. I mean, Elon, to be honest, is not a massive fan of salespeople, but to his credit, what I think he realizes is even though in a dream world, he would love for people to fall asleep on a keyboard and be able to order a Tesla while doing so, he recognizes that there still is a need for that human interaction. And so I think, you know, ultimately as I led the sales training team, I think we have to constantly remind ourselves, what does it feel like to be the customer walking into a showroom, right?

They're used to going to a car dealership where they're being hard sold and given all this garbage about, oh, well, let me get you this deal I can only get it to you this time. And all of those old school sales techniques that honestly are so easily televised, and you could see that they're doing it. So, you know, you've got to flip the script on it and just be natural, be natural. Think about, okay, well, why is this person in a Tesla showroom? What are they interested in? What type of customer are they? Are they the type of customer that's gonna take it on road trips? Are they the type of customer that likes the performance of the vehicle? Are they the type of customer that wants to have the technology? Is this like a big sort of extension of their iPhone? Are they a family person? So like you gotta do the discovery and ask the right questions.

So I think sales is really about,... It's about serving, serving the customer where they need to be served. I spent years waiting tables. I honestly feel that my corporate success was largely based on my service experience, waiting tables. Because when you wait tables, you get to know humans, you get to know, you know, at a very primal level, one of the most important things we do is eat. So it's like, how can I understand their needs? What do they want? How can I anticipate what they're gonna want going forward? And then how can I over-deliver in a way that they will feel like they were completely taken care of? And so when people sat in my section, they walked away feeling like they wanted to go tell the manager that they just sat in my section. And so I kinda want that same thing to happen when somebody serves somebody in a Tesla showroom, right? They need to give them everything that they want, but it starts with understanding what they want. So you gotta ask the right questions.

Shawn: It's funny because particularly this season, and some of our other seasons, it's amazing what someone who has worked in the service industry— so I waited tables and I waited tables eventually in a high-end restaurant—that once you understand the service industry and have done that, it does lean into really understanding these guest experiences and listening. We're actually in our sixth season of *The Combustion Chronicles* and I know that we get better every season at listening. So when you work with clients now, Billy, at Podify, how do you coach them into creating a top-tier listener experience, and what separates that top 1% from the rest?

Billy: A few things, consistency stands out. I just heard a great analogy. So I'll share it here. It's this idea of like, how do you do something over the long term? And in order to do something over the long-term, you need to find first something that you have a sustainable interest in. Doesn't need to be your number one passion, but do you have a sustainable interest that'll last long term? And then two, think of it like a treadmill. Like if you put the treadmill to level 10 and you were carrying bags with you, you probably wouldn't stay on that treadmill for a very long time. But if you put the treadmill at a reasonable level and you're not carrying extra baggage, trying to do it all, trying to do everything, trying to run full speed, you could do it for a very long time, and I really like that analogy and it helps you avoid burnout.

So I think consistency is paramount, but then aside from consistency, because anybody can do something consistently, you have to find a topic where you and your show can stand out. I think all too often we see any number of shows where it's like a dime a dozen or a dime a million, you know, you got the same exact show concept, just recycled and regurgitated a hundred different times. So I like to use the s'mores analogy. It's like, marshmallows great, Graham Cracker's great, chocolate's great. But you put them together and it's magic. And so how do you do what most Hollywood producers do and take two concepts. It's *Goonies* meets *Jurassic Park*, and you put them together and now all of a sudden you have a new and exciting concept. So if you're gonna do a leadership podcast, how do you turn it on its head and do something that hasn't been done before? Because there's a ton of leadership podcasts, or entrepreneurship, or any number of things.

And so I like to think of it from a perspective of what will make this show shareable, meme-able, right? You want people much like we talked about the surprise concept... You want people to say, "Oh, did you hear about this new show that does this blah, blah, blah?" That's what you want people to do. So I think if you're

consistent and you have a good show topic that hasn't been done before and you do it in a clever and unique way, you're nine steps ahead of the next person.

[15:51]

Shawn: I love all of that advice. I'm sitting here even running it through my head with what we've done with *The Combustion Chronicles*. So even talking further about podcasts, podcasts are all about humans. But typically just like now, you know, the guests and host, aren't usually in the same place. And the audience doesn't get to be part of the conversation, right? So what have you learned about tearing down the barriers then between the host, guest, and audience when you're doing podcasts?

Billy: I think the first thing is to remember that your audience is a real human being, they're made up of real human beings and the sooner you can actually talk to them the better. So I'll give you a few examples. For one, if you get somebody that...like, suggest that people send you messages on your show and when they do, suggest that you meet them. So, Taylor Swift, you think of her as a megastar now, but when she was starting out and she was still really famous, but when she was beginning to get, you know, pretty mega-famous, she would have parties with her fans. And they were like, sit down, some of them, parties, almost like a wedding where there's all these round tables and all her fans are sitting down and she would go from table to table and meet each fan individually. That type of mindset when it relates to your audience is so, so critical. So every single audience member you can meet, they're gonna do a few things.

One, that person goes from being a fan to becoming a super fan. Two, you can ask them questions like what about the content do you like already? How can it be better? What about the show stands out? Like how did you find the show? Ask them a bunch of questions that will give you information that will not only reinforce the positive things you're doing, but it'll also redirect in the areas where you could improve. So I think that's really, really key. The other thing that's key is as you think about who you're serving, you have to be an advocate for your audience. So as you talk about the guest, because you're not having that interaction, you have that interaction with the audience, but then allow that information to direct how you do your research and preparation for each of the guests that you bring on your show. So much like I talked about making your show different, you gotta make each episode different.

So if I know I'm interviewing somebody, I gotta think to myself, what does this person have in their zone of genius that hasn't been shared a million times in a million other places? What's gonna be that unique element that is so noteworthy, somebody will actually pull out a notebook and wanna scribble it down because they haven't heard it before? And you only know that if you've done enough research show, read the book or books, watch their YouTube videos, look at their social media content, read their articles or blogs, you name it. Like you gotta get deep into the research, and then anything that you feel is kind of bland or normal, or you've heard it a million times, just forget about that. And then zero in on those nuggets, you're like, "Ooh, that's mind-blowing, I wanna unearth that."

Shawn: Again, amazing. So, I wanna take that into a business case and pick your brain a little bit. So there are more than 1 million podcasts out there covering every topic you can think of. And so, you know, Billy, yours is in the top 1%. We're fortunate to be in the top 3%, but could you name one or two industries that could benefit from getting into podcasting?

[19:11]

Billy: I think any industry should have companies that are leveraging the power of podcast, going back to why podcast. It's like, I love that in your podcast it's all audio, it's not video. From a guest perspective, I've done this before on other shows and I actually quite like the experience of not being on camera, because you're actually focused more on the voice and there's truth in the voice, there's vibration, literal, literal vibration that you can connect with that is very different. It's much more intimate than other mediums. And so with a podcast, you get really three key things. One, you get the intimacy of the voice and the vibration. Two, it's a passive form of communication. And what I mean by that is you can listen to a podcast and do a million other things and still get that knowledge. You could ride your bike. You could go do errands, you could clean the house, you could do a number of things and it's not like a video where you gotta be engaged visually and hearing it.

So it's a passive form of media, which is really, really compelling. And the third, and there's a lot more, but the third thing is longevity and duration. So you get so much time with the listener because podcasts are long-form pieces of content, even if it's only 20 minutes, that's way longer than most videos, but a lot of podcasts are 30 or 45 minutes. And so you have the ability to connect with people in a far more meaningful and deeper level because of the duration of the content. And then you couple that with the fact that it happens every week or every twice a week, and now you have these checkpoints where you're building greater rapport with your core

audience. So from a business standpoint, going back to your question, it's like, why would you not capitalize on this intimate, passive, and consistent form of media that is unlike other forms that are so, so, so noisy out there.

Shawn: I've never heard it put that way before. And I struggled even with, do we do audio or video and the length? And all of those things you just said was like just the light bulb for me. So thank you for that. But I wanna close up a last question with you around some trending and specifically that podcasting is evolving. How do you see podcasting changing in say the next five years, Billy, and what will be different in terms of topics, formats, and even how people could access podcasts?

Billy: Great question. Yeah. In a lot of ways you're seeing it happen right now and it'll continue to happen. I think the distribution model of podcasting, it is evolving, whether we like it or not, it is evolving. And so part of that is the streaming and accessibility nature of it. So, you know, historically podcasts were started as pieces of audio that you can get through an RSS feed, really simple syndication, which is not a new concept. Bloggers have been using it, predating audio, blogging or podcasting. And therefore, you know, what happened over the last 15 plus years is we have a really cool platform that we can almost do what we want. There's no podcast police out there. And so there is something very compelling and exciting about the freedom that you get with the traditional RSS-generated podcast.

But as you can see with Joe Rogan and Dax Shepard, and all these podcasters moving over to a platform, you're seeing the streaming nature of podcasting being a primary change. And one, you get people who have a platform like a Spotify, or even YouTube, for example, or even now Facebook's getting into podcasting... You now have platforms that are gonna be taking advantage of the platform, which will mean more advertising, which will mean more money, which will mean a lot more big deals being signed. And we'll also then change how you see this content showing up where you see it showing up and where you spend your time, as far as the content itself, ultimately, you know, you look at the Netflix generation that we're in, people want on-demand content so that they can continue to gain knowledge and awareness on topics that matter to them most.

And so I think that will remain the same, but what you're seeing is now players emerge, of course, I've mentioned it now three times, Spotify being a very clear example of that, which they're going to basically be dictating the way in which the industry will evolve as a whole, which will include the content you see, how you see it, and also where you are getting exposure to advertising as a result. So I think those are the biggest changes that I see happening. The only other big change that I

see is what I'll call the smart speaker revolution. I'm quite curious to see how the evolution of smart speakers, that's one big component, and lives play into this. So Amazon live for example, and Alexa, so like smart speakers and then short-form content that goes into smart speakers. So like news briefings and things like that. I can imagine that being really big, but then also live content where let's face it, Amazon's doing live because now you could talk about the products on Amazon and then make a very easy and trustworthy way for us to hear about products in a live-type environment. So those are the things that I'm keeping my eye on.

[25:03]

Shawn: I'm very intrigued by the live things as well. We host a live show on LinkedIn, and interesting to see what happens with that as well. Billy, man, so many things that you dropped on us, thank you for all of that. But it has come to that point in time in our episode where we do these things called the Combustion Questions. And they are three randomly selected questions that were just handed to me. And you have no idea what I'm gonna ask you here. So, Billy, are you ready for your Combustion Questions?

Billy: I am ready. Thanks.

Shawn: Awesome. Well, Combustion Question number one, if you could put wings on any species of animal, which animal would you choose?

Billy: Humans.

Shawn: That would make my flying so much cheaper if I could just fly myself there. I love it. Alright, Combustion Question number two, dine-in or delivery?

Billy: That's a great question. Well, I'll just qualify it by saying, I love both, but I'm a dine-in guy and I'm also quite tired of dining of, you know, getting takeaway, and delivery because of the COVID generation that we're in. So I'm ready to get back into some more dine-in experiences.

Shawn: So am I, buddy. So we'll have to do it together. I'm the same way.

Billy: Love that. I love that.

Shawn: If I have to order DoorDash or Grubhub one more time. I'm like, yep. All right. The last question. Combustion Question number three. What do you think about pelicans?

Billy: That's my favorite podcast question ever. Okay. What do I think about pelicans? They're awesome. How do you not like a pelican? They're large, you know, you don't realize how big a pelican is until you see one in person. And that's what I think about them. I think when you talk about surprising, pelicans are surprising.

Shawn: And if you've ever been chased by one, it's even more surprising. So, yeah. Well, again...

Billy: That's a good question.

Shawn: ...Billy, thanks so much. How can our audience find you? Where's the best place to reach out to you if they want to learn more about you and what you're doing?

Billy: Oh, thanks for asking. Yeah, so I'm big on LinkedIn, communicate there regularly. So definitely send me a direct message there. But also if you have any podcast needs, if you need help with editing, or producing, or promoting social media, anything we could do pretty much head-to-toe podcast support. You could just go to Podify.com and you could even schedule time with me there. Happy to do a strategy session with you and you could just plug in there and we could get some time on the schedule, but yeah, thanks for the opportunity, this has been a very fun interview. I enjoyed it, you had me smiling, you didn't see me, but I've been smiling the whole time.

Shawn: Well, awesome. Well, thank you so much, Billy, and we'll talk soon.

Billy: Sounds good.

Shawn: Thank you 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 MOFI.co where you'll discover ideas and resources to help you ignite your own experience revolution. And be sure to check out my book, *Kiss Your Dragons: Radical Relationships, Bold Heartsets, and Changing the World*, available on Amazon. Then head over to ShawnNason.com to engage resources, a discussion guide, and information about everything from self-paced learning to personal coaching. As always, stay safe, be well, and keep blowing sh*t up!