

EPISODE 30

[INTRO]

[00:00:06] ANNOUNCER: You are listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving in a complex world, with Rick Torseth and guests.

[EPISODE]

[00:00:19] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders, the podcast that has guests that have made some decisions in their personal and their professional life to lead. We want to talk to them and understand a little bit about what that process has been like, and what they've learned about leading, and how it is that they help people in the world to deal with the challenges they face.

Today is an interesting day for me because I have a friend and a colleague and mentor, Guillaume Wiatr, who is French, and I have been a client of Guillaume's. So I'm quite interested in having this conversation because I believe he brings something that's really essential to those people who choose to lead.

Guillaume, welcome to the podcast.

[00:01:09] GW: Bonjour, Rick. How are you doing?

[00:01:11] RT: I'm good. I'm good. So Guillaume –

[00:01:13] GW: I couldn't help it.

[00:01:14] RT: Yeah. That's good. You can even speak more French if you want, man. Guillaume, you have a business called MetaHelm, and I'm going to read a little bit about what you put on your website. That specializes in strategic narratives for established companies. We

guide CFOs, founders, business owners to align people and accelerate the adoption of innovation.

Before we get into all of that because there's a lot of stuff there, and I think it's important that we sort of pull that apart and tease it out, so you can have some space to talk, tell people what it is you think they need to know about you before we get into the details of the work that you do and why you do it.

[00:01:54] GW: They need to know that I may have a different definition of narrative than they have. Most people will use narrative and stories interchangeably, which is true. I mean, you look at the dictionary. It's true. The definitions are very similar. But there is a nuance. There is an additional definition in the word narrative that we pretty much all use every day without noticing, and it's the facet of the word that expresses a larger conversation common sense, a larger meaning for something.

So let me give you an example. When we say the narrative about society, the narrative about climate change, the narrative about social justice, the narrative about business, or my narrative as a person, or the narrative about our family or our team, we refer to something that is more like a cultural device. It's like a meta definition for something. So I want people to know that when I use the word narrative, I use it always in this very specific sense.

When I use the word stories, I use also stories in a very specific sense, which is stories as individual, discrete devices that have a special relationship with narrative. The stories form narratives. Narratives are system of stories, and stories add to our system of beliefs. We heard stories about sharks attacking swimmers and being dangerous, right? So the narrative about shark is that sharks are aggressive, dangerous animals. In fact, they are probably one of the least dangerous. The most dangerous animal on the planet is – Guess what, Rick.

[00:03:53] RT: I think two of them are on this podcast right now.

[00:03:58] GW: Yes. Coach using consultants. I love it.

[00:04:03] RT: All right. So you've got us going here. I would have – If you'd ask me what is the difference between story and narrative, I would have said that a story has to do with reporting on a historical event. It's about the past, and a narrative is active. It's alive. It's about the present and into the future. To what degree does that hold up in your expertise?

[00:04:30] GW: 100%, except that some stories haven't happened yet. So most stories are from the past where they – In fact, if you talk about science fiction stories, like they're, "Oh, something – I'm writing a story about the future." Yes. But you've written it already, so it has happened already. So it is a little bit of a nuance here, but your definition is 100% aligned with how I see that.

Maybe another way to look at what a story is is a story is something that happened to someone. That's why we say a story has a character or characters or a protagonist, and that's why we say that stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It's closed, right? Typically, it has been really reinforced in 1920th, 21st century with the movie industry. We expect an ending. We expect closure to a story. Or maybe closure and then slight reopening to the next season of our preferred shows, our favorite shows.

But basically speaking, a story has that very well researched and engineered format that has a closure versus a narrative. A narrative is ongoing. It's dynamic, as you said. It changes all the time, so it's never-ending. It's open-ended, in fact.

[00:05:52] RT: Okay. So let's put this in context then. Tell people a little bit about – Give them a sense of what your purpose is. What is it that's going on in an organization that has them call you and bring you in and ask for your help? Then what is the help – A little bit about what the help is that you provide these people.

[00:06:10] GW: I've been working for many years with – I wasn't conscious about that in the beginning. But for some reason, I always happened to work with innovators, change makers, inventors, people who have an agenda to transform something. Transform either an organization or an industry or a market or how a community does something specific like recycling stuff or producing some sort of objects or services or also transforming people's lives like you, coaches equipping people with better leadership capacity.

That's the work that I focus on. I focus on helping – Let's call them change makers, but they're really people who are unsatisfied with the study school, who are not here to build something more efficient or optimized that exists already. But something, yeah, that is really a transformation to change. Some of them want to start a revolution even in specific areas. So that's the first piece of the context. What all these people are up against is a pre-existing narrative in their field, some kind of prejudice, some kind of unchallenged hypothesis, some kind of conversation or discourse that has been so institutionalized that we don't even pay attention to it.

[00:07:36] RT: Can you give us an example of what that would look like?

[00:07:39] GW: Yes, absolutely. In the field of energy consumption and I know you had some expert on your show before. But in the field of energy consumption, one of the number one challenge to change is not that we don't have the technology. It's the fact that we need to change people's belief about how we produce technology, how we consume it. We need to change people's beliefs about the fact that there is a limit in how much energy we can provide. So that's one of the examples.

Another example I've been working on lately is around how we sell things. So this company I work with has had trouble selling services because their team is convinced that selling is about pushing more products and hitting numbers and being very aggressive. They brought me in to change that culture because they see that it's a dead end. That it doesn't align with their values anymore. That it actually creates more arm to people. What I'm doing is helping them, first of all, realize that there's been a culturally historically established narrative that is there that we're going to be really facing and be up against, despite all of the new processes and trainings and tools that we want to put in place.

Another metaphor I want to maybe – I want to use a metaphor to illustrate my point. Imagine that you'd be playing a rugby or soccer or tennis on a field that is completely tilted, uneven field, right? And you are at the bottom of the field. You're on a down side of the field, and your opponent is at the top. Who has the advantage? Your opponent, obviously, right? That's what happens when you are trying to change the nature of a game, and you're faced with a narrative

that is really against you. You may have the best product, the best idea, the best program if you –

I'm thinking about a non-profit right now that I've been working with recently, and they have amazing programs. They have like astounding people and a brilliant team, but they are up against a narrative in society that is really, really hard to change. If they don't pay attention to it and if they don't strategize appropriately to change that narrative first before people are ready to listen or hear about their program, then their game is going to be really, really hard. So I'm most of the time brought in because the symptoms are we've got this great new idea, great new product, service.

For some reason, people don't see it as amazing as we do. It's not launching properly or we're doing a reorganization, and we thought we did everything by the book, and there is something. There is some kind of force that we can't see. There's some kind of thing that is invisible that people don't use those terms. Maybe these are my terms but some kind of thing we have a hard time explaining, and so we want you to help us understand what this is. I dig into finding what kind of narrative power this organization has.

Narrative power is a term that people in the social justice field use very often. They understand it very, very well. They know that it's something extremely important that they have to pay attention to because with limited resources, if you don't, first of all, work on the equilibrium between parties in terms of narrative, you're going to lose. So they know that right away. Did I answer your question?

[00:11:22] RT: Yes. That takes me to yet another place. So in your book, you have a line that jumped for me, and I pulled it into my notes because it resonates with the world that I live in, which is building a new strategic narrative as an act of leadership. Now, for me, I would actually make that slightly more active and say it's an act of leading, but we're parsing small details here at this point.

The reason that jumps for me is I do think that if you are that person who has made a decision to lead, and for most listeners they know my point of view on this, but I'll stick it in here again because I think this constantly needs to be repeated, which is the difference in an organization

between authority and leading. They're not the same, and we all know that or we have experiences where we hope that the people would lead would do the thing when the pressure's on. We look up the org chart, and they don't. So the org chart's a map of authority but not a map of leading necessarily.

I've been in the UK now for two months. I've been witnessing the perils of leading in authority and being prime minister in this country is unbelievable. Anyway, which therefore means that the basic act of leading is mobilizing people to take coordinated action in pursuit of something that matters. What I've witnessed, and this is why I want to think of you. In fact, this just happened about six hours ago on a call that I was on with three other, four other people. But the conversation is, that person who's made the decision to lead and needs to mobilize people to come with them on this journey to make this change has to have a compelling narrative to follow along.

I say that in some specific ways, and you're addressing it [inaudible 00:13:12] is oftentimes, that change means I'm going to have to lose something that I've been doing for a long time. It's maybe been a way I've been recognized and rewarded and that you're telling me is going to go away in this narrative world we're going in. So it strikes me that part of the job that you have is to help the person who's crafting and delivering the narrative be able to address the loss, in addition to the gain that's coming with the change.

If that's so – You're shaking your head. People can't see you shake your head. Yes. So talk about it. What's actually going on when you're with them and you're helping them figure out what the word words are they're going to say and how they're going to say it? How do you help them design the words that address that dynamic of gain and loss and difficulty and all those kinds of things that are ahead for them?

[00:14:07] GW: So first of all, the first thing I want to add to this great question is it's not only the words. It's also the actions and the habits and norms that you build. I want to say this because the reason why in my book I put in big a narrative is strategic narrative is not an act of literature. Just an act of literature but it's an act of leading. I'll use your term. I like it. It's because most people think, “Oh, yeah. That must be some – Yeah, I get it. Yeah. Building a narrative is something that the marketing department does or the communications department does.”

9.9 times out of 10, when people contact me, they want to be on the call with the marketing person, and I say, “Okay. Well, your company is not just you and the marketing department, right? Where are the other folks?” We're talking about mobilizing people. We're talking about change. So in that case, we can exclude the other factions in the company, right? That's one comment I wanted to make here.

But to get your question, how do I help people craft the words, actions, and norms that also help them explain what is it that we're going to lose, I help them realize what the narrative is for them, first of all. Like you say, you want to lead with a different narrative. What does this narrative mean to you? Very often time, that gets us to talk about the origin of a certain narrative. So if I'm talking to a startup founder, startup founders tend to have a very personal reason why they started a company. Some of them want to start it for money reasons. They want to get rich.

But some others, and actually more than before, start companies for changing values, change of value in – Have a different impact on society. They want to do that. They take the decision to lead. I think that starting a company, starting a new venture is a decision to and an act of leadership, and they do it because something happened in their life. Sometimes, it's something traumatic. Sometimes, it's something joyful. But whatever the case is, something triggered the aha moment. In that aha moment, they were faced with a choice, either to stay the course and stick with where they used to be before or actually accept to lose something, right? That's where it all starts. That's where it all starts.

Let me give you an example. There is this company founder called Mark Frohnmayer. He's from Oregon, and he has a company that builds three-wheeled electric vehicles, and he's an engineer, and he likes coffee. Every day, he was going to the coffee shop with his big SUV to get his coffee and one day realized, “This is so stupid.” Like, “I am angry at myself for using my big car here. I'm stuck in traffic. I'm using way more energy than necessary. This is actually irresponsible. We need to emit less useless energy, emit less CO2 emission, and I'm actually overusing, just to cook a coffee. What can I do about this?”

So it starts with the aha moment, with the realization that something has to change. Then very quickly, you're faced with – In his case, he was faced with, “Well, does it mean that I give up on

my nice car and comfort and nice sound system and all that, and instead go to the coffee shop by foot or take the bus?” What does this mean exactly? What does this change mean exactly? He realized that he wanted to do something about it. He's an engineer and thought, “Okay. Maybe I can invent a different kind of vehicle that has an in-between those two solutions.” So that's an example.

It always starts with what are you ready to give up to create something better. I noticed that people in position of authority rarely talk about that. They rarely talk about that aspect of giving up something that personally something that they have to give up. Why? Because they don't think about it or they're scared sometime or they're not equipped. They didn't have the help. They didn't have the guidance or the courage or whatever the case might be. Sometimes, they refuse fuse. There can be so many different scenarios. But I always see this pattern of if you want people to understand that they have to give up something, lose something, like, well, what are you ready to give up, right?

In fact, that conversation is happening at the global level, right? Countries reach developed energy, guzzling countries telling underdeveloped countries, “Well, you should use less energy.” Smaller countries or underdeveloped telling more developed countries, “Well, what are you ready to give up?”

[00:18:55] RT: Right, yup. Yup. [inaudible 00:18:58] conversation.

[00:18:59] GW: Like, “What are you doing?”

[00:19:02] RT: So this provokes a question for me. The question that I started with is what drew you to this work. But your conversation right now has me want to say what was the aha moment. What was the thing that was going on for you that put you on this track, where you've decided to strike out on your own and do your own thing and go help companies with their narratives? What happened for you?

[00:19:28] GW: Well, I come from a family of entrepreneurs. I didn't notice it until later in my life, but I turned around like in, I mean, a family reunion. I'm like, “Yeah. Everybody here has their own business.” So I always thought that business can be good. I'm very passionate about this,

right? First of all, I always thought, “Oh, yeah. One day, I want to have my own business.” But I was encouraged by my family to go study business in a very ivy league business school in France and really get a good education, get a degree. They told me, “Don't do like us. Entrepreneurship is hard. Find a good job, a stable job. Climb the ladder, and you'll be fine.”

I tried that for two, three years, and I was miserable. I was miserable. I didn't know what was happening really, but I just didn't like it. I was constantly looking for alternatives to do this path. I decided to hire a coach at age 27 or 28 because I thought I can't figure this myself. So musicians have coaches. People in sports, athletes have coaches. Why don't I have a coach? I'm a musician too. I'm a pianist, and I went to the conservatory, and I had like teachers and mentors and coaches. So I'm like, “Well, why don't I do that for my career?”

I was a young consultant working for a big firm, and one day I was hired to help on a project, where the topic was very technical like, “Help us figure out this technical problem. The problem was we just invested.” I think the number was – At the time, it was huge for me. It was 20 million euros in revamping our procurement system, and we can't figure out why this isn't working. Like people are not adopting it and where the money is going to, we're going to have to write this off.

I was 27, and for some reason they had heard that I had some kind of technical – A very specific knowledge about those systems which I did at the time. I thought that's pretty much all I know. So they brought me in. I mean, this board meeting with the head of procurement, 20 engineers in this room, and they're staring at me, and I'm supposed to kick off this project. 30 minutes into the project, I realized the problem is not technical. The problem is that these guys don't hear each other. They can't talk to each other. They don't understand where they're headed. They don't realize they're not aligned. They're not going in the same direction. I could feel some kind of statics, some kind of something is really off.

At the time, I would have never called this the narrative is wrong because I didn't have the words. But now, I can say that they are just not aligned on the same narrative. So 30 minutes into the meeting, I decided this was my moment to derail my own meeting, and I say, “Well, let's stop here. I have to tell you that I'm observing something very different that you brought me on. So do you mind if we just grab a piece of paper. Everybody close their laptops, if we just draw the project.”

They looked at me with googly eyes, and they did it. We posted the drawings on the wall, and the drawings did the rest of the job for me. It was just evident. People could see like, “Yeah, we’re literally not on the same page.” That was the moment where I thought, “Okay. If I'm able to use my own resources, my courage, my guts to trigger that kind of moment, I can probably impact organizations at a level that is more interesting, more beneficial than just coming in and giving technical advice.”

This was clearly what you call, Rick, an adaptive challenge. Again, at the time, I didn't have the words to call it this way, but that was the moment that I decided, “Okay, I think there is something here. I need to follow my intuition.” I remember in the weeks after that, I looked around. There was no other really – I couldn't find at least. I couldn't find or hear from any other companies or petitioners that were working this way. So I decided I would start myself, and I started – It was my second – I had started a tech startup before with colleagues, and this was going to be my third one. I thought, “Okay, this is just going to be about that. How do we make teams work better through communications?”

At first, it was like through interpersonal communications. It was very vague, very fuzzy. You couldn't frame my own service offering.

[00:24:06] RT: And no initiative.

[00:24:08] GW: I did – My narrative was very unspoken, very intuitive. People would tell me, “Well, [inaudible 00:24:13].” It was so hard to explain. I was just trusting my gut. It was a real swamp, let me tell you. It was a real swamp, and I lasted for five years and with some ups and downs. But I learned so much out of this experience.

So now, then I immigrated to the United States, and that same passion just kept burning inside me and followed me. I thought I really want to pursue this. But now, I have more experience. I have more knowledge. I have more tools and connections. I can probably take this to the next stage. In 2016, yet again I decided to leave a comfortable job in consulting and launched MetaHelm.

[00:24:52] RT: All right. So thank you for that.

[00:24:54] GW: That's the story, right?

[00:24:56] RT: That's the story. But it also identifies those turning points for you, okay? You talked about leaving a job, and then you talk about a big turning point in a room full of people, 30 minutes into a meeting, and flying by the seat of your pants, coming up with an idea that you think may or may not work, and there you go. As you know because we talked about this before we started recording, part of the reason I do this podcast is that there are people younger on a leadership journey path. They're behind us. We're kind of wisdom keepers, elders on the journey, if you will. So the notion that they could listen to this conversation and maybe pick up two or three things that could help them develop themselves at a faster pace is part of the purpose of the podcast.

A question then to you is what have you learned about how to help people? You have an expertise. You have some ideas around a professional way that you can go into the world and help people. But what have you learned about what it takes to help human beings?

[00:25:58] GW: Well, first, I've learned to listen. It's so trivial, so basic. It sounds so like, "Yeah, everybody says that." But I think it's really one of the most difficult thing to do, and it's really an art. It's really an art. When I say listen, it's not just listening with your ears. It's also listening with all your senses, and maybe I should say observe, listening being part of one facet of observation, of course. But observing is really the thing. What's the practice? Well, how do I practice observation? I think I want to get into practical tips for people who listen.

I practice observation with two principles, extreme discipline and extreme freedom. Let me explain. Extreme discipline because I journal. I carve out time. I will almost never skip a day without writing down what I observed that day, that week, that month. What is happening around me? I use a very specific kind of journal, but you don't have to use that model. I use something pretty well-formatted that I buy. It's called the BestSelf Journal. I also hacked it. I inserted my own pages because, we're going to get to that in a second, I practice extreme freedom. I break things. I hack things. I've always done that.

Let me go back to extreme discipline. Extreme discipline is about creating a habit of documenting your path, documenting what you've seen so that you can constantly learn and share that learning with others. So if you feel like your life is like it's all different every day, you don't have a structure, think about it. Get on it. It doesn't have to be complicated or rocket science. It doesn't have to take a lot of time every day. But that's what I do to observe deeply and keenly. I'm very, very disciplined about my observation practices.

I write but also I draw, and drawing is a great way to let your – Within that very disciplined, structured, and sometimes rigid frame, drawing is another way to hack your very own system, and let your mind and your brain wander around not just left to right, top to bottom of the page. But let your mind go up down, up down, left right, left right, wherever it needs to go. So that's an example. I track my habits. I make my bed every day. Now, we're getting into very personal stuff. But really practice and it's not about observation, by the way, at making my bed. But really practice. Build a practice of highly disciplined and structured observation methods. There are tons of them. You don't have to practice mine. I have my own set that I've developed over the years. Still learning about them but build your own. So that's number one.

Let's talk about extreme freedom.

[00:28:56] RT: Okay. Before we go to extreme freedom because I definitely want to hear your thoughts on this, I am supportive of the practice that you've been cultivating around observation, and I'll say that in the context of dealing with hard problems, which is we are wired, educated, raised culturally to get answers to problems. That's how we get grades in schools. That's how we get jobs. That's how we get compensated. That's how we get rewarded and recognized. Fair enough.

But there are certain body of work, a certain level of challenges that have an immunity to those quick fix answers. So the skill that I oftentimes see lacking with people is their ability to observe and diagnose the situation before they start to go to work on it. I think what you're saying here, Guillaume, is really important for people who are listening, that I would like for you to share before we go on to freedom is talk just briefly, I guess, about what did you gain from the rigor of the discipline of following your practice of routine and habits. How has that changed you and shaped you for the good?

[00:30:03] GW: So many benefits. I do less stupid shit, very bluntly. I learn more. I still do a lot of stupid mistakes, but I think there is hope. I mean, I feel like I'm improving. So there is that aspect. There's learning, the growing aspect. But also that I do observation. It brings me calm, peace inside, and I feel more quiet. I actually practice that a lot live in the moment because I told you about the discipline aspect of it, and I was referring to scheduled time.

But now, I want to talk about unscheduled time, and I facilitate meetings with boards, with leadership teams, all sorts of teams, operational teams, marketing teams. People are under the gun. Lots of things happening and they want to react very quickly on some issues. I'm here to facilitate, and the first thing I should do is observe first what's going on. So have that double posture of active participants, nudging people. But also just in a whim kind of step back and really observe.

I think through that practice I'm a better consultant as well and better advisor, better mentor to people. So I help people better. Also, I demonstrate and I teach others how to do it. I'm thinking about a recent event. We're in a meeting where it's a company where there is – Okay, I'm not going to go into detail, but there are complex relationships, personal and professional relationships. The conversation was getting a little bit heated, not to say the least, around sales. Very divergent views around how we should go about selling more meaningful products and services. I

It got to a point where somebody stood up and just say, “Okay, I had enough. This is ridiculous. I'm leaving the room,” and slammed the door and just left. Some kind of rupture there. Some kind of tension, definitely. I kept observing and then I had the chance because it's also a great team. They are very persistent, and they recognize that they have their emotions and that the adaptive change that they are in, which is to change the nature of this company, requires them to debrief after the fact.

We did a debrief session, and then I had a chance to listen more, observe more, and challenge them to observe more. They are very thankful for that, and they say, “Wow, this is actually a practice. We should really, really pay attention to even more than anything else we do, is observe more before we respond.” So I say, “Great. Let's redo that conversation if you don't

mind. Let's kind of role play it. I'll throw in one constraint. You can only –” We had the person who had the problem and then six other people in the room and say, “Okay, you can only ask questions for five minutes. Only questions.” It's very simple. But when you're forced to only ask questions, you're just forced to roll your tongue and just digest and listen and see if you heard it well and slow down. You'll see it's not very easy.

[00:33:19] RT: It's hard. It's hard.

[00:33:21] GW: It's really, really hard, right? Yeah. It's really, really hard. So observation, I think, makes me a better consultant. It helps me accept that I don't have all the answers. It's funny. The narrative here is something about my narrative, about the MetaHelm narrative. My narrative started in my career with, “Oh, I want to be a consultant because consultants know. They are the experts,” and there's a little bit of that. My dad was a doctor. In the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s even, doctors were the people who would have the knowledge. That you go to the doctor because they knew things you didn't know. You couldn't have access to their knowledge because it required years and years and years of training, which these days is not the case anymore. Anybody has access to all sorts of information about health online.

I was raised with that narrative that, “Oh, yeah. I want to be a consultant because then I get to know. I have some kind of power thing going, and I was building an ego for this and an identity around this,” and realize, “Oh, my gosh. This is leading me to a path I don't want.” I want to be curious. I want to be a kid. I want to be able to say I don't know with the people I help, and I want to be able to tell them, “Well, I don't know. But you know what? Let's figure this out together. I'm here to help you, and we will figure this out together. But right now, I don't know. Are you okay with that?” Most people say, “Yeah. Okay, I get it.”

[00:34:50] RT: All right. So let's talk about freedom then.

[00:34:53] GW: Yeah. Again, because I've talked a lot, your initial question was tips about how do I practice observation. So freedom has always been – I think that's one of our – First of all, it is one of my core values. I really, really – I'm really careful, but it's interesting. I have an interesting relationship with freedom because I love freedom so much that I imprisoned myself in a very tight schedule, and I have those routines, and I track my habits. So I have to also

remind myself like life is about freedom, free to wander, and this Tolkien quote that goes, “Not all who wander are lost,” right?

So I let my mind wander on a daily basis. I actually go on a walk every day. I was just on a walk before this podcast, and I never take the same route. I like to take new routes all the time, experiment, “Oh, I didn't know this back alley was there. Oh, what's behind that bush?” So really practicing and living and even moving my body with the principle of freedom. I was telling you earlier that I draw, and one of the things I learned to practice is to – Because it's also scary, is the art of white boarding in front of people.

I even made that part of my career at some point. I was a graphic facilitator for several years professionally. I still do it sometimes, but I don't advertise that as a service anymore. I just do it within the context of the leadership and strategy services that I offer. But my signature style is always to start with a blank canvas, and first observe where the flow and the energy is taking me on a canvas. So I practice freedom for observation in the context of note-taking, of reflection, of mental health. I'm always reminding that freedom is hard because, again, one of the narratives we grow up with is be compliant, be a good student, and learn. We don't realize it anymore. We learn that we have to kind of put ourselves into, metaphorically speaking, those little jail cells that we build for ourselves.

So I'm always breaking the walls. I'm always trying to derail my own meetings, derail my whole process once they've been established so that there is a constant cycle of life. I throw away my own darlings all the times. What example can I give you? I launched services. After a cycle, I go, “Great. I'm free to ditch them and start over.” People are a little bit shocked sometimes. They go, “Oh, why don't you do this anymore?” Like, “Well, I've changed. I'm free to change and follow my calling. I think I've got something that is going to be really useful to you and even better.”

[00:37:46] RT: Right. So here's a question for you then, and I ask this question to everybody, and I ask it to everybody because I think, again, in the context of leading, that we tend to learn more from our leadership failures than we do our successes. I suspect this question is not too difficult for you to answer because you have a practice of reflection. So you probably have a pretty good understanding of how you can get yourself in trouble. But what have you learned from your failures?

[00:38:17] GW: I've learned that I take a lot of risk, uncalculated risk, and that it's okay to do that if it's with myself. But I should be careful not to bring people who are not willing to take the same risks as me with me.

[00:38:34] RT: Include your wife and kids too, I assume.

[00:38:37] GW: That totally includes my wife and kids, and I'm talking very specifically about financial risk, about the risk on trips in the mountains. What else? What other examples do we have in mind? On the water, on the road, speaking to people we shouldn't be speaking with, all sorts of situation. I'm a very social person. I'll just go talk to anyone. But sometimes, we should just carry on. But I've learned that, unless they're willing. But not everybody has the same willingness to make mistakes than me, and it's something that I learned the hard way. I lost some friendships because of that. That's tough for me. That broke my heart, and I don't know if I will ever get those friendships back. They are dear friends and we just – Yeah, I messed up. I didn't do the –

So I learned from my mistakes that, yeah, I should be a little more empathic about risk taking and making mistakes. Not everybody can go on the same ride and same journey. I love adaptive change. I love uncertainty. I immigrated here in the United States because my wife is from the Seattle area. But I bought a one-way ticket. I had a way to get a green card like a Visa. That was fine. I didn't have that problem, but nobody paid for my relocation or I wasn't sent here by – And I didn't have a job.

By the way, I came in the summer of 2008, where everybody wanted to hire a French consultant. No. No one wanted to hire me because everybody was laying off. Like the biggest bank on the west coast was just shutting down WaMu. So I picked – I had no idea. But for some reason, I decided to go to immigrate that year. There we go.

[00:40:37] RT: When you look ahead, what do you see?

[00:40:39] GW: I want to do more work that has to do with more meaningful things, and what's meaningful for me is the challenges we are facing with climate, the challenge we are facing with

democracy, with how our society works. I'm interested in that kind of work, and I'm excited to meet more people who are also excited about this. Maybe that's a plug here on this podcast. If you're one of them, contact me.

No, but here is the thing, Rick. I feel like I'm in constant transition, and I feel a little bit lonely these days. I feel like I'm still working with a lot of people who have – They're trying to just build businesses so they'll make more money, and that's it. But they want to change, and that's why they want to work with me. So that's good, but I want also to work with people who have joined or designed, started organizations that by design are meant for that, for change, for positive impact, organizations that don't just try to wrap themselves around this idea, this narrative. I hope that makes sense.

[00:41:52] RT: So I want to thank you for being on this podcast. For people who are listening, we will put in the show notes the link to your website and also to your e-book, so they can pick that up, and check that out, and they'll know then therefore how to contact you. So, my friend, thank you very much for coming in and doing this with me. It's been a pleasure for me and I hope for you.

[00:42:17] GW: It's been an honor, Rick. You said in the intro that I'm one of your mentors, and I'm like, "What?" I've learned so much during this interview because thanks to your questions.

[00:42:30] RT: You're welcome. You're welcome, man. All right. Thank you, sir.

[00:42:35] GW: Take care, Rick.

[OUTRO]

[00:42:39] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

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