EPISODE 41

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06] 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.

[0:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders, the podcast where we talk with people around the world who've made a decision to lead and to lead in some pretty wild and crazy, or what I would call swampy issues, or innovative issues and opportunities. Today, my guest is a friend named Anne Gibbon. Anne has an incredible background and she intimidates the heck out of me. She knows that. I'm going to give some of the highlights and I'm going to let you fill in the blanks.

You're with the Naval Academy from 1999 to 2003. You didn't just go to class and get a degree in English. No, no, no, no. You were a two-time All-American rower. You set the rowing erg record for 2,000 meters. You won a national boxing championship, I believe, and they also have soft fit, rightly so, to put you in the Naval Academy Sports Hall of Fame. That was just the beginning.

You have done some amazing stuff between then and now, you're working the Navy, your time on ships, but you've gone through several education experiences and it's formed up, I'm guessing some points of view you have in the direction of your current life. You are the CEO and Co-Founder of Matri Incorporated, which I'm going to give you space to describe, because it's really quite fascinating and I think it's a thing to talk about in detail. First of all, welcome to The Swamp. It's so great to see you. It's been a while. Welcome.

[0:01:50] AG: Thanks. Thank you, Rick.

[0:01:52] RT: Before we get rolling, tell people what you want them to know about you for context.

[0:01:58] AG: I'd actually like to start with the people that came before me. My context is, or me, it's never far from my grandparents' stories. My grandmother was an immigrant from Mexico and left school in sixth grade. She had a really hard life. My grandfather was in the Navy in World War II. He was on a battleship when Pearl Harbor was bombed and spent the war on another battleship. My dad was a small business owner and my room was next to my parents growing up. I heard all the calls that he got in the middle of the night and it put into my brain, my subconscious about what it meant to be a small business owner when you're the last call. There's no one else that you can turn to to fix things. Anyway, so I think you can't tell the story of my life without telling the story, or acknowledging the people that that made me.

[0:02:50] RT: You immediately provoke a connection. Was your grandfather's experience in the Navy part of what influenced you into the Naval Academy?

[0:02:58] AG: Oh, for sure. Truthfully, what that experience did to him. He definitely had PTSD. He was a decently angry man. But he was around the water his whole life. He loved sailing. I grew up near the Puget Sound. I grew up with stories of that, of his time in the Navy. He sailed around the world with also, no GPS. He did celestial navigation. There's a stubbornness that was passed down through stories in my family.

Then when I was at the Naval Academy, it was for sure influenced by them. Then my service in the Navy was influenced by him. He would copy articles about World War II and really, about Pearl Harbor and the people they served with and that day. When I was in the Navy, I was stationed in Pearl Harbor, actually, on a frigate. I would always think about my grandfather's experience there.

[0:03:49] RT: Okay. Let's go to Annapolis, if you don't mind, for a little bit, because I suspect that has influenced you in a lot of ways, both pro and con.

[0:03:57] AG: Yes.

[0:03:58] RT: For me, I'm curious, because we've never talked about this. 1999, what was it like to be a woman going into what historically had been a fairly male dominated environment? What

did you learn about yourself in that process and how did you learn to make your way and excel in that world?

[0:04:16] AG: Yeah. Well, I'm really lucky. There's been 23 years at that point of women at the Naval Academy. It was absolutely accepted for women to be there. The difference was they didn't think that they could date you. That wasn't true of everybody, but it was sure true of a lot of guys and a feeling there. It was totally accepted to be there and do that job. Still finding our way to be not one of them, but to not change who you were as a woman, to fit in with their roles. I remember hearing when I first got there, someone said, women are either bitches, or sluts. Pick your lane. That angered me that that's how they would describe you. I picked a third lane, which was athlete.

I really just influenced how I spent my time there. I've put a lot of effort into working out and being an athlete and trying different sports. That was my persona, partly because it's naturally me, but partly, also, because it was a safe thing to do.

[0:05:24] RT: You got into rowing. I assume was one of the sports. Was boxing. Did boxing come into your life at the Naval Academy?

[0:05:31] AG: Yeah, I was very lucky. There's a lot of mandatory classes at the Academy. Obviously, you get a Bachelor of Science actually. I have an English degree with a Bachelor of Science. Same thing with the sports they make you do. There's obviously a lot of swimming, there's grappling, wrestling, and boxing is one of the mandatory classes. I did that my sophomore year and the boxing coach, which is teaching the PE class, thought that I hit pretty hard and was aggressive. He was ruffing amateur fights out in town, and so he was seeing the women who were fighting in the heavyweight class. He thought that I could take him.

He sent his boxers to recruit me, or he'd talk about it and think – say, “That mid given, she can clean up. If you guys can get her to come to the team.” My senior year, I switched from rowing to boxing and became the first woman to box at the Naval Academy.

[0:06:24] RT: The first woman to box at the Naval Academy.

[0:06:27] AG: Yup.

[0:06:28] RT: There is a video online of you giving a talk. I want you to give – because we're going to attach that link in the show notes, so people can watch this, okay. Give a little tease to people about what they're going to see, because this is a pretty outstanding video in a multiple ways. That's not Naval Academy video stuff. This is more present day. What's on that video and where did it come from and what was your thinking there?

[0:06:54] AG: Yeah, that was nine years ago now, but I'm 42, so it was 10 years after the Academy. I was asked to give a talk that was Ted Talk-like. I had about 20 minutes and they impressed upon me that they didn't want you just to come up to the stage and chat. They wanted you to do something. They'd had people swallowing swords and stuff and speaking from a bathtub. One of my unique things is that I'm a female boxer and I'm not small. The National Amateur Championship I won was in the heavyweight class.

I asked a local boxer to come hold mitts for me in the beginning of the talk is me working the mitts and throwing punches. Then I go behind the stage and change into a dress and heels, because the point of the talk is about design and what it means to do that work. For me, one of the big aspects is being able to push yourself to extremes of thinking and curiosity on many sides, not just what makes where you feel comfortable, or one of them and to have this balance to me means extremes in many forms of curiosity and exploration. The female boxing mixed with wearing a black dress and heels was my visual speaking version of that.

[0:08:07] RT: I'm going to affirm for people who watched this video that you pulled that off. I also was thinking, you have to be a somewhat stout guy to take the punches that you were throwing at him as well. I couldn't do that. Okay, so when you leave the Naval Academy, you don't leave education and development. You track yourself along the ways a few stops to expand your knowledge. What were you pursuing there? Not just specific content, but what was it that you were trying to achieve, or where were you going on that journey at that point?

[0:08:39] AG: I've always been obsessed with leadership and decision-making, since my dad would – he loves giving advice. It's probably genetically passed down to me, too. He would make us sit down and listen to him as kids and he'd take his glasses off and we'd have to stand

there at attention. He'd tell us stories about his day and how he took care of his team. He had people who were doing near minimum wage work in a gas station and it's not glamorous, or fancy and you wouldn't expect perks, or your boss to care about you a lot. He would tell stories about the 19-year-old guy who worked in the convenience store, who was becoming a first-time father, wasn't planned. My dad talked to him about that, but then he found a parenting class at a local community center, or library and he made that guy go and he worked with the manager and made sure his schedules fit, so that he could go to that parenting class.

He stayed on him. He's like, "No, you're leaving now to go to that class," because it's really easy sometimes when you're young to not do the things that you should do to better your life. I saw that my dad used his power for good in a way that didn't have anything to do with his business, but he cared about people. I was always so passionate about that work in the military of how can we be better leaders, which to me meant, how can you be better at using your power for good?

Then the business side of what I watch with my dad is how could he be better at the decision-making of the business? Because when it improved and grew, he could not just keep it open and pay people and create more jobs, but he could increase the bonuses and that stuff. I loved that work of a leader, that the skill of your decision-making in that whatever job, or space you're in, plus the ability to use your power for good could be life-changing. I would go to Barnes & Noble and read leadership books at night when I was a young officer.

[0:10:38] RT: All right, so let's get into the leadership part for a little bit and I want to come to your present day and the work that you're doing, because I suspect that these all start to come together and form up in a direction here. You went to the Naval Academy, spent time on leadership, you stayed in that conversation for a while, you're still in that conversation. Let's start with the basic for you. What is leading in your opinion after all this time?

[0:11:03] AG: That you have to bring it into it emotional self-regulation. I say that first, because when you're a leader, and I think we've all established by now, that's not necessarily an appointed position where you're the one in charge. Anybody can choose to exercise leadership. If you do that, if you start to exercise leadership, which means you're trying to influence others, you absolutely have to be able to self-regulate, because once you're in that position on

leadership and influence, if you take out your fears and your anger on others, it's a non-starter for me. I hate seeing that. Then once you've worked on yourself, I think it's two things. It's, don't ask others to do what you wouldn't do and using your power for good.

[0:11:48] RT: Great. Expand using your power for good. How do you do that today in your work?

[0:11:54] AG: I think about it now as a – I'm building a company, so I have a startup. When I think about the scale of what I want my company to be, one of the reasons that excites me about doing a startup is I can set the culture from day one. When you're managing a bottom line and there's a finite amount of resources, or it can feel like that, it's really easy to take shortcuts in how you take care of people. Power for good in a very tiny, simple way means looking for ways to create opportunity for people that would have easily been looked over.

Something small is there was a woman who worked for me and needed some time off for mental health issues. Instead of just leaving the company, we worked with the HR company that we use and made sure that she had healthcare and we found one of the exemptions, or labels that we could use, where she didn't have to work, but she could keep her healthcare. I think, you can make the system work for you. I think using your power for good means keeping your eye not on what is normally done, or a routine path to like, okay, you're going to leave the company or whatever and you're gone. Oh, that's too bad, you don't have healthcare anymore.

It's what's the end goal? It's always to take care of somebody. We're going to figure out a way to do that. There's usually always a way that you can manage a system to find an opportunity to help somebody.

[0:13:20] RT: You are in a startup mode right now, which is its own challenges. Talk a little bit, if you will, about what your idea is, what is the business? What is it you're trying to impact in the world? Where are you in this process right now? There's a few questions there, but hopefully, they're sequential for you.

[0:13:39] AG: Yeah. I met my co-founder 11 years ago. He's been a friend for a long time. About four and a half years ago, he asked me if I wanted to build his ideas into a business. He's an

MD and a PhD in neuroscience. He's the genius behind what we do. Over the last couple of years that we've worked on this, what is this thing that we're making?

His core ideas are around how we improve the interaction between humans and machines. What we want to do over the next 20 years is revolutionize how humans consume and use information. It's a massive, ridiculously huge paradigm changing thing that we've set for ourselves. We've been doing this, or I've been thinking about this for a long time, because literally within seconds of meeting him, he was showing me some of the demographic software that he'd been working on at that point. I knew within seconds that this had the potential to totally change the work that we were doing. Then that time I was still in the Navy and I was working on counterterrorism ops.

I knew that the conversations we were having, the planning we were doing would be dramatically improved if we had that tool. I was frustrated that we didn't. I stayed in touch as a friend, because I wanted to hear about where that tool was being built, so I could use it in my work. Then it hadn't yet. Our startup is small. It's a handful of people, but I've been obsessed in thinking about this concept and framework and how to turn it into a product, multiple products, but what's the first one? How do we use this?

I'm 11 years in ish. I'm four and a half years in from explicitly working with my co-founder on building a company and figuring out that roadmap. I'm probably 20 years away from achieving what we want to achieve.

[0:15:31] RT: People listening are probably intrigued, but they may not yet have a full understanding of what the point of the exercise is here. Where is it right now? What are you trying to do when you say, talk about this interface in people and technology? How do you make it better than it is? Maybe let's start right now with what you perceive in your own experience, the condition that we are in right now and what the issues are there and how – what you're working on can make my life better in some way.

[0:16:03] AG: Yeah. There's the really cool 3D graphic stuff we're doing. I don't see anybody else doing that. There's other things that my co-founder has worked on and research and his thesis, and he's been funded for different R&D contracts by the military and Intel community

over the years. The point of all that is better leadership, better decision-making. In order to make better decisions, we need to use all this data that we've gathered, which over the last 30 years has been revolutionary about the sensors we have and how much data we're able to capture and store and move around in better and better ways.

Now, the question that I believe, not the question, but the thing that stops us from using data more effectively is the interface. How much we see? Right now, we think that it's like a straw. Whether you're looking at a dashboard with scatter pots, or trend lines, or a wearable app interface, trying to make sense of your data, you're not seeing – it's just a tiny straw of what's available to you. Our brains are so incredibly capable of consuming huge amounts of information through our sensory system, whether that's the visual cortex, our body, like you think haptics.

Our nervous system and brain have this incredible capacity to consume information. We have all these stores of data. It's the interface between them that has not been fundamentally innovated in several hundred years. I say fundamentally, I know there's challenges to that in different ways, but we're still using histograms as an example, as a chart type, pretty commonly. Histograms were common. I have a picture in my pitch deck of histogram from 1821. The volume and depth of data that we're showing people in our data visualization interfaces now, whether that's an app interface for wearable data, or it's a business intelligence dashboard that businesses would use. It is incredibly small compared to what our brains are capable of receiving.

[0:18:14] RT: Where are you in this process now? I mean, are you experiencing a sense of progress, making headway?

[0:18:21] AG: Yeah. Oh, man, it's been a road. When I was talking with investors a year ago, I would get the feedback, this is interesting, but is this an R&D project, or is this a business? I would get frustrated, but that's because it's my process for generating the energy to keep going in a direction that is often new. I've always done new things. Started different departments when I was in the Navy, or teams, and I was – Anyway, I'm used to being the first one.

One of the things that I do is I allow that internal sense of frustration and anger to not be just a swirl that keeps me in one spot, but it powers me to go. I know, I feel that there's some truth here. I knew I wasn't doing a research project, because we wanted to build products that people use and take this idea to the world. It took me a long time to really grasp what my co-founder was doing.

I think it's as fundamental as a theory, a companion theory to Shannon's theory of information, which he was the person that came up with bits and zeros and ones to describe information moving between machines. This communication theory. What I think my co-founder did was describe the equivalent of that, but how information moves between a machine and the mind and back. It took me a really long time to grasp my mind and we had some military R&D projects, but where we are now is finally building a product for businesses, and so we're starting with pro sports teams and turning this concept of how do we move more information into something that they use every day without having to think about all that.

Our job is to be the nerds and people who obsess about decision making process and make a product that's so easy to use, the people that pick it up, a scout only has to think about the things that they are already doing. I'm going to a game. I'm going to watch players. Our product should be useful to them and they only have to think about where's the section that helps me monitor players. Cool. There's already a design, there's already prompts. I can just use it and do my job better. We're at the point where I've wrapped my mind around this and we've mocked up the product and now we're testing the prototype with people in pro sports.

[0:20:47] RT: I'm curious then, because you'd mentioned when I asked you about what leading is to you, one of the things you said is that it can come from anywhere. It's not a role. It's not a position. It's a choice and a decision to raise your hand, decide to go. I know that for you, most of the forks in the road you've chosen to take have been based on the harder work and the challenging work and the more interesting opportunities. You've got track record of leading yourself. For people who are listening, talk a little bit about what you've learned about raising your hand, what the consequences of that, what have been the lessons learned? If you have counsel for people who are timid, what is that counsel?

[0:21:29] AG: We met through a mutual friend, he's a Navy Seal and he rose to some of the highest positions of leadership in that community. I was at serving at a Seal team in my last time in the Navy, last year and a half. When I got there, so it's one of the tier one units. In the Navy, they do some of the most elite work of all the Special Forces teams, even beyond “the regular Navy.” When I got to that team, I had never been a Naval Special Warfare before. I served on ships and I was on short duty. I was teaching at the Naval Academy, but I hadn't been exposed to any classified material, because I was teaching at the Naval Academy.

I get to this team that is on the tippy tip of the spear of our military and I've never been in that world before. I don't know their acronyms and language and planning and I hadn't been reading classified material in a long time. I wasn't up on a lot of different things. Literally, when I got to that job, the only thing valuable that I could contribute at 30-years-old was changing the font size on PowerPoints. I'm not being dramatic. I remember that feeling. I was sitting in an ops center as an assistant ops, because they didn't know what to do with me initially.

I cannot describe to you the sense of sitting around with Navy SEALs that are the best at that job, who have gone on high-profile missions we've all heard about. It's not just the SEALs. Everybody at that command was incredible what they did, intelligence, analysts, communicators, cyber security, everything you can imagine, they get the best of the best to go there. The pace of operations is frenetic.

I remember one of the SEALs who was an ops leader looking at me going, “Hey, can you work on this?” I just had this confused face. He had that – it wasn't mean at all, but he was frustrated, because he was overloaded with work and he needed somebody who could help make some briefs and stuff. I wanted to do it. I just didn't know how. Anyway, whatever you can imagine that feeling is where you're like, I have thought I worked hard for the last eight years. I went to a pretty decently hard college and I can move font size. I don't even know enough to change the words, or move this around. Then I figured out how to be valuable, that the reality is that I kept a straight face and looked confident as much as I could during the day. Then I would cry at night.

What I learned is how over my life doing a lot of those things, but that's one of the more dramatic. Being new and starting something, because that's – if you're raising your hand to be a leader, you're in some way doing something new and out of character. You see something that

you believe needs to be changed, and so you're going against the grain in large ways or small. It means that it's going to feel uncomfortable. I just got used to the feeling of discomfort and saw that as familiar, rather than, “Oh, I feel uncomfortable. I don't know what I'm doing yet. That must mean I can't do it, so I won't.” I've gotten really, really comfortable with the feeling of discomfort.

[0:24:43] RT: All right. Let's stay here. A lot of people have discomfort and they freeze, they paralyze, they stop moving. What have you learned about how to stay moving when you're uncomfortable? Because that's how you've gotten to where you are now. What's actually going on for Anne Gibbon when you realize font size is the best move I've got now and that's not good enough and I need to move from here to someplace. How do you actually mobilize your head, your heart, your guts, your body in the face of that?

[0:25:16] AG: Am I allowed to swear on this podcast?

[0:25:18] RT: I'll put a disclaimer in. Go ahead.

[0:25:21] AG: That somewhere inside of you, if you got to the point that you needed to raise your hand and you couldn't just sit by and watch something anymore, it was so uncomfortable that you had to put yourself in that position. Now you're in this moment and you feel like you want to freeze. I go back to the voice. For me, there's a voice inside that just fucking screams that I am a motherfucker. I choose to say what feels decently vulnerable that I would work at the SEAL team and at night go home and cry sometimes and eat cookies, because you just – especially around those people, you just want to put on your war face all the time.

What I know is true that no matter if I cried at night and I could only change the font size in the beginning, I am a motherfucker. That fucking voice would scream in my head louder. Sometimes it was just slightly louder than the desire to stay frozen and quiet. Because what quiet is and frozen is just, please don't notice me. I don't want to get this wrong. I don't want the attention of separation from whatever community. Like, we’re all social creatures and designed for connection, so that freezing is just, you don't want to be separated, but there is something greater in you than this fear of a temporary disconnection and it's this truth. For me, it's this voice that screams.

I don't know, it was a few months into the work there and there's a group of us going into one of the big conference rooms to do a video teleconference and participate in a brief. We're standing outside. I'm in Cammies waiting to go in. One of the people there was the senior enlisted. It wasn't Dave. But it was the senior enlisted at that command. The number one enlisted person in charge of this SEAL team. He was like, “Oh, Anne. I knew you're really smart, but I didn't know that you were a boxer, too. That's really cool. Tell me about it.” We're all jovial and we're carrying power points and stuff, but we're always around SEALs. I didn't say anything.

I've got for being a heavyweight boxer, I've got a really good first step. I was a several feet away. I just moved really fast and threw a punch that landed an inch from his face. He was like, “Yeah. I believe you. Got it. Good.”

[0:27:42] RT: I'm imagining people who are listening, I imagine my daughter who's nearly 30 living in New York, she just ran a marathon in Paris last week.

[0:27:51] AG: Congratulations.

[0:27:53] RT: Yeah, it was sweet. I'm imagining people listening to this and thinking about what you've just said. That works for Anne Gibbons is what they're going to say. But I'm me and I'm different and I didn't go to the Naval Academy and I don't understand this technology stuff, but I'm trying to figure out my way forward. Since we are all different, but you've been around a lot of different people and seen a lot of different ways to approach the things that you're talking about, how do you speak to those people if you're in the front of a room of a bunch of people who want to use themselves more effectively to lead, but they're all different and they have different kinds of motors. What's the common DNA that you think you can tap into there that will help all of them, but it'll be different for each of them?

[0:28:41] AG: I actually feel like I want to counter that. I don't want to try to say something that talks to everybody, because I can't. It's just what you said. I can't know their experience. I don't know where they're coming from. I don't know what they want to do with their lives. I only know what's true for me. That's why I tell the stories of this is the reality, the fun parts, the sad parts.

One of the things that I turn to and I've seen this work for others. I learned it when I was in New Zealand. I worked for some Maori tribes.

The military does an incredible job of showing you your place in a legacy. Really, it makes you feel in some ways, often anonymous. You put on a uniform and you look like all the others and your job is to serve both the mission, but you also get a sense of this is the long legacy. Your ships are named after people who have won Medal of Honor, towns in America, and battles that have been fought decades and decades prior. You're always very aware of the people who came before and served with honor and that you wear the same uniform and you have to uphold that legacy.

It doesn't necessarily give you a place yourself, like where's my identity in this and where's the future? When I was in New Zealand, I got the other side of that lesson, which was there is such honor placed on ancestors and knowing those stories, you never introduce yourself as just this is my name and who I am in my life, because of course, you didn't emerge from nothing. You came from somewhere, a place and a people, so you always introduce yourself with this is my family and my tribe and my place. This is my mountain, my river.

The work that they do, they constantly talked about seven generations ahead. You knew that no matter how imperfectly you did it, that your life's work should be about a positive effect for the next seven generations. You acknowledge that you came from the seven generations back. It gives a sense of, “Oh, I'm not alone.” There's a purpose to this work and it's not – like my name is a fancy legacy and the name on a bench, or a building at my university. It's I am one link in this chain and I am part of a chain, but I'm just one link.

I think, I don't have personal – the advice that I want to say to others listening to this and I think about your daughter, I want to point to others who have I think perfected the advice and I look at indigenous people and my major experience with indigenous culture is with my Maori friends. It was the honor of my lifetime to get to work for them and go into their homes and see their – participate in rituals and know their culture. I think if in your own life, you can find what that chain is and for me, it's many things. It's my family and like I mentioned, my grandparents. It's also the place that I'm from. I love the mountain ranges.

The Olympics and the cascades and the Puget Sound define so much of even my psychology. I love that area, but so does the military, the Navy. There's so many places that I've come from that are my chain. That in the end is the thing that has gotten me every time that I want to freeze, it's the thing that unsticks me is if I conceive of myself as alone, I want to freeze because that's terrifying. If I think of myself as just one link in a greater chain, then I feel much more free to go figure something out and keep moving forward.

[0:32:29] RT: When you talk about the way you're talking and thinking about the past generations and future generations, you take me to a place and just some reading I was doing the other day, but this issue of climate change. I know, it's maybe a little bit outside of your core focus, but we are clearly not all that interested in future generations and what they may inhabit, given the way in which we're going about addressing climate change now, in spite of all the hard data we've got that we're really tracking in a really poor direction. Do you have thoughts on this? I mean, you're involved in a lot of things and we're in a weird place right now and we don't seem to be able to capture people's attention with the information that we're producing that would cause behavior change that could alter the direction we're going. Is there anything up your sleeve with the work you're doing that might help with this cost? Please, please.

[0:33:22] AG: Yeah. This is why I love the company that we're building, because we want to make it easier for everybody, whether it's experts, so somebody who's a scientist, or just a citizen trying to understand their community and the likelihood of flooding and erosion around where they live and wildfires, we want to make it easier for people to consume information and understand it. If you can only see a straw, a few things about that, it is much harder to understand a complex system and the many pieces of your world, whatever you're looking at.

Climate, your environment where you live, whatever your role is, whether you're a citizen, or a scientist, what we're building is a visualization tool that makes it easier to see a lot of information, but in a way that's consumable, so it makes sense. It's not just impossible. Visualization will end up being more immersive gaming than a dry dashboard with a lot of little pieces.

I think what it enables people to do is not see bits of disconnected data that you have to work paradoxically when you see a little bit of information, like on a dashboard. It's just, here's a little

trend line, here's a histogram, here's some scatter plot, here's just a couple numbers. Your brain has to end up working a lot harder to bring that information together to make meaning about your world, because it may look pretty, like graphically, it's nice colors, it's nice design, segmented, but to actually make it mean something to you and then change your behavior, or bring you to some new insight, it's actually harder work to look at that than it is to look at some of the things we're designing, because we're taking a different approach to showing information.

I say, we can show you more, but we do that in a way where different data points are linked together, so they're now concepts. When we show people we're starting off with sports, when we show scouts information about players, they can see a couple dozen parameters per player. To some people, that would be overwhelming, but they're experts in that sport and they know the data that's available pretty decently well, they definitely know the concept of all the things that that player is doing. If it's baseball, all the aspects of hitting and fielding and pitching of the game itself over innings, teams playing and going back and forth.

They can look at that information the way we're showing it, and they are actually seeing dozens of data parameters. It's a lot more data than you'd see in other tool. But it's easier to consume and make sense of, because it fits their concepts of how they already understand that system. Players and all these different kinds of – the data about the game. When I think about what we're doing and why I say I'm like, 20 years away from my goal, this is my life, there's no this got too hard and I'm walking away. When we put for ourselves something really audacious, like we want to revolutionize how humans consume information and use information, it's because I want to get into the thorny, or exciting things, whether that's, we say climate change, but really what that is, it's just managing our environment, whatever is true.

At a community level, that could be managing storm drains and runoff and voting on local policies about, I don't know that you could vote on flood insurance, but flooding and allocating budgets to protect a community. If you can see more information about your community, then you are much more likely to have a sense of relative risk and opportunity by allocating budget. You can model predicted weather patterns, you can look at historical data. We're going to make it easier for people to see information in a way that makes sense to them that reflects in that digital world what they're seeing in their environment. You're only looking at your environment out the window here second by second. When you look at this twin world of data, you can look

at historical patterns for days, weeks, months, decades to predictions of what might be. Does that make sense?

[0:37:47] RT: It does make sense. You said something, there's no too hard and I'm walking away. You also made mention, this is your life 20 more years, maybe.

[0:37:58] AG: Yeah, for sure.

[0:38:00] RT: Most people don't have this clarity that the road ahead is going to be this challenging. That is what they're facing every day when they get up and get started. If they did have that clarity, they probably would figure out another option. They would figure out another alternative for a lot of people, not everybody. For you, what's the dynamic between the pull of what the possibility is and the push to keep moving forward? How do you use both of those to keep yourself in motion and sustain and optimistic and a belief that we're going to get there?

[0:38:35] AG: Yeah. Partly, because I've done this before. My dad really wanted us kids to go to military academies. He took us, our family vacations were essentially marketing opportunities. One year, we went to the Air Force Academy to see the July 4th fireworks. I think it was 11. For whatever reason, I thought the only thing you could do with the Air Force Academy was fly and be a cook. I do not know how I came up with that. Neither one of those appealed. When I was in the fall of my freshman year in high school, we visited the East Coast and the only reservations my dad had for all the historical things that you could imagine towards the things that you might want to see in the East Coast, the only things my dad had reserved were football games at West Point and at Navy.

There's a lot of other stuff we ended up seeing, because we could fit it in around the marketing tour. I just remember after walking around, it was a beautiful fall day, I still remember sitting in the hotel room that night and I had the sense of, “Oh, I'm going to the Naval Academy.” I also knew, I wasn't thinking about it. I was just knowing it. It was a truth. I also had this thought in my head. I can't even conceive of what that means for me right now. I don't understand the implications. I just know I'm doing this.

For the next four years of high school, I did everything possible to make a good application to go to the Naval Academy. I read everything I could get my hands on and talk to people that had applied and gotten in. Then that's an incredible decision to go to the Naval Academy, because of the timescale involved. I was 14. I knew I wanted to go there. That's another two years, or four years, it takes you to 22. Then if you go there, you owe an obligation of five, to take you at least to 27.

I knew when I was 14 that I was – I just had a knowing and I never wavered when I was in high school. I knew that I was committing to something that would take me to at least 27 when I was 14. I've had this experience before where I recognize the feeling inside, once I get to like, “Oh, I know I'm doing this.” It took me until I was 37-ish, 38 to find this work now and to know, okay, when I talked with my co-founder, he'd been a friend for a long time, but he said, “Let's build a company together.”

It took, I don't know, months or years, I don't know. Maybe it took seconds, but it took some time to sink in and to know in my bones that this was my commitment in life. Anyway, that's where I got to. I recognize the feeling inside, because I've had it before that the scale of what we want to do cannot be accomplished in a short time period. It can't be accomplished if I am an average version of me. It may not be accomplished if I can get myself to be the best version of me. The only chance we have at doing this is if at least on my end, if I am every day I'm finding the next best version of what I can be.

When I say too hard, there's nothing in the outside world that can bring itself to be too hard. The hardest thing in the world is to every day find the edge of what you're capable of and know that if you want to do the thing that you've set out for yourself, not everybody uses this phrase, but I use it. I have to burn myself down every day to be a better version tomorrow. That's painful every day, because every day I'm finding the things that I need to improve.

[0:42:15] RT: Okay. I almost want to stop here, but you just ended with a very provocative descriptor. I have to burn myself down. What does that mean in your world when the day ends? What does that actually mean for people listening?

[0:42:28] AG: All the comfort I have of I'm doing a good job, or I'm smart, or people like me. Because there can be a tendency to hide in the comfort of oh, Marti, good enough. I don't need to push myself a little bit harder. Whatever this is that I'm doing in whatever way. I have to do sales. I have to do product design. I have to figure out the financial management, financial modeling, all of the stuff that I have to do to build a company, it can be tempting to fall on, well, this is good enough, because whatever I am is comfortable and growth is often painful.

I say, burn it down, because I try to burn down the places in which I find false comfort and in that fire, which is this it's painful, but it's also energy. It's clarifying and you get to the essence of something. I try and burn down those places of false comfort and I look for the truth of what I need to work on. Also, what's going right and then I use that to drive me forward.

[0:43:37] RT: Thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for being you and thank you for sharing your stories and your wisdom about how to navigate this crazy, messed up world.

[0:43:48] AG: Thank you for having me.

[0:43:49] RT: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:43:53] 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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