EPISODE 64

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:05] 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.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth. And this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. This is the podcast where we have conversations with people who have made decisions to lead and to address very complex issues socially, globally. And have conversations and understand a little bit about how they use themselves to do that work. How they get other people to do that work?

And today, it's a real pleasure to have Ethan Schutz on. I've known Ethan for a number of years. He is the President and CEO of The Schutz Company. He is also an organizational psychologist. The Schutz Company has been around for a very long time. Over 45 years almost, Ethan. And has done – you have this on your website. And I know it's true. Some pioneering work in helping human dynamics function more effectively so you can get better work done.

We're going to get into all the stuff of what the human element is. What The Schutz Company does and that stuff? But first, I want to get you in here and give you a chance to tell people what it is you want them to know about you or the organization. And then we'll just go from there. It's all yours.

[00:01:23] ES: Thank you so much, Rick. I'm delighted to be here. I know we'll get into the details of all of this. But the quick story is that, yes, The Schutz Company has long roots. And we help people work better together so that they can get done the things that they're trying to get done. We see ourselves as working at the intersection of strategy and people and helping them, if you will, change the operating system of how people work together. And I think probably as we talk, we'll flesh out some of the history and how we got to where we are.

[00:01:54] RT: Okay. Because the organization and the work has been around for so long, let's begin with a little history. Because not everybody's familiar with this work. Tell people a little bit about the human element, FIRO. I'll let you just kind of map the terrain a little bit here in the history of it and then we can work off of that.

[00:02:13] ES: Absolutely. This body of work came out of some original research that my father, Will Schutz, did when he was in the US Navy in the early 50s. He had been in the Navy at the end of World War II. Got out after the end of the war. And on the GI Bill, got his degree and his PhD in research psychology.

And when the Korean War started, the Navy recalled him into the Navy and asked him to do research. The research was all about what makes teams productive and how the Navy could put together teams of people that would be productive. When they put people together randomly where people were technically competent but they put them together otherwise randomly, they found about half the teams were productive.

And through his research, what my dad was able to do was to define a bit about what else was required to make teams productive. And also, to assemble teams that were productive much more of the time. He defined something he called compatibility, which was simply the ability to work well together. And he was able to measure that by measuring how people wanted to interact with other human beings.

In other words, we all have preferences for the way that we like to interact with each other. And when we put people together who have similar wishes, we could get more productive teams. Now, in some ways, that's intuitive. Right? If we get along with each other, we're more productive.

What he was able to show was that when you put together a team that was naturally productive and you put them under stress, they actually performed better. And when you had a team that didn't perform well and you put them under stress, they really fell apart. In other words, this effect, something he called the CP effect, which means compatibility is related to productivity. That effect magnifies under stress. For the Navy that made a big difference. Because, of course,

they're always operating under stress. And most of our organizations these days tell me the same thing.

Out of that original research came also a theory. That was how he was able to measure people's interpersonal preferences. The theory was called FIRO. FIRO stands for Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation. That's a mouthful. Basically, that means what's the basic way that we like to interact with each other? And he had an instrument that would measure that.

His interest then became how do we help people develop the capacity to be compatible with as many people as possible. If I'm working in an organization and I have probably contact with 50 or 100 people on a regular basis, there's some people I have an easy time with and others that I probably don't. And the idea is that if I can develop the capacity to work effectively with more of those people, things are going to go much better. And on my team, if we can all together develop the capacity to work effectively with each other, the team is going to work better.

That became the basis for the rest of his career. And over the next 40 years, he really studied not just what's happening on teams but how we could help develop people to gain that capacity. And that involved everything from experiential bodies of work, body work, and being aware of our sematic experience. It involved developing further his theory and using it for development rather than just for measurement.

By the time 1980 came around, he had worked with all of these various things enough that he put together what we now call the human element. Which is, at its core, it's a program. But, really, its essence is a whole body of work that's aimed at helping people build a different capacity or what we like to say is changing the operating system of how we interact together.

The fundamental points of that body of work is to help people be more open about what's true for them and to be less defensive and more accountable. And by accountable, I mean self-responsible. That was the word that he used. When we're able to do that with each other, we can fundamentally change the way that we interact and we're able to solve problems that arise between us much more easily.

The human element then is a methodology for helping people do that. And we apply that in organizations, with teams, with leaders, and in a variety of industries. It doesn't really matter who we're dealing with. Because anywhere that people are involved, this will apply. I'll pause there. We can talk about more of the details. But that's the essential history.

[00:06:39] RT: All right. You lay some nice groundwork and some intriguing propositions here around the idea of groups of people being able to work more effectively together. Because as you say, that's kind of an aspirational intent for most groups and organizations and struggle mightily often times to even get close to it. You've learned some stuff about this stuff.

Before we get into the details of what this is for people, let's, if you don't mind, share a couple of experiences or stories that you have around groups that were in a particular state where it wasn't going so well and then you did work with them. And maybe a little bit about what they're able to do now and how they can even do that work themselves without you once they've got practice into it.

[00:07:25] ES: Yeah. One team I'm thinking of, this was with a pharmaceutical company. We were called in because a team that was doing clinical trials was having difficulty. And it was clearly according to the chief medical officer which oversaw this group. They were clearly having interpersonal difficulties. And what it meant was they were about six months behind in their clinical trials.

Now, not all of that was due to interpersonal difficulties some of it was due to the difficulty of getting people involved in the trials. However, the bulk of the issue was that they weren't communicating well. They were having very ineffective meetings and they were struggling with how they handled outside consultant that was doing a lot of the administrative work for them.

Our job was to come in and support them in having open conversations about how they actually interacted with one another. And what came out of that, first of all, they were able to solve some misunderstandings between people and some hurt feelings. Second, they were really able to identify that the way that they had set themselves up wasn't working. And by that, I mean they had so many meetings every week that they were all complaining about that these aren't

effective. Or I don't even need to be here at these five meetings and whatnot. And then their struggle with the outside consultant.

The second thing they did after really sorting through the interpersonal work was to rearrange all of their meetings. And they did that in a different way. They were actually talking with each person about what would make sense. Even something that sounds as simple as figuring out what meetings to have was helped by the work that we had already done about getting the conversation going.

Once they did that, they could then focus on, "Now, how do we interact with this outside consultant?" We were able to support them in figuring out some more effective ways of managing that consultant and being on the same page themselves as they would interact with that consultant so that they got some better results.

And in the end, they were able to speed up their timeline. Instead of an additional six months that had been projected from the time we started, they were actually able to complete their work within three and a half months and move forward from there. That would be a reasonable example of the type of thing that we can do.

And then when I checked back later, the team seemed to be operating pretty well and they seem pretty satisfied with the way that they were moving forward in general. They were able to maintain some of the ways that they had agreed upon to interact with one another.

[00:09:52] RT: Okay. For listeners out there, I'm very familiar with this work as somebody who took the varying courses, including some certification work. And the work of the human element is a dominant influence in terms of the work I do with groups. But I don't always have the luxury of being able to do deep dives in this because of the nature of the things I'm doing. I do know though that when you go to work with a group, there's some work that takes place at an individual level so you can bring them together sort of with some common shared understandings of some of the things that your father and you have determined are essential for teams to work well together.

I know I'm asking a lot here for you to be able to explain some of the nuts and bolts of what's going on for the human element, the personal level. But I think that's an important element here for people to get grip with what might come ahead here in the conversation.

[00:10:45] ES: Absolutely. And it's always a good practice for me to summarize. We like to say we start with the individual. And emphasis on the word start. Because the end goal is really to change the dynamics on any team, or group, or organization that working with. And we start with the individual. Because what we found is, if we start at the team level, it all sounds very good. Like a common team goal or something of the like. Except that if each individual isn't fully opting into that, it sounds nice and no one does it. By starting with the individuals, what we're doing is helping them raise their awareness of their behavior and of their motivations. Because that's where we tend to get stuck with one another.

I'll give you an example. A typical thing would be the New Year's resolution. I can tell you that for the last 15 or 20 years, every year I tell myself I'm going to exercise this year. And I do a really good job of convincing other people that that sounds like a good idea and it sounds like a good idea to me too. And then I don't do it again and again and again. My question is why is that? It's a great idea. I don't need any justification. There's plenty of good reasons for doing it.

What's really happening though is, at heart, really, deep down, I don't want to. And I feel better that I am not even though I know it's a good idea. And that's hard to admit out loud. But it gets at our internal motivation for everything that we do. It's based on how we feel and how we feel about ourselves.

The deep dive that we do with individuals at the beginning of the process of the human element is to peel away – we say it's like peeling the onion. We look first at what's our behavior with other people. How do we actually interact with people? Then we look at what are the feelings or the beliefs that we have about other people? What's our worldview? Do we believe that people make a difference? Do we believe they're competent? Do we like other people in general? Are we suspicious? Are we wary? Where are we in terms of that.

And then, underneath that, we look at how do we feel and see ourselves? Because how we feel about and see ourselves actually is reflected in the way that we interact with everyone else. I'll

give an example of that too. If I believe that – or let's say I worry about my own capacity to get things done. I might still be good at it. But I worry about it. I'm concerned about it. I question myself. I find all the errors that I do. That pervades everything else.

I see everybody else through that lens. And maybe I see them as being more capable of things than I am. And maybe that doesn't feel so great to me. And so, the way I behave around them is to make sure that I don't wind up feeling bad as much as possible. And if we're we're not aware of those things, then it shapes everything that we do. I may get myself in trouble with other people because I'm still operating from something that I'm not aware of.

The whole first part of the process is designed to help people peel away those layers and really see themselves more clearly. And I might add from the point of view of I just want to know what's happening for me. Not to judge whether it's good or bad. Or right or wrong. Or anything like that. It's more about doing some detective work. What's really happening for me? Where do I see myself clearly and others clearly? And where do I distort things because it feels personally threatening?

When I can see that, I have a much easier time interacting with other people and understanding what happens. Instead of taking what you say and perhaps taking it personally at times but maybe you mean something that you don't, I'm more able to separate those two things and realize, "Oh, what you say is what you say. And how I interpret it is really mine." That's the basis that we use to help groups then function more effectively.

But going through that process and really helping people become more aware of themselves has a powerful effect on many. It's not uncommon for us to hear, "Wow. This really changed the way I looked at things. It's life-changing." It's an amazing statement that we hear on a fairly regular basis for that reason because we really get at the underlying issues that are happening for people.

[00:14:54] RT: And for listeners out there hearing you describe this process, it's a little more sophisticated than just the narrative you're giving in terms of the way in which you help people do their own assessment through a process that the organization's designed assuming that they're going to be honest with themselves. And they collect some data. They have

conversations with other people in the program. They get feedback. They give feedback. And so, there's a kind of – it always struck me, not only you're doing the work, but you're also in the process of doing the work. Creating conditions by which people are starting to get more comfortable with talking to people about stuff that they might not normally talk about but can get in the way of their work.

Share a little bit to the degree you can about the overlay between the dive and the process of connecting human beings to each other around this stuff. Because I think that's where you're trying to get to with teams and groups because we can now function together because we understand a little bit about this and we've discussed it in public with a few other people.

[00:15:59] ES: Yeah. That's absolutely right. And you've said it well. We use a variety of methods to help people raise their awareness. And in the process, exactly as you said, they're getting to know each other at the same time. They do give and receive feedback. They're brought along very purposefully incrementally. Meaning a step at a time. We ask them to talk about one thing. And then based on that, we ask them to talk about the next thing. And then we have an activity that allows them to experience a concept such as being open or noticing how we make decisions in the moment that we may be unconscious of.

Each part of that process involves learning not only about self but about others. Getting more discerning and understanding what other people are doing and why they're doing it. And in the process, that is very connective. And it does promote exactly what you're saying, which is more open conversation.

Many times, in that process, I find that people will tell each other things that they never thought they would say. And we can even point that out. Did you think, when you walked in here the first day, that you would be telling each other a bit about what you're worried about or what motivates you? And you may not have known these people on the first day. We're able to do that simply because we do it in small steps. One little step at a time. And everybody is going through that same process.

Well, I should say it's much more inviting than it would be if one person was doing that in a vacuum or one person was doing that and other people weren't. It's very purposeful in that way.

[00:17:29] RT: Speak a little bit then about the work that the practitioners of the human element bring to the conversation about creating space and a kind of environment by which people are willing to nudge themselves forward into these conversations. Because it seems to me that's an essential condition in which people want to operate in in order to begin to try these things out.

[00:17:52] ES: Yeah. It's largely an invitational stance. Meaning, the practitioner is there to create and hold a space for people to try new things in and then invite people to do one new thing, and another new thing, and so forth. The way that we facilitate in some ways can be summed up this way. Somebody put it to me like this, "Don't just do something. Sit there." And that's true a lot of the time. Many times, we'll ask a question and simply wait and wait for people to process a little bit. And then, usually, there's somebody who's courageous enough to say something new. It may only be a small new thing. But that does get the process moving.

The facilitation is very purposeful in that our job is simply to ask questions and allow people to tell us their experience as opposed to telling them the right way to do it, or a best practice, or anything of the kind. What we're interested to know is what's really happening for people. And that stance by itself I think is different from many other approaches. And that usually is something that catches people's attention. It takes a day or two for people to really realize that this is different and they're not going to be scolded or told they're wrong or anything like that. They're not wrong. We're asking for their experience, whatever that happens to be. And we assume that whatever that is useful for them to know.

[00:19:15] RT: Will was very explicit. I remember from my time, and it's a piece that stayed with me, this notion of choice. And it was the first time that I'd ever been involved in a program, and I've been involved with a lot of them prior to that, where this concept of choice was so developed and so addressed in ways that really brought it alive. Maybe it's my pet thing here. But maybe not. What is this role of choice in an explicit way? Why is it sit in this program? And why does it matter?

[00:19:49] ES: The concept of choice is the idea that – well, I see it really as a tool or a means for becoming more self-aware. And it goes like this, I ask myself how have I made choices, many of them unconscious, to get myself into this situation that I am in? And by doing so, what it

does is it helps me look for the ways that I help to create my own experience. And by doing that, I become more self-aware. And as a further consequence, I also get more into the driver seat of my own life. Meaning, it gives me more freedom because I become more aware of the choices that I make.

Let me break it down a little bit. One of the activities that we'll do is have people go through a short piece where they choose a partner, and they sit down together, and they get up and they do a few things together with a partner. And it lasts maybe 60 seconds. But then here's the key, we have them reflect on what were all the choices that you made in this very short time? This 60 seconds? And most of those choices are unconscious. Like, "How did you choose someone? Did you just turn to the person next to you? Or did you seek somebody out? Did you initiate? Or did you wait for somebody to talk to you? How did you negotiate who would do what part of the activity that we asking people to do? What went through your head? What were your reasons for doing the things that you did?"

Most people, most of us, operate on autopilot most of the time. We've learned to cope with life in certain ways. And we do those things over and over again. And most of the time, it works just fine. But sometimes we get ourselves in situations that we don't like. And for most of us, it's very easy to blame the outside or other people for that even if we're kind about it. Well, it was because of the weather. Or it's because of this other person has another agenda. Or something like that.

And what we miss in that is our own participation and the ways in which we contribute to the situation that we're in. The wonderful aspect of choice is that it helps me become aware of how I'm actually driving much more than I think I am and creating a lot more of my experience than I may be aware of.

I'll give you an example of my own. I actually started my career in architecture. I wanted to make sure that I did something that was very different from my parents. Right? This is important for young people at times. I went off in a whole different direction. And I ended up working for an architect for number of years who I really didn't like. And I spent a lot of time feeling bad about that and complaining to friends, and family, and so forth.

And years later, when I looked at it, I thought, "Well, why would I do that?" If I'm looking at this through the idea of choice, which asks me to look at, "Well, how was I choosing to create this situation without blame? Without blaming the other person, my boss. Without blaming me. Just what happened?"

What I learned was, well, there was a reason that I made the choice to stay there and work for this person. Even though, on the outside, I said I didn't like it. And that was because I got to feel like I was a hero. I got to fix the things that I think he messed up. And I got to get praise from all the people who worked for us. All the contractors, and electricians, and plumbers, and inspectors, and so forth. They all liked me because I was a buffer between them and my boss.

And it wasn't until I realized that that I got all these goodies, if you will, from staying there and being in that position and even getting sympathy from friends and family who would say, "Wow. He's lucky to have you," things like that. Until I realized that I got all of that good stuff, I didn't recognize that I was actually a participant in staying there. And these were my choices unconscious at the time. But my choices to stay in this situation.

And that's the beauty of the concept. It allows me to see that and allows me to see how I'm actually much more successful at getting what I want than I think I am. And if I know that, I can look at my current situation ask, "Is this working for me?" And if it's not, I can deliberately make choices to change things and make it more of what I like because it helps me to see that I have more options than I might have already.

[00:23:51] RT: Okay. I want to talk a little bit about inclusion, control, and openness. Because it's a very central part of the work. And I want to go back a little bit, if you will, to, A, help people understand what is inclusion, control, and openness. Why do they go in this order? But maybe a little historical framing here, how did your father arrive at this? And why did it matter as a fundamental to the work of the human element?

[00:24:20] ES: Yeah. that's an important piece. That original research that was done in the Navy, the way that he went about measuring how people actually interacted with each other was by coming up with his own theory. That's the FIRO theory that we mentioned before. And inclusion, control, and openness are the three basic dimensions of that theory.

Now, originally, it was inclusion, control, and affection. That was updated much later. Affection was changed to openness. But the main idea is that there are three basic dimensions that we all operate in that explain how we interact with each other. Where did those come from? They were heavily influenced by a fellow named Wilfred Bion, who was a psychologist working in the UK during the Second World War. And he came up with a way of looking at the unconscious processes in groups. And he had three dimensions, which were very inspirational to my dad as he put together his own theory.

The other part of it was that he did a thorough review of the available literature at the time and found that there were theories that included anywhere from two dimensions to 49 dimensions to explain human interaction. He chose the three because they are what is called in the scientific literature necessary and sufficient. Meaning you need three to explain the vast majority of human behavior. But if you add any more, if you add it a fourth, you don't learn much more. It's necessary to explain. But it's sufficient to explain the vast majority of it. And I find that's held up quite well over the years that just about anything people come up with we can put in one of those areas. That really helps us to understand and have a language for how we interact with one another.

Very quickly, inclusion is all about the amount of contact that we like to have with one another. Some people like a lot of contact. Some people prefer much less. We vary on that. Control, which often the word sets people off of bit, control really means the structure of the interaction that we have. Somebody's leading a conversation, somebody's following. Somebody's giving direction, somebody's receiving it. Somebody's inspiring others, other people are getting inspired, if you will. All of those things would fall under the category of control. It's really about how things get done when working with people.

And then openness is the depth of the interaction, which is all about to what degree do I want to tell you about my experience, my thoughts, my feelings, my worries, my intentions, my intuition, the state of my body. Everything about what's going on. And we vary on that. Some of us like to be very open and tell a lot about our experience. And other people prefer to keep things more private or even prefer to be listening to others rather than defending.

When we look at our preference for how much of each of those areas that we like, we can start to see how we are compatible or not with other people naturally. If I like a lot of inclusion and you like a lot of inclusion, we may fit together pretty well because we both like a fair amount of contact. But if we have a difference in that, then we may run into some difficulty or some sort of disagreement at least unless either or both of us can be flexible. And that's really the key we have found to having people work well together. Whether it's in pairs or in groups, or teams, or even in organizations. That flexibility is really what's key. Those dimensions really become a foundation for everything that we talk about in terms of human interaction.

[00:27:52] RT: In my experience in being exposed to this and doing the exercise and work is it also helped me understand not always perfectly, but some decent way of understanding how people like to navigate the world. How much they want to be in on things? How much they want to be in control or let other people control? And so, there was a sense making and a sanity making a little bit to understand people not perfectly. But it's a starting point for that.

And it strikes me that certain positions, the position description for a lot of roles, either implicitly or explicitly, has defined into it, if we could say, the demands of the degree of inclusion, control and openness necessary to do the job well. Is that a fair read do you think?

[00:28:40] ES: Absolutely. It's a funny thing because we say very explicitly that the dimensions themselves don't have a good or bad, or right or wrong. We vary across them in terms of what we prefer. And I think you're right, different roles often have a preferred end of the scale.

For example, many leaders have discovered that being high in inclusion is often a better idea. To be in contact with the people who you lead tends to work a lot better than being remote and distant. What I find is that people often mistake the role they're in for their own preferences. They'll say, "Well, I like to include people a lot because I'm a manager or a leader." And sometimes that isn't actually how they feel. And that disconnect is one of the things that we can surface in the work and people can understand a bit more, "Oh, okay. That might be why I feel drained at the end of every day. Because I'm busy being flexible. I'm doing something outside my natural preference and I may be able to do it. But it also may take a bit of energy for me to do that." And I think that bit of awareness can be hugely helpful for people.

[00:29:47] RT: Yeah. Why is truth the great simplifier?

[00:29:52] ES: Yeah. This is one of our key phrases is that truth or openness is the grand simplifier. Because we believe that being open with each other, which we use the words interchangeably, is the way that we get work done and the way that we can solve problem. Let's say you and I have a conflict of sorts. If we don't stop and talk about it, that means the conflict is sitting there between us even if we never mention it. And everything that we do will be affected by it.

Let's say – well, I'll give an example. Let's say I'm working with a colleague and they interrupt me in a meeting and it really bugs me. And I go home and I think about it. And I get up in the morning and I'm still thinking about it. And then I say, "Well, I'll be professional. I won't say anything. It shouldn't be a big deal."

But the next time I see this person, of course, I either avoid them, or I'm a little sharp with them, or I'm not talking to them the same way that I might have before. Our relationship has changed. And if we're not open with each other, it stays that way even over years, years, and years, and years. It's common for us to hear stories like this.

But if I am open and simply say, "Hey, I had a strong reaction to what happened yesterday. And I'd like to talk with you about that and I want to sort that out." And we talk about it and we're both open about how we really think and feel. We can solve that problem because we can understand each other more. And it doesn't mean everything would be perfect necessarily. But what we're really seeking is to exchange our perceptions and understand one another. And from there, we believe that we can solve a lot of problems even if we still disagree. We may know, "Okay, we disagree. We had a different take on whatever happened. But we're clear on that." And so, it's no longer getting in the way the same way. It really does become the magic formula for individuals, and teams, and groups to solve problems. The more that they can be direct and simple about what's going on for each one of them, the more they can do that.

[00:31:38] RT: Okay. In your example, you had a very subtle description of how that engagement might actually start. But what you all taught me was, first, truth first. Aand it usually begins with me. Could you expand a little bit? Because people are listening saying, "Okay,

Ethan. I'm with you. This makes a lot of sense. I should be more open." But there is some craft here. There are some wise moves to make in the process and some not so wise moves. How do you help them a little bit think about that?

[00:32:07] ES: Yeah. This is such a common piece of all of this. I think where many people's minds go when we say, "Look, this is about being truthful or open." Often, what we think is, "Oh, that means I'm going to tell you what's wrong with you." I say, "God, you were so nasty to me yesterday. You interrupted me." Right? That's where I think most of us think that means being open.

The problem with that is it is being open but only a little bit. Because what I'm basically doing is being open with you about the label and the judgment that I have on you. A deeper level of openness is really be more self-responsible about what's true for me and explaining it that way. And you're right, you picked up what I'm trying to say, which is here's what's actually happening for me without blaming you for it. I notice I reacted strongly is talking about my experience without saying you're the cause of that or you're bad and wrong for doing that.

Now, people may hear it that way. I understand that. But it's much easier to hear that than it is to hear a blame and a label or a judgment that is eventually hurled at somebody. Sometimes we say, when we do that, when we blame, the term is brutally honest. And it's more about being brutal than honest, if you will. That's part of the reason that we want to get to that deeper level of understanding.

If I know, "Ooh, yeah. I had a reaction." Partly that's owning my own reaction. That can help. And the piece that you're talking about in terms of first truth, what we mean by first truth is how am I feeling right here right now as I have this conversation with you? And let me say that first. It may be something like, "Hey, I'm a little nervous to say this. And I want to make sure that we get to a good place. And my intention is to sort things out. I'm worried about your reaction. I'm worried if I'm going to say it right." Any of those things would be in the category of first truth. Meaning, what's going on right here right now between us before I get to the issue that I want to talk about? And it's a way simply to give some context so that what I'm saying doesn't come out of nowhere and lets you know a bit about my state as I talk to you about this. Because that probably is going to have some impact on you hearing it.

[00:34:19] RT: And I would say that when people are in this work doing this work with people like you, they get opportunities to practice this stuff in a less than high intense situation. They begin to actually not just experience it but understand the moves you can make in order to get good progress on. Is that fair to say?

[00:34:41] ES: Yeah. Absolutely. I mean the whole process is highly experiential. We're inviting people to participate in activities where we can do all of this real time and work with these ideas. Yeah.

[00:34:52] RT: Okay. At the outset, I mentioned that your father's work's been around for a very long time. And as you well know, since you live and operate in this world of human development and organizational development, organizational psychology, all sorts of new stuff pops up along the way. And some of it sticks. Some of it passes away. How is Will Schutz's work still relevant today? And why does it matter that we keep chasing after it?

[00:35:16] ES: My first truth is that I'm highly biased. I'll give you my take on it.

[00:35:23] RT: Please do.

[00:35:23] ES: I mean, the power of this work never ceases to amaze me. I did one of these programs just last week, and I am always struck by the degree to which it affects people in a positive way. Meaning, I think it's still relevant because we are still human beings even despite our technology. In some cases, I think the technology makes it even harder. Something like Zoom, or email, or texting, or all of the ways that we have to communicate now. In fact, I think make it more challenging to understand each other. And I hear about this on a regular basis, "Oh, if we're all on a Zoom call or a Teams call, it's much more difficult to read people's reactions." People are getting distracted because they don't have the immediate see of the interaction. We can't read body language. We only see the face and not the rest. And so on.

I think all of those make it more challenging. And, therefore, this type of work is even more important. If I'm communicating by email across the world, wow, not only is there the challenge of only seeing the written words. We have the time zone differences, and cultural differences,

and you name it. There's so many opportunities to miscommunicate. It would be my summary that I think this work is relevant for that reason by itself.

I also think that today's world is more stressful. We're on 24/7. The pressure to respond all the time. Everybody's email inbox is full. There's a lot more stress I think now than they're used to be just in the amount of information that comes into our brains at any one time. There's lots of research about that too.

And I think for that reason, having more self-standing and having a basis on which I can support myself, do more self-soothing work, self-care, if you will, is really necessary in today's world. I see people struggle with this all the time around burnout, around working hours, around giving themselves so much pressure to perform, and to respond, and solve problems all the time. I think we used to have more space in our lives. We don't anymore.

[00:37:28] RT: Yeah. That's the undercard, if you will. The challenges. But you do this work with a lot of people and you've done it for a long time. What excites you about it? What's the upside? What comes of this? Why spend all this time trying to do this work? It's not easy. It's challenging. What do you see in humanity that excites you and keeps you in this work?

[00:37:50] ES: I feel very privileged. Because by doing this work, I believe I get to see on a regular basis people become aware of a new way that they can be. And by that, I mean they see possibilities that they didn't see when they walked in. They see more possibilities for the way that they can be with other people. They see more possibilities for themselves. They often feel different about themselves or feel different about the way that they are with other people and their own capacity to do things.

When I think of just one person, I think it's pretty worth it. And what often happens is I'll have a whole room full of people who are feeling that way. And the feeling that I get in the room when we're there toward the end of our foundational program is wonderful. It's a lot of the reason that I do the work. Because it's so inspiring. People leave with a new sense of optimism. With a newfound energy for wanting to make things different.

And what I noticed is we have a lot of discussions about, "Well, I'm going to go back to work on Monday morning. And it's going to be really hard to do all this." And there's a lot of truth in that. Even, however, if people do just 1% of things different, 3%, maybe 5% of things different, things shift.

What I get to hear later is, "Wow. We got together and we had, whatever, meeting or project that we did. And it went so much better." And I think that's what the world needs. I think we all need to turn the tanker, if you will, and get to a place where there is more optimism. People can draw upon more strength that they have. They can connect with people more. It doesn't take a lot of new connection to change the way people feel. And I really truly believe that the way people feel is, A, where we live. And, B, what drives everything that happens in the world?

For me, even having a relatively small impact on the world in that way is tremendously gratifying. And I think there's not enough of that to go around. I want to see that there's more and more.

[00:39:46] RT: Okay. I think you're being modest there. But I'll let that go for the time being. I'm curious. Your father's contribution to this part of development is significant. And many people do not know who he is. But those who are in this world know exactly who he is and knows the contribution.

One, talk a little bit about that from your perspective. And I know you may not be objective. But you can have a perspective that nobody else has. But the other question I want to ask you is – well, take this question up first. Then I'll give you the next question.

[00:40:22] ES: Okay. If I'm understanding what you're asking, about his contribution and what that means. I mean, he was a mix. As all of us are. And I think really brilliant at making sense of his own experience. Because, ultimately, I think he was looking for how could he be happy and satisfied himself?

And in some ways, he was his own toughest customer. And, therefore, did some really amazing work at understanding what was true and what was going on for him. And because of that, created a whole methodology and approach that was very, very powerful. And I think what he

was able to do was pull together lots and lots of things that seemed very disparate and put them together in a very, very powerful way, so he would be able to have maximal effect on individuals and groups.

And I think he was ahead of his time that way. One of the things that we found is that – of course, since he created the initial body of work, which I would date back to the 80s, of course, there's been tons of research about from neuroscience and all sorts of studies of sociology and human behavior. I have yet to see anything that dramatically contradicts the work that he had put together before all of that.

Even in the way that we work with people, by creating a safe space and helping them become aware of the choices that they have is fully supported now by all of the very scientific research about how humans operate. And I think that's amazing. I think from just the point of view of somebody able to discern what's happening, he really had quite a knack for doing that.

The funny thing to me is he's often thought of as somebody who was wildly experimental. And that goes along with a connotation of kind of risky or crazy. And there were aspects of that. But at heart, he was still a scientist. And even his experimental stuff was always driven by his desire to try something, a hypothesis. See what happened. And then make adjustments from there. And that's what he would always do.

And I think that endless pursuit of improvement, continuous improvement, if you will, resulted in something that's uniquely powerful. There's a lot more in the marketplace now that addresses similar issues than there was when he created all of this. And some of it's wonderful. But I've yet to see anything that brings together all of the various strands into one comprehensive package that really, really can move the needle in terms of changing the way that we operate.

For that, I'm very grateful and grateful to be part of that. Because I think, even now, what I discover is that – like last week, I went in and worked with a brand-new group who didn't know anything about this. And it still has quite an amazing impact on people.

[00:43:09] RT: You're an architect. Studying architecture. And, meanwhile, your dad's doing this work over here in another part of your life. What caused you to set that aside and pick up this

work? Not easy for somebody to follow a founder. Do you mind sharing your thinking and your process for why you made this decision?

[00:43:30] ES: Sure. It's funny. Because when I was growing up, he was in the thick of experimenting with all kinds of experiential stuff. This was the height of encounter groups, which he was a big part of. He was doing body work. He was bringing in all sorts of people who were doing a huge variety of things. I grew up around that and being involved in some of that.

And then when I was in college, he was actually creating the human element and creating the updated instruments that were based on FIRO theory. And so, I got to work with him for a couple of summers while he was doing that. And I learned a tremendous amount about how he had created the theory, and the instruments, and put all that scientific part together.

When I went into architecture, it was really because I didn't know what else I wanted to do. And as I did it – even though I worked in it for almost a decade, as I did it, I was always very aware that I wanted to find either some way to approach it or find something different that I'd be more passionate about.

What I discovered eventually was that I did a lot of project management in architecture. I did a lot of office build-outs, and home additions, and things like that. What I discovered was that, first of all, the part that interested me was not so much what color carpet they picked or things like that. But, rather, I was fascinated by the fact that the various people who were working for us seemed to be at odds with each other.

The general contractor was always complaining about the subcontractors, the electricians, and the plumbers. And everybody hated the inspector. And they all thought the client was crazy. And the engineer was just in the way. And so on and so forth. And I had people sabotaging each other or delaying and doing all kinds of things that just seemed crazy to me.

And what I found was that the more that I spent time with them, and talking with them, and building relationships with them the more they wanted to work for me and work with each other and get the job done. And I came to it, I don't know, unconsciously, intuitively. And at some point

I realized, "Oh, this is the fascinating part to me," is figuring out how to make a team out of these disparate trades, if you will, of people who are not trying to work together.

I got better at doing that. I suppose it was my first lesson in leadership that I didn't even realize is leading those projects. And at a certain point, I realized, "Oh, actually, what my dad does is exactly what all this is about." And that is fascinating to me. And I literally called him up one day and said, "Okay, I want to get more involved."

What was wonderful for me, and I think this was an unconscious choice that I made, is that by going away from all of this and establishing myself – I was reasonably successful. I didn't need a different job or anything like that. By doing that, when I called and said I want to get involved, I was crystal clear that I really wanted to do it just for me. It wasn't because he did it. It wasn't because I felt like I was supposed to or anything like that. If anything, he was a bit ambivalent, his word about me becoming involved. He wanted to be sure that I really wanted to do it also. And I was very clear at that point. I think that was really good. Because I could bring all of the experience of working in this other field. Really working in a business for a while. To the party as well. And I knew I wanted to be there because I wanted to be there.

[00:46:51] RT: This is a podcast about leading. What have you learned about yourself as a leader in doing the work of leading the Schutz's organization and growing the business, bringing people along? What have you learned about you?

[00:47:07] ES: I think I've learned a couple of things. I've learned almost reluctantly that people will follow me more than I expected them to. There was a time a number of years ago when I said to my team, "Okay, I want to use some of our own work. I want to use our decision-making method," which we call concordance, to make team decisions all the time. I had a group of five or six at the time. And we did that for a while.

And after a while they spoke up and said, "You know, actually, we just want you to make the decision. Just tell us what to do. We're very happy with that. But we don't want to be involved in all the rest. We trust you." And that was a huge eye-opener for me, "Oh, they trust me that way." And I realized I wasn't sure of that beforehand. That was one piece.

And I think I've also realized how my own wish to have things come out really, really well is both a strength and a weakness. Meaning, in our terms, I can be very high on control. I like things to come out really well. And I can be a perfectionist. And I like the details. And I'm good at that. And sometimes that's great and sometimes it's not. And really recognizing, "Ah, it's helpful if I check myself on that. Where should I use this superpower of mine? And where does it not fit?" There's some places where it's really helpful just to hand things off and say, "I want somebody else to do this." And there are other places where it's really helpful for me to say, "No. I'm going to trust my own gut on this one. I think it needs to be better." And that's been – I'd say it's still an ongoing aspect that I'm learning.

I think the other thing is, for me, I found myself – as I came into the position I'm in now, which is, technically, I'm the president of my own company. But my company really handles the US and Canada. And we have partner companies in a number of other countries. The material is owned by a company in Japan now. I'm not ahead of that. But many people see me as the leader of the material or the concepts themselves. And I think it's taken me a long time to accept that.

And even as I say it, I can feel myself a little nervous about it. There are people who've done this longer than I have. And I learned from them. I find myself nervous about it. And, at the same time, I realize that many, many people will turn to me looking for leadership in that way. And as I've gotten more comfortable with that, I think I've allowed myself to be more creative, lead more, be more vocal.

It's been an amazing journey. And I think it has certainly helped me in doing work with leaders when I work with them in organizations. Because I can say, "Look, this is the experience I've had in running my organization even if it's a very different one or a different size." A lot of those lessons I think translate.

[00:49:52] RT: This is an interesting place. I want to go just one step further here. There is a global network of practitioners who have been certified in the work of the human element all over the world, speaking all sorts of different languages. How do you use your capacities as a leader to keep this group engaged, doing work, mobilized, to stay active, help them in particular ways when you don't have the authority, you don't have all the control you'd like to have? How

do you actually do the work of leading this desperate group of people and stay true to the principles of the human element?

[00:50:32] ES: Well, I mean, from a practical point of view, we have an annual meeting that we call The Update. I often present quite a bit there of new thinking or even reviewing things that we all supposedly know but a lot of people don't have as much contact with. There are opportunities like that. We have a meeting that we have here in the US and Canada.

The other way is that I've always been very involved in the material itself. I tend to be the one who makes updates to our leaders' manual, for example. And that has a lot of power and that that's the book that everybody reads from. And so, when I do that, then I send things around the world. I invite people to ask questions. And there's a lot of practical stuff like that.

But I also think one of the things I discovered early on in assuming my role, which I did in 2005, about two and a half years after my father died – well, I had a funny experience. I'll just tell you what it was. My dad would always say to me that I was his confidant. Meaning that he would tell me things that he only told to a few people is how I interpreted it. And that included a lot of his background thinking about the concepts in the human element, and how he got there, and what it meant, and so on.

And in my mind, I assumed that I was one of a number of people who were confidants. And I thought I knew who they were because there were people who worked very close with him, and other family members, and so forth. And at one of our annual meetings early on, just a couple years after he died, I said, "Well, I have this time to do a presentation. And what I want to do is tell you a bit about some of the background thinking behind these concepts, and how them material is created, and what it means, and so on. And I said I don't know how this is going to land. You may know all these things already or not. I really don't know. But please let me know.

And I had a bunch of material and we started doing it. And the hour quickly went by and I said, "Oh, I'm sorry. The time's done." And the response really surprised me. Because they liked it, which was great. But they really liked it and they said, "You know what? This is so interesting. We wanted to change the schedule so that we can give you more time to finish all of this."

And what I really realized in that was that I had something unique to offer to the community that I thought other people knew and I discovered in talking closely with them that they didn't. Even the people who I thought were also his confidants turned out that they didn't know a lot of the same things that I thought everybody knew. A big wake up for me that, in fact, when he said I was his confidant, it was more true than I realized. Meaning there weren't really other people that he talked to the same way or maybe one or two who got little bits but not the whole picture.

And so, since then, I've really made a point of being in a position where I could convey some of that. I've written about part of that. I've done various sessions or presentations to convey some of those things. But I think that's really the place where I can add a lot of value. Because sometimes the concepts aren't clear on the surface until you know some of the background. And that can really help, "Why do you do it this? How'd you get there?" They're unusual and can often be misinterpreted. Never mind the different languages, and geography, and that stuff. It just adds to it all. But that's one of the ways that's really been gratifying for me and I think helpful for the community.

[00:53:44] RT: Okay. Let everybody know that we have assembled a lot of links and resources, points of contact, information. That if they want to follow up with you or the organization about the program work that you do, materials, articles you've written, they'll all be in the show notes of the episode here. And they'll be able to click on that and chase after that as they like.

Last question. What is it I'm not asking you that you want to say?

[00:54:11] ES: Oh, that's always a great question. A key piece of this that's not even so explicit but it's so important is that we have some humor. And there are two things I'm thinking of. I'll start with one that's not related to the human element. This actually comes from the other side of my family. But I think it's so instructive. I think it's important that we can laugh about ourselves.

Here's my story. My great-grandmother, this is the other side of my family, came to the us as a child through Ellis Island at the age of eight. And she never quite mastered English. She would make these funny mistakes. Or some things were hard to understand. For her a heart attack and an architect we're both an architect. Right? Right. We laughed. Right?

The wonderful thing was, when she would say something like that, everybody would laugh and she would laugh too. And then she would say, making another mistake, "Are you laughing from me?" which just made us all laugh more. And she would be laughing right there with us. And I thought, "Wow. What a wonderful way to approach the world." Because she would be able to laugh with us at her own mistake. And not feel bad. And not take it personally. Or feel like people were laughing at her. Or anything like that. I think, "Wow. If we could all cultivate that capacity, how different would things be." That's one piece. I want to make sure I'm laughing from me.

The piece that was part of the human element is something that my dad called endarkenment, which was supposed to be the opposite of enlightenment, and came out of a time when he felt like, "You know, I've spent every day trying to make things wonderful, and really learn about things, and raise my awareness. And sometimes I just want to sit back on the couch, watch TV, have a Jack Daniels, and a cigar." And what he decided to do was create a workshop where everybody would teach each other the things they did the worst.

At the beginning everybody would say what they did that they really messed things up and people would say, "Well, I ruined relationships." And somebody else would say, "Yeah, I never follow through on things." And somebody else would say, "Well, I create meaningless relationships." And so on. And then everybody would be given a time during the rest of the program when they were supposed to teach everybody else how to do what they did because they're experts at whatever it was that they say they do poorly. And they could do a skit. Or they could do a teaching piece. Or sing a song. Or whatever they wanted to do.

The classic example was the guy who said, "Well, I don't finish things. I have a closet full of half-done projects." Everybody was very eager for his presentation. And when his time finally came around, he had dropped out of the group.

[00:56:50] RT: All right. Ethan Schutz, thank you very much for your time, and your conversation, and for helping us understand a little bit better about how we might be able to know ourselves, share more truth, and in process, do good work. Thank you very much for coming to the swamp.

[00:57:06] ES: Thank you so much. Really appreciate it.

[OUTRO]

[00:57:11] 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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