

EPISODE 89

[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.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:20] RT: Hi, everybody. This is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. This is the podcast where we have conversations with individuals who have made some choices in their personal and professional life to use themselves in support of the development of leadership capacity. Today is a perfect example of that.

My guest is Steve Segal. Steve and I are going to be talking between the Pacific Northwest and the state of Washington and New South Wales, Australia. Steve, welcome to the swamp. It's great to have you here.

[0:00:49] SS: Thanks, Rick. Thanks very much for inviting me. And I look forward to it.

[0:00:53] RT: Okay, so I've got a lot of questions. You've got a book coming out, and you do a lot of interesting things in the leadership space. But before we get into any of those details, what do you want people to know about Steve that will help them have orientation for what's to follow?

[0:01:07] SS: I guess the theme that has kind of run through both my life and my professional work is what I'll call moods of disruption. And by that, I mean, as a youngster, I had lots of anxiety, many bouts of depression. And kind of that anxiety and depression led me into being very curious about both anxiety and depression. And I didn't know it then. But as I look back on my life now, in my 60s looking back, I see that kind of the theme of both my professional work and my personal life has been kind of working with moods.

I'm also a psychologist, so I practice as a therapist. I spent over 25 years in a management school. Well, I was teaching philosophy in management, leadership in management, amongst others, including executive coaching. The kind of underlying theme of all my courses and my work is how moods of disruption play out in different areas. So I've just brought out a book on Nelson Mandela, looking at how moods of disruption play out in his leadership style.

And I guess one or two of the things that I kind of stress in the book is that, firstly, I think what was very interesting about Mandela is, alongside the rational dimensions of leadership, he also had a very strong understanding of the emotions of people. So he understood fear, he understood anger, he understood grief, mourning, etc. And he knew how to kind of lead through very powerful emotions, which I think is getting more and more important as the world gets more and more disrupted.

[0:03:05] RT: So I've got a bunch of questions about your book, Mandela, and also we will definitely get into your pairing of Nelson Mandela and Martin Heidegger, which is an unusual partnership. And you've got rationale for it. But first of all, I want to start with you, and I picked up this piece in the work that you've done. It says, "The heart of my work as a psychologist, philosopher, and leadership coach is the management education that lies a single human being's experiences, responding to existential anxiety," which I think you've sort of started to get into here in your introduction. But would you put a sharper point for listeners on what you mean by existential anxiety?

[0:03:44] SS: So I think there are at least two dimensions to existential anxiety that are important. The first point to existential anxiety is that the normal rules of the game no longer apply. And there are yet no new rules of the game. The way I express that in my work is I say it's when the conventions for doing things have been disrupted, but we don't know how to go on anymore.

And a kind of example of that would be knowing the rules of one sport allows you to make sense of that sport. So let's say basketball. You know the rules of basketball, and that allows you to make sense of basketball. But then imagine going to a different country and they play a different sport. Let's say cricket in Australia or the United Kingdom. And you're sitting there and you're looking at this and it looks like nothing is going on. And so nothing makes sense to you.

And it looks kind of stupid, or boring, or idiotic, or something like that. So that's a kind of moment of existential anxiety where you just don't know how to make sense. It's a state of bewilderment and you don't know how to make sense.

[0:05:12] RT: So I just wanted to let you know you described exactly the experience I had in watching a cricket match in London a few years ago, so I can relate to that part. But you take this a little further because you branch it out beyond the individual to include communities and nations. So let's expand that out because, as you know, and I live in the United States, we are definitely in an existential crisis up here in this country. So make that connection and broaden that landscape a little bit, because I think you're saying not only might I have it individually, but I may be walking and living in a space where it's constant as well. So navigation might be a challenge in multiple dimensions, I would think.

[0:05:50] SS: I think so. I think that, let's say, nationalism, in whatever country. Popularism, for example, is often underpinned by an existential anxiety in the sense that the nation – well, many people in the nation go into a state of anxiety. There's the kind of threat of the unknown. There's the threat of the stranger, the other, becomes kind of a threat to our way of life. When we feel a threat to our way of life, that's a kind of existential anxiety. It's often not seen as an existential anxiety. It's often seen as the other is threatening us rather than actually the rules by which we live life are being threatened.

So let me take an example, I think, from far away in the United States. I think that the rise of Donald Trump has been an existential threat to the rational principles of democracy. Because democracy has always assumed that if things are rational, then we can work them out and we can understand them and we can set policies and so on. And many of us, let's say, laughed at Donald Trump coming into power. We saw someone in our judgment who doesn't operate on rational grounds.

And so the expectation was that, well, at the beginning, Donald Trump wouldn't really get much traction, actually, from a rational perspective. And yet Donald Trump continued to get more and more traction. And so rationalists couldn't understand this. They couldn't understand it because actually it threw into question the very fundamental principles of a kind of rational, liberal

democracy. And that rationality is universal and that everything can be understood in rational terms.

And Donald Trump, I guess in many ways, is a response to a kind of emotional angst in the American people. And liberal rationalism doesn't really know how to deal with that kind of angst, which I guess I'll call an existential anxiety. It's a people who are lost. It's a people who are very scared. They can't see a future ahead of them. Everything kind of looks bleak and it looks dark. They feel disempowered. They feel helpless. They don't know how to go on. And here comes a man who kind of resonates and promises something in that area.

And I think that even if you go back to kind of Nazi Germany, the comparison I'm making is the importance of emotions in politics, which Democrats, whether it's Nazi Germany, here in America, or even South Africa, or here in Australia as well, rationalist politicians just marginalize emotions and moods. But people, their sense of being, can I say, at home in their nation. If people's sense of being at home in their nation is disturbed, that gives rise to a lot of anxiety. Liberal, rational politicians are not really equipped to deal with it, and populist politicians, unfortunately, exploit it for the sake of their narrow political aims.

And that's where I think someone like Nelson Mandela has been very different, because Nelson Mandela saw the existential anxiety in the nation, and he didn't exploit it. He actually was a therapist of the nation. He enabled national unity by working with the tensions between different threats experienced by people in the nation.

[0:10:00] RT: Okay, so I want to come to Mandela for the reasons you've already just laid out sort of the groundwork of. But I want to ask you a little bit about what you just said. My experience in the country I'm living in, and I'm not the only country, I mean, I just came back from Europe for two weeks over there, and there's some stuff like you're describing going on in Europe as well in varying countries, different forms, different doses of it, but it's sort of alive and well in some degree. My sense of it is that individuals and communities are struggling to deal with it, but they don't even know what they're dealing with. You're naming the issue and you're naming the attributes and the qualities that manifest itself in this condition.

For listeners, what's a way to step back or maybe get on a balcony and diagnose more accurately the condition that they're being challenged by? Because at some point there's a pull for action. But your point is that if you don't know what you're trying to do, the action is going to make it worse at best or nothing happens. What's a diagnostic process or ways in which people can begin to see at play the condition you're describing objectively?

[0:11:08] SS: Well, first of all, in these kinds of emotions, it's actually difficult to stand back. So when you're feeling threatened, it's very difficult to stand back. So you need that kind of discipline that's able to not lose yourself in the threat, in the emotion. So in other words, the thing about anxiety is that it causes more anxiety. So when you're anxious about something, you get anxious about being anxious about that anxiety because it's such a powerful kind of feeling. It's at that moment that I think that it's very crucial to be able to recognize the anxiety and not to kind of have that secondary anxiety build up and say, "Okay, this is anxiety." So to be able to say this is anxiety is quite a big thing. It's not an easy thing to do. But once you can recognize it as anxiety, you can also begin to work with it in different ways.

So if I just give an example from my therapy practice, quite a few sessions I've spent with a client just being able to name what they're going through. And once they can name what they're going through, it also begins to give them perspective on where they're at. So it enables them to stand back and say, "Okay, so this is kind of – well, let's say this is existential anxiety. It's not, say, narcissistic anxiety or neurotic anxiety or anything like that." Being able to name it is being able to take a step back and start putting it in perspective.

[0:12:59] RT: And what I hear you say in there is that that step may come after a period of time of sort of bouncing around trying to sort it out, even with the help of a therapist, meaning it doesn't necessarily always happen rather quickly. There could be work there just to get to that place.

[0:13:16] SS: Unfortunately, I think that's the case.

[0:13:19] RT: Yeah. At a collective level, a community level or a country level, my experience is that the easy route is to find peers, colleagues, like-minded people who agree with the description that you're using about what's wrong and project that out into the world. And if they

will get it sorted out, Donald Trump will get it sorted out, my life will be better. And so it strikes me that that strategy puts a lot of people in a waiting game that has no possibility of ever changing because I'm waiting for the external world to improve to my liking without me lifting my finger, so to speak. I'm being kind of extreme here to make the point.

[0:13:58] SS: Absolutely. And I think that's why the popularist route is kind of easier because you're not taking ownership for the experience. You're projecting it out. You're blaming others for it. And that does give a short-term buzz of empowerment and strength. But in the long term, it's not the most effective. It keeps on repeating itself, you know. You have to keep on finding enemies and you have to keep on blaming others. And you don't really move forward.

[0:14:31] RT: Okay. So let's bring in your two voices here, which I find quite fascinating when you sent me your information. You have Martin Heidegger and Nelson Mandela meeting in the town square, so to speak. My sort of metaphor here. So explain to people why you've sort of used this as a basis for the ideas that you have. Let's start with Heidegger. And most people, I think, know more about Mandela than they might about Heidegger. So please take your time and give a context and a setting for who this man is and why it matters that he should be in this conversation.

[0:15:05] SS: So I think that for Heidegger, why Heidegger? There's a number of reasons. But the first one is that Heidegger's got this concept of the experience of feeling not at home in your world. And that can be understood on so many different levels. And he works with it on many different levels. But the experience of not being at home in the world is kind of like you feel like a stranger in your world. You find it very difficult to make sense of what's going on around you.

So let's say, for example, political discourse, especially, let's say, policymaking and things like that, is written in a technical language. And it's kind of only technocrats can really understand what's being written in those policies. Whereas the person in the street, it's weird to him. It's strange to her, you know. It doesn't make sense to them at all. So they feel kind of strangers in their land.

And so for Heidegger, this experience of homelessness is very important. I think that we are kind of living almost in a time of that kind of homelessness at a moment in a broader scale that

the very assumptions and conventions in terms of which we understand reality are being undermined or threatened. Again, we've been socialized. Let's call it, broadly speaking, in a Western world. And the Western world has been underpinned by principles of rationalism and democracy and so on. Those very principles are coming into question today, not only internally in the United States, but globally between different players, between China and the United States, in the Middle East and the rise of Islam and so on.

There's this big feeling of not at home. So much on our doorstep at the moment. And Heidegger articulates this principle of being not at home in the world. And he sees both individual, but we're speaking on the nation, that nationalism is often a response to this feeling of not being at home in the world.

Actually, my PhD thesis was looking at apartheid in South Africa in these terms, that Nelson Mandela understood very well that the white Africana people felt very not at home in the rise of black nationalism. And Mandela was able to work effectively with white feeling of not being at home in a new land. Heidegger's not at home in the world. And not at home in the world requires a different kind of logic to what we're accustomed to.

So it might sound quite esoteric. But for Heidegger, and I argue in my book on Mandela, for Mandela as well, the first kind of experience that becomes important in recognizing not being at home in the world is learning to listen. Not to argue, not to speak, but learning to listen. To listen very deeply. And here, I'm making it very general, but for both Heidegger and Mandela, to listen very deeply means to listen on the dimension of the human dimension of what it means to being a person, not in terms of binary opposites of class, or race, or gender, or anything else, but to get to the human dimension of being. And so Martin Heidegger's philosophy really is about working on that human dimension of being. And my argument about Mandela is that he led very much from this human dimension of being.

[0:19:19] RT: All right. So I have one more Heidegger question because I picked this up in your writing and it really got my attention. You say that Heidegger advocated that people stay inside the disruption, which seems counterintuitive to survival for people in some ways, depending on the degree of disruption. Obviously, that's his advice. So a couple of thoughts on your side, having studied this and watched the world and be in the world, what are a couple of moves that

people can make that support staying in the disruption rather than vacating it and trying to avoid it?

[0:19:56] SS: Let me start with the individual therapeutic level and then maybe move on to Mandela and his ways of dealing with it. So in my therapeutic practice, what I do is get people to describe as kind of finely as possible the lived experience of anxiety that they're having. Don't try and explain the anxiety. Don't look for a solution to the anxiety. What does anxiety feel like? What does it feel like in your life? What is the kind of logic of anxiety?

So let me see if I can give an example. So let's say a particular client I had comes in and he finds that he gets into social situations. And in the social situations, he finds himself feeling anxiety. Then he gets very upset with himself for feeling anxiety. And so he tries to force himself back into the social situation. But he can't force himself back into the situation, and so the anxiety becomes worse.

And so I say to him, "No, let's not try and get back into the social situation. Let's stay with the anxiety of moving out of the social situation." So let's stay with the fact that you are withdrawing from the world. You're not emotionally present in the world. You're withdrawing from the world. And let's describe that experience of withdrawal that's happening for you.,

For example, let's say in your first move of withdrawal, you panicking and you fighting yourself back into the world. Let's stay with kind of you are withdrawing. Okay, I am going away from the everyday world. Yes, it is scary. It's not nice, but I am going away. I'm not particularly present with these people that I'm with. And then I'm learning to see, "Oh, I've been fighting with myself." I never realized that I'd been fighting with myself. Here I see that I'm fighting with myself. Then I see that because I've been fighting with myself, I go into a state of despair. And in that state of despair, I start to think that things are hopeless and there's nothing I can do about it. But if I start watching the pattern of anxiety I'm going into, I can reconstruct my relationship to the anxiety. And in reconstructing my relationship to the anxiety, I open up new possibilities for myself.

So can I give an example from Mandela on the same level? So there are a number of examples, but the example that I want to give is in 1993, Mandela of the African National Congress and the then South African government were in very combative, tough negotiations with each other for

control, I guess, of a post-democratic apartheid South Africa. And one of the leaders of Mandela's party, of the ANC, was assassinated by a white right-wing person. And that was a Saturday morning. Mandela was taken by surprise. The whole nation was taken by surprise. Everybody expected civil war at that time. It was definitely moving towards civil war.

And Mandela was full of anger. He was full of grief because not only was it a friend of his, but it was a symbol of the party. So he was angry, he was grieving, and he was also uncertain. And the story goes that that was a Saturday morning. Most of his party gathered back in Johannesburg to try and stop the possibility of a civil war. Mandela, so the story goes, actually spent time on his own on the Saturday afternoon. He kind of withdrew into a state of reflection. He didn't try and force the situation. He withdrew into it. He listened to his anxiety. He listened to his anger. He listened to his grief. And still he wasn't ready. But they kind of forced him to make a speech to the nation that night.

And so the argument goes that speech was not a great speech. It didn't touch sides at all because Mandela was still in these states of deep emotional turmoil. But by the Wednesday, Mandela had kind of started coming out of it. And that evening, by his own accord – and he had no formal authority, but he had the kind of moral authority and he had the kind of authority of the anxiety that was whipping up the nation. So he chose to make a speech that night. And in that speech, he began with something like this, "We are a nation in mourning. One of our national heroes has been assassinated. We are full of anger. We are full of grief. And yes, our knee-jerk response would be to go for civil war at this stage."

And so therapeutically, one of the things he was doing there is he was acknowledging the fear and the anger of the nation. And then as the speech went on, he kind of opened up a space for transforming the relationship to the emotion. He said, "Again, we can either act on this emotion or we can kind of open up the possibility of seeing a new way of kind of doing things through this emotion. And this emotion can become an opportunity for recommitting ourselves to the struggle against apartheid, for achieving the future that we want, not giving into what the right-wing Afrikaner – they want civil war." He was able to kind of work with the emotion, change their relation to the emotion, see what was actually happening underneath the emotion, recommit the nation to national reconciliation.

And in no part of the speech did he say, "We must do this. We've got to do this." He said, "The choice is yours. The choice is ours. How we respond to this is going to shape the future." And he left his speech at that point. That is known as the turning point in the history of South Africa. That night, it's well recognized by historians that Mandela became the de facto leader of South Africa. Not the de jure, but he became the leader of South Africa at that moment. Negotiations with the government were then conducted on Mandela's terms, not on the white apartheid government's terms.

So he stayed with the emotion. He spoke to the emotion. He provided a space for people to transform their relation to their emotion. And I think to do that on a national level is absolutely amazing. Because most leaders would have gone out and made this kind of motivational talk about the enemy has done this and we're going to kill them now. And not that kind of disciplined, reflective, therapeutic kind of speech, which involved both mood and reflection at the same time.

[0:28:00] RT: I'm interested in your views of that sounds like a roughly 48-hour period of time from the Wednesday to the speech where he disappeared. It tells me that that kind of reflection, that block of time is essential in order to get clear and understand and feel the feelings and interpret it and make meaning of it for oneself before, in this case, speaking to the country.

So I'm interested in your views about how can we as individuals build that kind of muscle or that kind of pause. As I sit here in my country, it's stimulus response, stimulus response, stimulus response. There's no gap in between. There's nanoseconds of time. It seems that part of the pathway to a more healthy society is in these sort of mechanistic moves of pause and reflect and etc. That's a story I'm making up about it. So I don't know how grounded that is but I'm just interested in your views about Mandela was different on Wednesday than he was two days later when he gave this speech. And that made all the difference in the world. How do we support that move in the work that you do or the work that I do or people in organizations, people in communities, people in government? How do we go about that?

[0:29:20] SS: Because I think it calls for a different kind of reflection. I think that we live in a society that's very solutions orientated. So we want the solution straight away. And if we can't find the solution, we kind of panic without the solution. And this is saying, well, let's open up a

different space of reflection. Not so much go for the solution, but actually let's understand what the problem is a little bit more.

If I just take Mandela as an example here on this level, Mandela could have easily stopped at saying, "Well, this is a leader that's been killed, and we're wounded, and we're going to react. This is the time for blood." But instead, he kind of had what Aristotle calls the practical wisdom or what I call, based on Aristotle, the emotional wisdom. He had the emotional wisdom to stay with the disruption. To stay with that disruption enabled him to see, "Hang on, behind all of this actually is exactly what the assassins wanted. They wanted the civil war."

And so Mandela could see the bigger picture, the bigger threat. Mandela could actually see the historical context because he was able to kind of not have that reasoning which goes, "We need a solution." Most of the people of his party did that. They wanted a solution. In fact, some of the history books say that they were angry with Mandela for not being at headquarters in Johannesburg. They were doing the firefighting and Mandela wasn't there. They were angry with him. And we've got to learn to say, "What's the problem?" We don't say what's the problem. We don't say what's the question here. What's actually the question that's being asked here?

I mean, in philosophy, kind of more poetry, I guess. Rainer Maria Rilke. I don't know if you've come across. Learn to love the question. Don't just go for the answer. Don't assume that you understand the problem. Spend time understanding the problem. So have that kind of reflection, which is about spending time finding out what the problem is. If I take it on a psychotherapy level, again, I spend time with my clients, a lot of time at the beginning. What is it that we're actually dealing with here? Do we know what we're dealing with?

[0:31:55] RT: There's so much here. Here's a question I wrote down. What is Mandela's existential Ubuntu wisdom? First of all, I didn't know what Ubuntu meant, and now I do. But it seems to me that somewhere in this process that he went through over this roughly 48 hours and how he conducted himself was based off of this aspect. Can you explain to people what that is? Because it seems slightly important to Mandela and maybe to us going forward.

[0:32:27] SS: So I've got to say, this is my argument. It's not how a traditional Ubuntu wisdom would look at it. So I just need to preface it with that. So my argument is, first of all, Ubuntu, it's

primarily not a philosophy. It's primarily an African way of life. At the core of this African way of life is people are people through other people, which means that the individual doesn't come first. It's the we that comes first.

So it's not to say that there aren't individuals, but individuals are possible through the we. The collective comes first. And only through the collective is there later such a thing as an individual. But in my argument, the position I put forward in the case of Mandela is that this Ubuntu way of life was disrupted. So it was an existential threat. It was disrupted in his early teens. At the age of about 16, the elders of the community said to him and his peers, who had just done a transition ritual ceremony into manhood, the elders had said, "You think you're going to be great leaders of the nation? Well, I'm here to tell you that actually you're going to work on the minds of the white people and you're going to work in the back offices of the white people. You're not going to become great leaders of the nation." That's an existential crisis. That's kind of losing your sense of being at home. The home in the world is threatened.

So what we can say is that for Mandela, that kind of Ubuntu being at home was disrupted. And he spent the next, I don't know, 50-odd years or so having no explicit relationship to Ubuntu philosophy. I'm arguing in my book that the way in which Mandela led was through Ubuntu. He doesn't say it. Nobody says it. I think there are a lot of people that would probably say I'm wrong to say it. But for Mandela, the we came before the individual in his leadership style.

For example, he didn't only see, let's say, the whites as the enemy. He also saw that Ubuntu is about relationality. So he also saw a relationality between black and white at the same time. And that to get beyond apartheid is not just to kill the white, but it's to restore being in relationship to the world. So Ubuntu on this way is about restoring relationship to the world. So through your enemy, you also restore relationship to the world.

Part of Ubuntu in Mandela's sense, I argue, is being able to listen to the humanity in his enemy. So he was able to see the fear, the anxiety, the vulnerability, the sense of not being at home of his enemy, of the Afrikaner in particular, that they felt kind of lost without their kind of ideology. And he could see it and he could work with it and he could enable transformation through it. And he established relationships to his enemies in these terms. And that to me is what Ubuntu is all about, is establishing relationality, not just killing your enemy or outcasting them, so to speak.

[0:36:26] RT: Or in a slightly more civilized but not civilized world like the country I live in, not denigrating your opposition and mocking them and humiliating them in public would be roughly in the same category. Not quite as severe, but roughly in the same category.

[0:36:41] SS: Although having said that, Mandela was known to be in parliament and in the political opposition. I mean, he was quite a fiery person and he certainly made quite heavy judgmental calls on others. But he was also known to be – I'm just trying to recall one incident where in the parliament he called a member of the opposition something like Donald Duck or something derogatory. And this politician happened to be going to hospital the next day or two. Mandela went to visit him a few days later. I know I've got my characters wrong, but he said, "Hey, Donald Duck, here's Goofy. Goofy's come to see you." He had a huge sense of humor, but he also was quite fiery as well.

[0:37:31] RT: Okay. I want to give you a chance to – imagine as people listening to your story about Mandela, once again being awed by the man and what he accomplished, and also being able to say, "Well, that's Mandela. I'm me." So let's give people a few thoughts on how they can use themselves, channeling the spirits of people like this. If they're thinking they don't have a move to make, I'm not constituted that way, and yet I'm stuck in this place, and all I'm doing is complaining and moaning, and I want to shift myself. What do you have as a therapist and a consultant and as a coach that you can suggest to people that might form up a small practice that they could begin with and then sort of expand from there in pursuit of what we're talking about here?

[0:38:18] SS: I'm not sure if this is a direct answer. In the book, I speak about Mandela's dialogues across difference. Mandela was able to hold these dialogues with his opposition, his enemy, in order to discover the humanity in them. And so I guess just on this kind of broad political level would be a sense of curiosity towards someone that you kind of radically disagree with, you know. Can you have some curiosity? Where are they coming from? What is it that's informing their way of thinking?

It's moods. It's the mood of curiosity rather than I'm right, you're wrong kind of logic. So curiosity would be one of the things. I think that it's, again, listening is such a big thing in both

Heidegger's philosophy and in Mandela's way of leading, of listening to yourself as well. I think people don't know how to listen to themselves. I mean, it might sound a strange thing to say, but we actually take ourselves for granted. And so we don't really know how to listen to what we're feeling, where our feelings are coming from, what's driving those kinds of feelings.

So listening, curiosity, and the notion of kind of standing on the balcony or taking a step back is very important here. But it involves not just a kind of rational stepping back, it involves kind of emotional stepping back as well. Again, listening. I think I'm beginning to sound a bit boring here in repeating the emotions, but it's kind of listening to your emotions rather than reacting from them.

I think the Stoic philosophy has got a good way of saying – or the example that I often use in my practice is, let's say you're in a traffic jam. Let's say one person in a traffic jam is going to go crazy and start blaming the traffic, and their tempers flaring, and their stress is rising, and all of that. And in the car next door, someone's listening to a podcast and they're quite cool. And so I guess the Stoics, philosophers and the existential philosophers here would say, "Well, it's your attitude towards the situation that counts." Do you understand your attitude towards a situation? If you begin to work with understanding your attitude, you also begin to work with enabling yourself to change your relationship to the situation.

I often say to my coaching clients, are you captain of your ship or are you a captive on your ship? I think that most of them are captives on their ship. The coaching process is about enabling them to become captain of their ship, but they first got to understand that they actually are captive on their ship. And that process of understanding their attitude and moving beyond that attitude is crucial to becoming a person.

[0:41:39] RT: You have a wonderful, provocative statement on your website. And we will put links to your website and the books and stuff like that in the show notes so people can go after those.

[0:41:49] SS: Thank you.

[0:41:49] RT: I wrote this down. You said, and I think you're talking about yourself here, as I recollect it, "I didn't arrive here in spite of my moods, but through them." And I think to some degree that's what you're saying in the last few minutes. So can you expand a little bit about that? Because it's a very provocative wording, "I didn't arrive here in spite of my moods, but through them." So what's the work of doing that?

[0:42:19] SS: On a philosophical level, that comes from kind of Kierkegaard's philosophy. And underpinning his view of anxiety is the idea that anxiety is an educator if you learn to listen to it. He kind of puts two extremes. He says anxiety can be the source of suicide if you don't listen to it, or anxiety, if you listen to it, it can take you through the trauma that you're going through.

And I guess you'll find that repeated in so many kind of great thinkers. Like in Nietzsche, for example. I don't know if I'm going too philosophical a path at the moment. But Nietzsche says, "Stay with your pain." Say yes to your pain. Don't say no to your pain. Learn to say yes to your pain. Your pain will teach you as you say yes to it. I mean, in my mind coming up at the moment is someone with a terminal illness. You can fight it. But the moment you can say yes to the illness, you can also start to have a very different relationship to that illness.

And I don't know if you ever read a book called *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

[0:43:35] RT: I have, yes.

[0:43:37] SS: Yeah. And I think *Tuesdays with Morrie*, with his illness, he was able to say, "Yes, I am dying. That doesn't mean that I can't do anything worthwhile." And not only worthwhile in a kind of pragmatic sense, but like emotionally and spiritually worthwhile as well. Say yes.

[0:43:59] RT: Say yes. We're coming to the end here. I have a couple more questions. First question is, what have I not asked you that you want to address? Anything that is top of mind for you, either based on the work you're doing in your book, the state of the world, whatever?

[0:44:14] SS: I mean, I think this has been quite an amazing interview. So thank you for that. I don't know if I've got much more to say on this part. I guess the other part, if I may say, is I'm just completing a book. Looking at philosophy therapeutically for therapists, coaches, leaders,

and others. And the book goes through – from a Heideggerian perspective, it goes through about 15 different philosophers, looking at how their philosophy. The traditional way we read philosophies, we go into a classroom, you're confronted with a text of a philosopher, you're reading it already in abstraction. But the philosophers, at least I argue in my coming book, is they were responding to disruption of conventions around them.

So Socrates was responding to the breakdown of Athens, really. Descartes was responding to kind of the breakdown of the Catholic Church and the rise of science. And Nietzsche was responding to kind of the kind of spiritual emptiness, if you like, in Christianity. And so in the book, I go through each philosopher is responding to a particular kind of disruption of fundamental conventions of the society and their way of thinking emerged as a way of responding to those disruptions.

And so my view again is we're living in times of really fundamental disruptions. We're living in times in which philosophy can be actually quite emotionally and existentially practical at the moment because it can help us think through the crises in which we live. So that's my forthcoming book.

[0:46:03] RT: Okay, we'll look forward to it. So last question, what gives you optimism about the future?

[0:46:08] SS: What gives me optimism is that I really do believe that people have the ability to go beyond the present circumstances that are kind of pulling us down and to opening up new possibilities. I believe, as Nietzsche often says, no matter what we're going through, we have the ability to say yes to life, to be able to create out of what we're going through. I think we're living in hard times, but we also do have the strength of just by virtue of being a human being, we can go beyond what we're living through.

[0:46:49] RT: Steven Segal, thank you very much for coming to The Swamp and sharing your ideas. It's been a wonderful conversation.

[0:46:55] SS: Thank you, Rick. Appreciate it very much. Thank you.

[0:47:00] 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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