

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript  
Episode #3, "Achieving Breakthrough Growth"  
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- Ken Harvey: 00:00 We want to welcome our listeners to episode number three of Check it Out, the podcast for lifelong learners with inquiring minds. This podcast is brought to you by Sno-Isle Libraries and the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation.
- Ken Harvey: 00:14 We have someone special with us here in the studio and we are looking forward to getting to know him better, and I think he's going to be sharing some very interesting things with our audience today. Andrew Ballard is the chief growth strategist for marketing solutions, which is an agency located here in the greater Seattle area. And that agency develops research based growth strategies for small businesses. He has over 30 years of experience, specializing in marketing research, strategic planning, brand development, and advertising. His company's co-founder is his wife, who I've actually had the pleasure of meeting and chatting with a few times, her name is Sandra. And together they've worked with and helped hundreds of public, private, and non-profit organizations, not just in this region and state, but I think across the continental United States.
- Ken Harvey: 01:09 And they work with them to help improve their brand image and their revenues. So they work with companies from start ups to fortune 500 companies. Andrew's a graduate of the Ford Marketing Institute and certified in Six Sigma, which maybe not everyone knows what that is, but we may talk a little bit about that in this podcast. And before launching their company, Marketing Solution, in 1997, I think that's right, he was the executive director for the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation. And before that he worked with the CBS affiliate, broadcast affiliate, in the Seattle market.
- Ken Harvey: 01:48 So Andrew's a respected author and educator, he is serving as a part-time faculty member at the University of Washington School of Business, and he is, as an author, has put out articles on growth strategy, which have been published in business journals throughout all 50 states. And his first book is entitled Your Opinion Doesn't Matter, which I have read, and it was ... It's received some great reviews from people in the business and people who wanted more business.

(Continued)

Ken Harvey: 02:27 I also happen to know that Andrew is a nationally sought after speaker. He does Keynote speaking, he is a trainer, and a workshop facilitator, and he just happens to have been a speaker for our popular TEDxSnoIsleLibraries events back in 2016. So Andrew, thank you so much for joining us.

Andrew Ballard: 02:47 Oh my pleasure, my honor. Ken, I gotta take you on the road. That's the best introduction I've ever had. It was kind of neat, he read just the way I wrote it.

Ken Harvey: 02:55 Well thank you. Thank you very much. Andrew, tell us a little bit more about yourself and the work that your company does.

Andrew Ballard: 03:05 Well I started in the marketing business about 35 years ago, and as you mentioned I went from marketing to management as the director of the March of Dimes. And we had an opportunity, Sandra, my wife and I, to launch a new business. And we did that because we thought we could do it better, and when I say do it better, help small businesses grow than what would be traditional in terms of marketing.

Andrew Ballard: 03:32 So as you mentioned, we launched in 97, so we're in our 21st year. Knock on wood.

Ken Harvey: 03:37 That's remarkable. A lot of companies don't last more than two or three years, and certainly five years is a major milestone in the lifetime of a business.

Andrew Ballard: 03:50 One of the courses I teach at the UW is on entrepreneurship and the data suggests that 95 out of 100 starts fail. And so the odds are not in favor of most businesses.

Ken Harvey: 04:04 Well let's stop there for a second because I just realized that I forgot to also introduce our two co-hosts who are also going to be asking your questions. So joining me for this episode's interview is Paul Pitkin who is the executive director for the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation, and Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation is one of the major sponsors, they are the power behind bringing this podcast to life. So we want to welcome Paul to the table.

Paul Pitkin: 04:40 Thanks Ken.

Ken Harvey: 04:41 And then sitting right across from him here in the studio is Jim Hills who is the public information manager for Sno-Isle Libraries, and Jim has been part of our team now for two to

three years now and we are just delighted to have him sitting here with us.

- Jim Hills: 04:54 It is wonderful to be here.
- Ken Harvey: 04:57 So these other two voices, listeners will hear them chiming in and joining me in asking questions of Andrew. But Andrew, I wanted to go back to what you were just saying in terms of businesses and kind of maybe life cycle of start ups. You know this from your own experience that entrepreneurs who have an idea of doing something that they think will bring value to the marketplace have a lot of challenges in making that come to life, and then once they have actually gotten their sign up and opened for business, then other challenges of continuing to be able to operate ... And so can you talk a little bit about that since I know you talk with a lot of entrepreneurs and small, small businesses?
- Andrew Ballard: 05:49 Yeah, no, that's really well put. So what I see as the biggest challenge is that people launch an enterprise because they have a talent or an experience, but a great product or service does not ensure success. Again, that's why the overwhelming majority of start ups fail. And our observation is that the primary reason is because a lack of market intelligence.
- Andrew Ballard: 06:17 They really know their product and service, the supply side of the equation, but they don't have good data on the demand side.
- Paul Pitkin: 06:25 Actually that leads to a question I have. I was taken by the title of your book, Your Opinion Doesn't Matter. Can you explain that a little bit?
- Andrew Ballard: 06:34 You bet. Sandra actually named that, and she helped me write it and did a lot of proofing. But she's been hearing me say for nearly 30 years before we'll take on a new client I will always say "Listen, unless you write a check right now and buy up all of your own inventory, your opinion doesn't matter to me. What I care about is what your customers think and believe, it's their opinions that count". And so that's where it came up. And of course our client's opinion does matter, but if they're going to market just based on what's in their head and they really haven't gathered voice of the customer, they often head in the wrong path.
- Paul Pitkin: 07:12 Is it sometimes a challenge for you to get them out of their own heads?

Andrew Ballard: 07:17 It is.

Paul Pitkin: 07:17 They know what they're doing even though they don't.

Andrew Ballard: 07:20 It is. About nine out of 10 new engagements though, people can intellectualize the fact that they don't have all the answers. You don't know what you don't know. And then there is that rare 10 percent that know it's my way or the highway. And in that case I give them the phone number of my competitor because I don't want to work with them.

Jim Hills: 07:39 I'm really happy to hear that you didn't spend 30 years telling Sandra that her opinion didn't count.

Andrew Ballard: 07:45 No.

Jim Hills: 07:46 That probably doesn't work.

Andrew Ballard: 07:47 No.

Ken Harvey: 07:47 But I'm really interested in how you made, so how you made that leap back in 97 from doing March of Dimes, working with Sandra, and then making your own personal decision to say yes, I can take this into the market place, and how you ... Did you know the kind of tenants that you're teaching now? Or did you learn them on the job? How did you make that leap? How do you make that mental switch from working for someone to working for yourself?

Andrew Ballard: 08:15 Well in answer to did I have it all figured out or did I learn along the way, it was definitely learning along the way. But we started with a premise that the book is based on, and that is that we really need to gather information beyond ourselves to understand what engenders value. What's going to create interest and loyalty?

Andrew Ballard: 08:36 And Ken had mentioned that I'm certified in Six Sigma, and a tenant of Six Sigma is gathering voice of the customer. And that's what we focus on is gathering voice of the customer or what we call VOC. In fact, the book has a full chapter just on that alone. And really kind of getting out of our head, and it's that market intelligence that really puts us on the right path.

Paul Pitkin: 08:58 Can you explain what, Six Sigma, is that what it is?

Andrew Ballard: 09:02 Yes. Six as in the number six.

Jim Hills: 09:04 Yeah, spell it.

Andrew Ballard: 09:05 So six as in the number six. Sigma as in the Greek letter. So Six Sigma essentially is a continuous quality process improvement effort, but the term Six Sigma actually defines six standard deviations from the mean, which is only three defects per million. So the whole point of Six Sigma, which originally started by Motorola in the early 80s was merely about removing the variants that causes defects and errors. And while getting to where you only have three defects per million isn't that feasible for most organizations, producers, manufacturers, et cetera, the effort of reducing variants that causes defects is a great approach.

Paul Pitkin: 09:57 And when you apply that to marketing, is that essentially identifying the weaknesses in a marketing strategy and trying to eliminate those? Can you explain a little bit more about how that relates to marketing?

Andrew Ballard: 10:09 Yeah. You bet. So most companies will go to market based on their product service portfolio and the ideas they have on what they want to communicate. The challenge is without the voice of the customer, you have no idea if your messaging is really resonating with customers. So the idea really of Six Sigma as it applies to marketing is to eliminate the things that are not relevant and compelling to the target market. And that's where the voice of the customer comes in. Literally we use the voice of the customer when we're building messaging and story for our clients.

Paul Pitkin: 10:48 Oh. Excellent. Thanks.

Ken Harvey: 10:49 So I think our audience would be just interested in something that you and Jim actually just kind of chatted about in terms of Jim saying he's glad that you didn't spend the first 30 years of the experience telling your wife that her opinion didn't matter. You want to just talk a little bit about kind of the structure of your company and how you and Sandra have been able to really kind of craft something that is in some ways a very successful kind of husband and wife led company?

Andrew Ballard: 11:27 Yeah and it's not something that I recommend because it comes with its own challenges.

Paul Pitkin: 11:32 I don't know why you would say that.

Andrew Ballard: 11:34 Well her opinion does matter Jim. But the point is that whenever you are in a family relationship, and then that extends to a professional relationship, it brings a whole set of challenges. And so we really have learned along the way. Some of the key things that have really helped us stay together as a business and remain intact as a marriage, one is to be very role aware, make sure that there are clear boundaries and dilatation between roles and responsibilities. The second is just communication, even to the point of over communication. So everybody knows what everybody else is doing. We're actually a virtual company, we're a team of 25, so it goes beyond just Sandra and myself. And then another key point, and we just learned this over the last 10 years, is to have separate offices separated by a considerable distance. We're on completely separate floors. It's a bit tongue and cheek, but it really has made a big difference, it's helpful.

Ken Harvey: 12:38 Well I know that in the intro that I gave for you that it indicated that you're also doing some education work through the University of Washington and training others. You want to talk a little bit about the type of individuals who come to the classes that you are instructing in? And what are they typically looking for? What are they trying to solve when they pursue that kind of education?

Andrew Ballard: 13:12 Sure. So I have two different segments that I'm working with in terms of education and teaching. At the University of Washington all of my students are seniors in the school of business. So their motivation is graduating and making sure that they have all the necessary classes, they've checked the box on getting the right electives. So their motivation really is graduation, et cetera. The classes I teach are around entrepreneurship, marketing, and critical thinking in business consulting practices. Those are primarily the classes that I'm teaching.

Andrew Ballard: 13:48 And these are 21, 22 year olds typically that are way smarter than I am, but it's a lot of fun. I'm in my fifth year there at the UW.

Ken Harvey: 13:59 Congratulations.

Andrew Ballard: 13:59 Thank you. I'm honored to have that opportunity. It was actually the book, publishing the book that led to the appointment at the school of business. So that was a fortunate occurrence.

Andrew Ballard: 14:12 When I get into the business community and doing workshops and seminars that you eluded to, they are typically early stage

small businesses that are experiencing challenges. Sometimes they're mature organizations that have hit the wall, hit the growth wall. There's that five to seven year ceiling you kind of hit that's kind of hard to break through. And their motivations are quite different than my UW students. They're looking for ways to accelerate revenue generation, they have challenges with cash flow, they have challenges in customer acquisition. And so those seminars and workshops are very, very focused on how to achieve breakthrough growth and principles of marketing to accelerate revenue generation.

- Ken Harvey: 14:59 So are these like ceilings in terms of their revenue growth like going from 50 thousand to 100 thousand, or 500 thousand to a million, or five million to seven and a half million? Is that what we're talking about?
- Andrew Ballard: 15:12 All of the above. Yeah. Most of our clients run between the one and 50 million range. We do have three fortune 500 clients that we work with on and off. But our real focus and joy is serving that small business. And whether the ceiling they hit is at the 500 thousand dollar level, the five million dollar level, or the 50 million level the same principles apply after really doing kind of an analysis.
- Andrew Ballard: 15:39 And Paul eluded to this earlier is how do you know or what can you do to stop making the errors that are causing issues? And the idea kind of enclosing the loop on this is that whatever you did to get you from where you are, where you were to where you are is not what's necessary to get you to the next level. It requires a whole new level of skills and strategy.
- Andrew Ballard: 16:06 People get to maybe a million dollar company and they go wow I'm at a plateau here for the last few years, how do I break that. You know the old adage, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again yet expecting different results.
- Ken Harvey: 16:23 Yeah.
- Jim Hills: 16:23 I've been guilty of that a few times.
- Paul Pitkin: 16:25 I imagine too it makes it even more difficult when maybe what you've been doing over and over again has worked in the past.
- Andrew Ballard: 16:31 And that is exactly the issue. It had worked in the past, it's what led you to your initial round of success, but as you scale your business it requires another set of strategy, capital investment, and certainly people, your human resource.

Jim Hills: 16:48 Can you talk a little bit more about, you've mentioned a lot about knowing your customers. Sort of sounds like kind of a data driven approach to learning about your customers. Can you explain a little bit about how you go about getting that information and really getting something solid for your clients about the customers?

Andrew Ballard: 17:06 Yeah. You bet. It's kind of unpacking the voice of the customer approach. And so one of the first things we do with a new client engagement is we work with a client to identify what segment of their existing customers are the ones they want to replicate. Right? Because all customers are not created equal. Some are more loyal, some have more frequent purchasing patterns, some drive higher margins.

Jim Hills: 17:31 Some are more critical and you end up spending a lot of time kind of dealing with questions and-

Andrew Ballard: 17:38 Right. Some need more hand holding is the way that we call it. But the idea is we identify what is the segment or the smaller subset of their customers that represent the cohort or the segment that they want to replicate.

Andrew Ballard: 17:53 And so then we have the client put together a small list of those customers. We provide a small incentive for them to spend 10, 15 minutes with us on the phone and we interview them in a way that protects their anonymity, easy for me to say, and-

Ken Harvey: 18:11 I'm glad you said it instead.

Jim Hills: 18:13 Can you say it three times?

Andrew Ballard: 18:14 No, I can't. And if you try to ask me to I'm going to leave the studio.

Andrew Ballard: 18:18 But the idea is we create a safe place for them to be very candid about their experiences. What they really value about those experiences, maybe what frustrates them. We also dive into what research they do to find providers in our clients category so we can help them with marketing, search engine optimization, that kind of a thing. But really it's about doing in-depth interviews with our clients customers, and that's what gives us the insight to optimize their growth strategy.

Paul Pitkin: 18:49 And of course you're interviewing the people that they want more of?

Andrew Ballard: 18:53 Right. Right. Exactly. Traditional research says you want the sample to be representative of the population under study. Well that's not the voice of the customer approach, that's large sample quantitative research. This is qualitative research where we're interviewing a small sample of the best customers, like you said Paul, the ones they want to grow.

Ken Harvey: 19:16 So I love your book. And I love the concept of being customer focused. I also, I just finished a book called, its been around for a few years called Blue Ocean Strategy.

Andrew Ballard: 19:26 I've read, it's a great book.

Ken Harvey: 19:27 And what I really loved about that is it is also customer focused. But it makes the point that, I think you were just talking about the skills that got you to the point now may not be the ones that take you to the next level.

Andrew Ballard: 19:42 Exactly.

Ken Harvey: 19:43 That's what I was getting out of Blue Ocean Strategy. Well where do you look for that next market? Have you ... Are you being held back by not tapping your current market fully or do you really need to be looking for the next market? And that might not be your current customer, but you still need to do the same work that you're talking about around market investigation, looking to define that market and then take your product, your service, whatever you're bringing into the market and how you approach those folks.

Ken Harvey: 20:18 So I was interested to see how you view that current customer expansion piece and then this Blue Ocean piece where you're looking for that next expansive opportunity.

Andrew Ballard: 20:32 Sure. And there's a couple moving parts. And I mentioned that I love the Blue Ocean Strategy book. And for the audience members that aren't familiar with that, it distinguishes between red ocean and blue ocean. Red ocean being you've got all of the competitor sharks all fishing in the same area. Blue ocean is more open space where you can really own a place or a position in a market, and what we call that is a niche strategy.

Andrew Ballard: 20:59 And so that requires not only that you gather voice of the customer, but that you also really understand the competitive landscape and what's going on in the industry. And the Blue Ocean approach that we take with our clients is understanding what customers value, we also understand what our clients,

what their core competencies are, but also what's going on in the competitive landscape. And we align those three data sets and try to surface something that our client can be unique in that lines up to what the clients value.

- Andrew Ballard: 21:37 So a Blue Ocean strategy doesn't always involve going after a new market. Sometimes it involves doing a better job of competitively distinguishing your brand with others in the same space. Other examples of Blue Ocean is based on your core business, looking for ancillary products and services, or some extensions that might appeal to your existing customer base, but then might even attract new customers. But the idea is that you really separate yourself from all the noise in your market space.
- Paul Pitkin: 22:11 Have you ever had a situation where beyond just marketing you had to go to a client and say your processes need adjusting or your product needs adjusting? And how do you approach that if that's the case?
- Andrew Ballard: 22:25 Well that's a really intuitive question. It actually happens-
- Jim Hills: 22:29 Because that's not good news.
- Andrew Ballard: 22:30 No, it isn't. But the reality is that happens more times than not. So we're dealing with those conditions in the majority of our client situations. That could be 60, 70 percent of our clients. And these are some of the things I learned as an executive is that you can't just focus on marketing, you need to grow your enterprise and have functional balance. If you have the best marketing strategy in the world, but the wrong team trying to execute on that strategy, it's not going to accelerate revenue generation, you're never going to achieve a breakthrough.
- Andrew Ballard: 23:04 So yes, it's about process, it's about technology, and it's about people. And you need to make sure that those are really well aligned. We've actually had tough conversations with some clients, said "Hey, distinguishing your value proposition is not going to be the challenge. The problem that you have is in your sales department with the lack of the technology and the people to convert the opportunities that your marketing is generating". So yeah, that actually happens more often than not. And sometimes those are tough conversation.
- Andrew Ballard: 23:43 I hate to say this but we've been responsible of some people losing their jobs before.

Paul Pitkin: 23:49 That can't be easy.

Ken Harvey: 23:50 Well Andrew, I wanted to maybe go in a direction that kind of ties back to libraries and learning and reading and things. And one of the things that you have been so gracious and transparent in revealing to me in conversations that you and I have had in the past is that for you there have been some challenges in your life with reading and learning. Just wondering if maybe you could just maybe share a little bit about that because I think that our audience will find that really fascinating.

Andrew Ballard: 24:30 Well I think one of the reasons that I accepted the leadership position at the March of Dimes is I've always had a heart for differently abled people. I was diagnosed at a very young age, third grade, that I had severe primary dyslexia. And that's a condition that doesn't change with age, you've got it for life. And it presented serious challenges in learning. I couldn't read, I couldn't write, I couldn't do math, I couldn't spell at the level of my classmates. It caused a lot of problems to the point where I even dropped out of high school, I just couldn't keep up.

Ken Harvey: 25:09 So was dropping out an esteem issue or was it just a sense of you were failing, feeling like you were a failure? What was-

Andrew Ballard: 25:16 I think a combination of both. The failure was so obvious. I had a 1.6 grade point average.

Ken Harvey: 25:23 Congratulations.

Andrew Ballard: 25:24 Yeah. So that was in itself kind of said I wasn't doing well. And certainly not as much in high school, but in grade school I would be teased, not only by the students, but I even had teachers that would tease me.

Paul Pitkin: 25:40 That's incredible.

Andrew Ballard: 25:43 So that wasn't a lot of fun. But what I learned, really in hindsight decades later I see it more as a blessing than as a curse. You've heard the adage, whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger. And unbeknownst to me I developed coping systems and mechanisms to deal with these leaning differences and learning challenges. And while ... It's really funny. In 8th grade I took Evelyn Woods speed reading, they're not even around anymore. But the average person reads 250 to 300 words a minute. I took speed reading and that got me up to 150, about half of the norm. And I still read very, very slowly.

- Andrew Ballard: 26:27 But now rather than it being a bane, it's a delight. And so I do a tremendous amount of professional reading. And I think that that's because of I'm always trying to stay leading edge in my business. When you're teaching and writing you can't rest on your laurels, you can't remain in the status quo because we're in a very dynamic market place. New ideas, new technologies, new innovation, you've gotta stay on top of that.
- Paul Pitkin: 26:54 What helped you turn the corner as far as going from a 1.6 grade point average and being teased by teachers, which again is amazing, what helped you turn the corner so that you became eventually being able to write a book? Was there something that you learned along the way that helped you, other than speed reading, that helped you further your educational goals?
- Andrew Ballard: 27:20 Yeah. There was definitely a tipping point, and it happened when I dropped out of high school as a sophomore. At that time, and I even mention this in my Sno-Isle Libraries TEDx talk, while I was really failing in school and possibly even in other areas, I loved music. And I had, I don't want to call it a gift, but I had a real knack for playing the drums. And it's something that I really enjoyed doing and I loved doing it to the point where I was practicing between 16 and 18, practicing six hours a day.
- Andrew Ballard: 27:54 And I had a plateau very quickly. And I don't know how I got this idea, but I ... I'm right handed. I switched to a left handed drum set. And that just propelled me to just a whole new level of learning. And because I enjoyed success that kind of followed as a professional musician, that really turned a corner. Also I learned how to read music. And music is really about math. It's not just about intonation and scales, it's really a lot about math in terms of how music and scores are written. And so it really helped a lot there.
- Ken Harvey: 28:33 So you mentioned what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, but I happen to know that you also had another challenge in your life that pretty nearly did kill you.
- Andrew Ballard: 28:42 Just about ended me, that's right.
- Ken Harvey: 28:44 And I'm curious, I'd love to have you talk a little bit about that, but also it came in the middle of your start of your business, it came not that many years after you'd started. And I'm wondering if that experience, not only on the personal side, created a bit of a crux. Is there a breaking point where you saw your business different? Where you saw life and how you were going to approach it differently after that?

Andrew Ballard: 29:11 Really good point. And the answer is yes, yes, and yes. Next question. Just kidding. So I did, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2003. So that was only our fifth year in business, kind of to your point. And it was a very dangerous situation. It was almost seven centimeters, so it was the size of a baseball, and it was wrapped around some very, very delicate tissues. And so the short response is we didn't know if I would even survive the surgery, I had two surgeries in 24 hours. The first one I had to be awake for, but that's a party I'll share for another podcast.

Jim Hills: 29:47 All right. We'll have to invite you back.

Andrew Ballard: 29:49 But so not only did we not have assurance that I would make it through these surgeries, but there was also a very high probability that I would have left side paralysis. It was right frontal brain tumor and that's what causes left paralysis. And fortunately the big guy upstairs isn't done with me yet, and so however it did take a year to recover, I went through a lot of speak, physical, and occupational therapies.

Jim Hills: 30:16 Wow.

Andrew Ballard: 30:17 And frankly I could not have done this without Sandra and my kids. And so while this experience and taking a year to get back to baseline, you notice I didn't say get back to normal, I've never been normal and I think that's far more than it's cracked up to be.

Jim Hills: 30:32 I think most of the people who know you would say that too.

Andrew Ballard: 30:36 Yeah. Very accurate. But the thing, my real epiphany wasn't so much associated with my professional life, it really was more about my personal life. And I don't think that it's possible to excel and really perform at a high level professionally unless you have your ducks in a row personally.

Andrew Ballard: 30:57 And I kind of went from being very career minded and aspirational and really switched back to being very, very family oriented. And its been, geez I'm 13 years, and I still have to do the regular MRIs, but it has not grown back. Knock on titanium. People that can't see this, I've got four titanium screws. You can't see them, but that's how they put me back together again.

Andrew Ballard: 31:26 Anyway, so I've been very blessed because of that. And when I put a greater focus on family, at that same time our business just exploded. So.

- Jim Hills: 31:38 Well and you're also very community oriented. I see you in a lot of different kind of community level things, regional things that go beyond career in business, but are really seem to be about giving back to the community.
- Andrew Ballard: 31:55 I just think that that's any leader's responsibility. And after I had really recovered from getting through the brain tumor and surgery and all of that, I started getting involved in several organizations and had opportunities to join several boards, but it kind of goes back ... And I think my parents instilled this in me. The best demonstration of this, or illustration rather, is a quote from Winston Churchill. And he said you make a living by what you get, you make a life by what you give.
- Andrew Ballard: 32:33 And so I've had the opportunity to work with many community organizations and try to give back. I really had that in my DNA, going back to the March of Dimes and even before then, really having a heart for people that had challenges. I've always been rooting for the underdog because I've been an underdog for most of my life. And I'm pretty comfortable in that position, I actually like it.
- Jim Hills: 32:56 Well it seems to be working for you.
- Andrew Ballard: 32:58 So far, so good.
- Jim Hills: 32:59 And everybody else that you're working with, it's working for them too. So that's fantastic.
- Ken Harvey: 33:04 So Andrew, we only have a few more minutes and I wanted to read you a quote from Malcolm Forbes and maybe have you just react to it. And this is actually something that my co-hosts and I would love to react to your reaction, respond to your reaction. So here's the quote. "The richest person in the world, in fact all the riches in the world, couldn't provide you with anything like the endless, incredible loot available at your local library. You can measure the awareness, the breadth, and the wisdom of a civilization, a nation, a people by the priority given to preserving these repositories of all that we are, all that we were, and will be".
- Andrew Ballard: 33:52 I'd never heard that quote, but I have a great respect for Malcolm Forbes. And I completely agree with it. The thing that is so important to me about libraries is that it is a public venue, a public institution that levels the playing field for everyone. And whether people are interested in information or resources related to business or more from an entertainment perspective,

I'm just a big believer in libraries and having that as an institution as part of our community. And it's been an institution and part of our country since the beginning really.

Andrew Ballard: 34:34 I personally, and my company, lives in the business section of the Sno-Isle Library's website. And we're constantly using those resources, free resources, to help give our clients insights they wouldn't have had otherwise. There are so many business tools, and I don't want to limit it just to business, but that's kind of where I live. And so I just, what an incredible asset, one that we need to preserve. And if we don't and if we don't keep education at the top of our value system, our society is going to be in trouble.

Paul Pitkin: 35:11 Well that equal access to information is so important. You were mentioning Andrew, for you it's business, for other people it could be something completely different, but the idea that everybody has access to it and it's all free is pretty amazing. So it doesn't matter, you don't need to be wealthy to get critical information, critical information to you or to your business or anything else. I think that's pretty important.

Andrew Ballard: 35:36 Exactly. That equal access is huge.

Ken Harvey: 35:39 It's interesting, I guess it's been three years now that Sno-Isle Libraries has had a business librarian to help be that guide to those resources. That position isn't designed to compete with you, it's designed to help you help your clients access those data bases and that information so that they can make informed and better choices about their own businesses, their own lives, and help the community, and help it grow.

Ken Harvey: 36:10 When Sno-Isle created that position, it was one of the few public libraries in the country that had that position. And it has been extremely popular in terms of in the business community, especially in terms of the access to data that can help people make intelligent choices.

Andrew Ballard: 36:32 Right. And I don't see your business resource library or your businesses resources as competition as much as I do, in fact, a resource that I get to access.

Ken Harvey: 36:42 Yeah. And I talked about the business perspective. One of the things I love about how Sno-Isle Library's business resource is organized is you can go in there and you can go ... If you're interested in starting a business or growing a business, there are all these different resources. In fact, Sno-Isle Libraries even has

a small business start up kit. And they have all the forms that you need to put together a business plan. And for start ups that are pre-launch, those are resources that will take them to being 95 percent failure to be five percent success.

- Jim Hills: 37:19 Wow. So I know that you and a number of other business professionals have essentially volunteered some of your time and experience and knowledge to give back to other would be business people, entrepreneurs, that knowledge through some business pro classes that are offered through Sno-Isle Libraries. And just talk a little bit about that. Why would you do such a thing? Why would you offer that? And who do you find shows up for a class like that? And what do you help connect them with that they can use from the library?
- Andrew Ballard: 38:07 Sure. Well you've been doing the business, Sno-Isle Libraries has been doing the business pro series. I think you're in your second year. And I volunteered the first year and I'm doing, in fact I've done three talks this year. I've done a total of 10 at 10 different libraries. And there's a lot of motivations for doing that. Giving back to the community is one. Another is i just love teaching. And the people that show up for that, most of them from my perspective, are either very early stage companies ... I just did one of the business pro series last month for the Edmonds Library, the Edmonds branch there, and all but one of the people who attended were pre-launch. And so that's one of the things that most speakers do is they try to get a read on the room, who their audience is so they can share relevant stories, et cetera. And it's just really encouraging.
- Andrew Ballard: 39:08 I've been doing pretty much the same talk and that is I share the four secrets to growing your business. And those same four secrets apply whether your pre-launch or whether you're second stage business. And so it's just, it's a talk I've been doing for about 10 years. I just really enjoy it and I've gotten great feedback that people really get a lot from it.
- Andrew Ballard: 39:31 The last point, getting to the library resources is that during that I can show them the two or three databases that I live in. The A to Z database, you can do just about anything with. You can study competitors, you can put together a mailing list if you want to, another one that I use a lot for industry data is first research. Then you also offer free demographics now, which just has so many layers and you can build maps, and reports, and it's just an amazing resource. And by the way, all of these tools are at cost, they are subscriptions. I've had to pay subscriptions for this information before until I became, several years ago, Sno-Isle Library's account holder. I'm a customer now

so I get all of these resources for free. So we just kind of share some of these resources that are directly in line to the four secrets we share.

Ken Harvey: 40:33 That's incredible. We're definitely going to have to have you back.

Andrew Ballard: 40:37 I'd love it.

Paul Pitkin: 40:37 Ken, I have one more question.

Ken Harvey: 40:39 Okay. Go ahead.

Paul Pitkin: 40:40 We've talked about a lot of different things, but I wanted to really, really ask the important question for the segment and its, I think we can all just sort of take a deep breath because this is really big. Andrew, I remember in your TEDx talk, your TEDxSnoIsleLibraries talk, you mentioned that you played drums on a few albums, and we're going to need a discography.

Andrew Ballard: 41:06 Okay. Well we can do-

Paul Pitkin: 41:08 Name of band, year it came out.

Andrew Ballard: 41:10 Okay. So I actually did albums with four different groups. Three of them were in Europe. I actually had a contract with a German record company.

Paul Pitkin: 41:21 Nice.

Andrew Ballard: 41:21 I moved to Germany for a couple years. The first album I did was for a popular Seattle band in the mid 70s called Hurricane Ridge. And it was actually an EP, not an LP. That means extended play. It only had three songs on it.

Paul Pitkin: 41:36 Oh yeah.

Andrew Ballard: 41:37 But all three of them got regular play on the Seattle rock station.

Paul Pitkin: 41:41 KISW?

Jim Hills: 41:42 Right on.

Andrew Ballard: 41:42 And KZOK, both station.

Paul Pitkin: 41:45 Yup. Gotcha. Gotcha.

Andrew Ballard: 41:46 Every summer we did the KZOK. Anyway, so that was fun. But I think I really achieved a higher level of success in Europe as a recording artists. And these bands you're not going to know of. One of them was the Dave Lee Howard, 'cause they're all German, Dave Lee Howard Band.

Paul Pitkin: 42:03 The Dave Lee Howard Band doesn't sound very German, just so you know.

Andrew Ballard: 42:06 It doesn't. It doesn't. His mother was German, his father was military in World War II. So this goes back. We're talking over 30 years ago. But one of the biggest groups I worked with and we were actually doing a lot of television and recording was a band called Press Cop.

Paul Pitkin: 42:29 Now that sounds German.

Andrew Ballard: 42:30 Yeah. And it actually is kind of a negative connotation, I'm not going to share what the direct translation is. Anyway, the point is it was a German wave band. And you might remember in the late 70's the wave movement in the US, well that was all driven by German.

Paul Pitkin: 42:48 Do you mean new wave?

Andrew Ballard: 42:49 Yes.

Paul Pitkin: 42:50 Okay.

Andrew Ballard: 42:50 It's exactly new wave and Deutsche Welle is just the German version of new wave. And so we were a wave band and just had a lot of success. It was fun.

Paul Pitkin: 43:01 That's fantastic. Now, I don't want to make you feel bad, but you don't have a whole lot of hair right now. Did you have a Flock of Seagulls haircut or something like that going on if you were doing wave?

Andrew Ballard: 43:12 That is so funny. I actually had a hairdo very similar to Robert Plant, long wavy blond hair. I have pictures that would scare the heck out of you.

Paul Pitkin: 43:23 Wow.

Andrew Ballard: 43:23 I've got video that's even scarier.

Paul Pitkin: 43:26 Well that's a podcast in and of itself.

Ken Harvey: 43:28 I think Paul brought that up just so that he could point out that he's the only person, only guy in the room with hair.

Paul Pitkin: 43:34 And you know what, it is kind of flock of seagull's esc. The loop always closes.

Andrew Ballard: 43:42 Well thanks for asking. That was a real fun chapter of my life. And part of kind of getting me on a better track.

Paul Pitkin: 43:49 Not only that, if you were doing that, I can already tell from just listening to you talk about it, but obviously you were a great drummer, a really accomplished drummer, which is-

Andrew Ballard: 43:59 Oh, I just loved it.

Paul Pitkin: 44:00 That's fantastic.

Ken Harvey: 44:01 So two things that you and Paul have in common is work in the non-profit sector because you were March of Dimes, and Paul you were [crosstalk 00:44:12]. Right. And then the second connection is both of you involved in the music industry.

Andrew Ballard: 44:20 I didn't know Paul was involved in the music industry.

Ken Harvey: 44:22 All right Paul.

Paul Pitkin: 44:22 That's why I was so curious about it.

Ken Harvey: 44:24 So Paul, you have to share.

Andrew Ballard: 44:26 You look the part though. You're looking good there young man.

Paul Pitkin: 44:29 I try.

Ken Harvey: 44:32 So go ahead and share Paul. Don't stutter as you say it.

Paul Pitkin: 44:39 So I've been a singer, and I play guitar, and bass, and write songs. So I've been doing that for forever it feels like. Made lot of EPs, going into the studio making EPs. Had songs on the radio, I've had a song on a TV show, national TV show.

Andrew Ballard: 44:57 Wow.

Paul Pitkin: 44:58 Yeah. That was really exciting.

Andrew Ballard: 44:59 That's cool.

Paul Pitkin: 45:00 Played all over the place. Still do it. I really relate to how you talk about the drums really helping you with the other parts of your life. And the other part that I really identified with was when you said the language of music is math. And we're opposite that way. The math part drives me crazy, but you're totally right. Everything is a math equation when it comes to music.

Andrew Ballard: 45:27 Sure. Well you're about rhythm and creative and I'm about keeping the beat.

Paul Pitkin: 45:35 Which is really important, driving the feel. Yeah. Absolutely.

Andrew Ballard: 45:38 You played the bass. There is nothing in my mind more important in a band than the relationship between the bass player and the drummer, 'cause they're driving the groove.

Paul Pitkin: 45:47 Absolutely.

Andrew Ballard: 45:48 But that's fun.

Paul Pitkin: 45:49 Yeah. It's great.

Ken Harvey: 45:50 So I have to ask both of you then this question. So what's the difference in being someone who plays the two instruments that you just referred to and someone being the player? A drummer, a bass player. So you can play something or you can be it.

Paul Pitkin: 46:12 Oh I-

Ken Harvey: 46:13 What's the difference?

Andrew Ballard: 46:14 Interesting concept.

Paul Pitkin: 46:15 Yeah, I would say the difference is I consider myself a singer first, and I play guitar and bass so that I can write songs and play them. I think a guitar player is first of all going to better and also lives his or her instrument. That is how they identify music, they see, they hear music and in fact they see music through the guitar. And I would say in Andrew's case he's probably seeing it through the drum kit. The music is, for me the music feels like melodies going up and down, and for Andrew I'm guessing it probably feels like tempos, and tempo changes, and syncopation and that sort of thing.

Andrew Ballard: 47:02 That's exactly right. I really couldn't put it better. But the notion between playing the drums or playing the guitar and being a guitarist or a drummer, I think back to when I worked with Seahawks and I had a mentor named Chuck Knox, our coach back then. And he would share the difference between an armature and professional. And he said amateurs practice until they get it right. Professionals practice until they stop getting it wrong. And I think that's the key distinction between a professional musician and an amateur.

Paul Pitkin: 47:38 I couldn't say it any better.

Andrew Ballard: 47:40 Yeah.

Paul Pitkin: 47:40 If you're really, if you are really trying to hone your craft people always ... I have always had difficulty sometimes with other musicians 'cause they, well this isn't fun, and I always want to tell them music isn't always fun, music is horrible sometimes. There's nothing worse than being in a studio and trying to get something on the 50th take after you've done it. But that's a great way to put it Andrew. That is, truly. And I imagine that kind of falls in line with other aspects of art and business and life.

Andrew Ballard: 48:14 Absolutely. It really does. It really is a metaphor for personal and professional life.

Ken Harvey: 48:20 So let's ... We're going to wrap up this interview and I'm going to give Andrew, you an opportunity to maybe have some kind of final words. And maybe along these lines, if you want to go this way. You shared something very personal in terms of the brain tumor and your challenges overcoming dyslexia, and it just really struck me what you said in terms of the experience coming through school. And knowing that for this particular episode someone may have been listening to this episode because they were interested in the business aspect of it, of what you were sharing, they may know someone in their family or their circle who is dealing with some challenges that are just really tough to overcome. What would you say to them based upon your experiences?

Andrew Ballard: 49:27 Probably that if you're dealing with challenges, if you're differently abled, et cetera, whatever the condition is that you live with, is ... And this really helped me kind of turn things around, is do not identify yourself with how you are judged by other people. Because other peoples judgment do not define who you are or how you go about life. And so it's really about

taking stock of who you are and not allowing your self-esteem to be established by other people.

- Andrew Ballard: 50:03 And when I was very young my self-esteem was about the people that were teasing me. And when I got older I realized that their judgment didn't define me, nor did my previous failures. And in fact, failure is just a bridge to success. So I would say take heart, don't embody the negative feedback or comments you get from other people, be clear on who you are, who you want to be, and more importantly where you want to go and fixate on that.
- Ken Harvey: 50:40 Well said.
- Paul Pitkin: 50:41 Fantastic.
- Ken Harvey: 50:42 Hey, thank you so much for spending the time with us. We really appreciate your taking time out of your busy schedule. And we're going to have to have you back because I do want to, in a future episode, talk with you more about your TEDxSnoIsleLibrary's talk and some of the things you're working on going forward.
- Andrew Ballard: 51:03 As a result.
- Ken Harvey: 51:03 Yes.
- Andrew Ballard: 51:04 That was a great experience.
- Ken Harvey: 51:05 Yeah. Well thank you. So just a reminder to our listeners, we will have some links up on our show notes page about some of the things that Andrew referred to, whether they were materials and services, resources available through Sno-Isle Libraries, or some of the topics that he touched on as he was sharing with us. You'll find that on our webpage at [Sno-Isle.org/podcast](http://Sno-Isle.org/podcast). And so I'm going to spell that out for you. S-N-O-dash-I-S-L-E.org and then slash podcast.
- Ken Harvey: 51:47 And I want to thank Andrew again for being with us, and we look forward to having him back.
- Andrew Ballard: 51:52 Thank you. It was my honor to be here.
- Ken Harvey: 51:54 Coming up next, book notes. Sno-Isle Libraries encourages readers to take advantage of the many titles available in our collection. All of the books, movies, and music we provide is there for you to enjoy. We have a group of librarians who are

very intent on wedding your appetite. Our reader services group works to connect readers with books and create a community of active readers, music fans, and movie lovers. And in this book notes segment I'm delighted to welcome Jackie Parker. Jackie is the leader of our reader services team. She has suggestions for podcast listeners who have a passion for any of these areas. So welcome Jackie.

Jackie Parker: 52:40

Hi. Thanks.

Ken Harvey: 52:41

So Jackie, what would you like to offer our listeners in this segment?

Jackie Parker: 52:47

I have three titles today that I've recently read that are, I enjoyed, you may also. The first one is Vox by Christina Dalcher. It's about Jean McClellan, who is at the cusp of curing a particularly nasty brain disorder that caused patients to lose the meaning of words, rendering them able to speak but only speak non-sensibly. When a puppet administration is elected to the presidency, essentially creating a theocracy that reverts women to the property of the men in their lives, they lose their jobs, passports, access to books, they're money is deposited into accounts only their closest male relatives can access, and eventually all women and girls are fitted with a wrist counter that monitors the number of words they say in a day. If they go over 100 words, they receive an electrical shock that increases with each infraction.

Jackie Parker: 53:41

But then the president's brother, struck with the very disorder Jean was close to curing, and the rules for this woman change. Vox is clearly a descendant of the Handmaid's Tale with complex questions raised about oppression, compliance, authority, and the importance of language and communication in any form. In addition to Atwood fans, I think anyone who likes thrillers or is interested in civil rights and women's issues will find Vox an addicting, if occasionally claustrophobic read.

Jackie Parker: 54:11

I also have the Garden of Small Beginnings by Abbi Waxman. Lillian is not opposed to gardening, but when the illustrator is told that taking a six week gardening class for a potential client might save the publishing company she works for from going under, she jumps right in. As a widowed mother of two, she brings along her two young daughters and her devoted sister. In the three years since her husband has died, Lillian has finally gotten to a place where she's able to cope with life and her responsibilities. It is in this class where she finally begins to grow and move on. The cast in Lillian's kids center the story with wit and irreverence and a snappy, lively dialogue. It's very much

a feel good book and has put Abbi Waxman squarely in my personal must-read list of authors.

- Jackie Parker: 54:55 If you like Liza Palmer, the City Baker's Guide to Country Living by Louise Miller or Loretta Nyhan's recent Digging In, The Garden of Small Beginnings is definitely for you.
- Jackie Parker: 55:05 The third book I really enjoyed recently is Tougher in Texas by Kari Lynn Dell. It's her third entry in the Texas rodeo series. It's everything that is right about romance. The cast is moving about in the real world, grappling with real world problems alongside their all consuming lives in the rodeo circuit. The male lead, Cole, has Asperger's and struggles to interact with most people, especially in crowded, loud, or chaotic situations, but he's smart, a hard worker, and has a list for everything. Shawnee is not dealing with her many issues and for valid reasons is living loudly, impulsively, and needs no one but herself. She and Cole have crossed paths before and Cole dreads seeing her again when the bosses hire her as the final option after Cole has fired a series of employees.
- Jackie Parker: 55:50 It's a deep but fascinating dive into rodeo culture, of all things, with fully build characters you really would expect to see Dusty from the last roping challenge.
- Ken Harvey: 56:00 Sounds like quite a list.
- Jackie Parker: 56:03 It's three very different books. But I tried to read widely because I know our customers do.
- Ken Harvey: 56:12 And available in our collection for them to enjoy.
- Jackie Parker: 56:14 All three of them.
- Ken Harvey: 56:15 Well excellent. Well thank you very much for those suggestions Jackie. So for our listeners, if you'd like to check out the suggestions you just heard or others from our reader services team, please take a look at the show notes for each podcast episode at [Sno-Isle.org/podcast](http://Sno-Isle.org/podcast). Our special thanks goes to our legacy sponsors, Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation. Your private tax deductible gift to the Sno-Isle Libraries foundation provides seed money to expand and foster extra early learning and life time learning opportunities through innovative library classes, activities, and civic engagement events. Type Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation into your internet search engine to find out more about how your donation can change the lives of preschoolers,

third graders, teens, and life long learners like you or someone you care about.

Ken Harvey: 57:08 If you enjoy this podcast, we'd love you to subscribe so you can receive episodes automatically. Also please consider leaving a rating and a short review on iTunes and Google Play. Your rating and review will make it easier for others to find us.

Ken Harvey: 57:25 We love hearing from our listeners and subscribers, so drop us a line at [CheckItOutPodcast@Sno-Isle.org](mailto:CheckItOutPodcast@Sno-Isle.org), that way you can let us know you left a rating or review and you can also send us questions and comments, especially if you enjoyed or were fascinated by one of our guests. Or maybe you might suggest someone you'd like us to interview. Don't be surprised if we read your comment or answer your question on a future podcast episode. And if you have a great library experience you'd like to share, we'd love to hear it. We might even invite you on the show one day to have an on-air conversation.

Ken Harvey: 58:03 By the way, e-mailers will automatically be entered into drawings for library swag and other potential prizes. Prizes like what you might ask. Well, we may have promotional giveaways from sponsors, so we'll be offering books autographed by authors and event posters with a performer autograph, there may be free theater or performance tickets from time to time. Keep in mind these are prizes provided by our sponsors. No actual public dollars were killed, or harmed, or used in the making of these prizes.

Ken Harvey: 58:36 Be sure to visit us at [Sno-Isle.org/podcast](http://Sno-Isle.org/podcast) for the show notes and the links discussed in this episode. You may discover some other fantastic bonus content in the process. And finally we always invite you to stop by your closest library or visit the library online to find thousands and thousands of titles of books, music, movies, and resources from our friendly, helpful, professional librarians just waiting for you. Check it out today. Thanks for listening.