

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript
Episode #6, "Finding fulfillment (and coffee) through social enterprise"
Sno-Isle Libraries, Sept. 28, 2018



Ken Harvey: 00:00:02 Welcome to episode number six 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: 00:00:15 Coming up in this episode, you'll hear our interview with world-class entrepreneur, Jeff Ericson, where we'll trace his journey towards social enterprises, finding his oasis on Camano Island, and becoming a TEDxSnoIsleLibraries' speaker. He'll also share how he learned to live with purpose and how his views about public libraries have changed.

Cindy Tingley: 00:00:37 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:00:45 Well, welcome back to another episode of Check It Out. I'm your host, Ken Harvey, and I am joined here by smart and talented cohost, Cindy Tingley. Cindy, thanks for being here with me.

Cindy Tingley: 00:00:55 Thank you and hello.

Ken Harvey: 00:00:56 Hey, and we are delighted to have a guest, who's a special quest for me, before us, Jeff Ericson, from the Camano Island Coffee Company. Jeff is the President of the company and he's also the owner of Frozen X-Plosion, which is a smooth and creamy beverage services and distribution company that's actually world wide in scope.

Ken Harvey: 00:01:18 I actually met Mr. Ericson I think a little bit about three years ago as part of our run-up to the TEDxSnoIsleLibraries event in 2015 and had an opportunity to be part of, a minor part, of his coaching team and was really struck by the idea that he shared in his time on the TEDx stage and also about his story and the work that he does as an entrepreneur and a coach to entrepreneurs around the world. So, Jeff, we are delighted to have you with us.

Cindy Tingley: 00:02:01 Yes.

(Continued)

Jeff Ericson: 00:02:01 Thank you so much for having me, Ken. Thank you, Cindy. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Ken Harvey: 00:02:05 Well, we would love to know a little bit about you as we get started, tell us where you grew up and any special memories you have of those years.

Jeff Ericson: 00:02:17 Well I think my childhood, like anyone's, has definitely been part of the formulation of my adult life. I grew up a child of a single mother in Arizona and a learning disabled sister, who was actually older than me, but by default I became the oldest child, and really spent years making sure my sister was taken care of because in the day we didn't have programs that would catch people that fell through the cracks, so there was no welfare, there was no opportunities, and my mother had work to support us. My mother taught me everything I know about being an entrepreneur. She was definitely a scrapper and she always knew how to make ends meet. Living in Arizona was where we ended up, and it was great experience.

Ken Harvey: 00:03:13 What part of Arizona?

Jeff Ericson: 00:03:14 Tucson.

Ken Harvey: 00:03:16 So, within the city or outskirts of the city?

Jeff Ericson: 00:03:18 No, in the city.

Ken Harvey: 00:03:20 So when I think of Tucson I'm always thinking of blast furnace hot.

Jeff Ericson: 00:03:25 Yes, it is.

Cindy Tingley: 00:03:28 I was thinking dust storms.

Jeff Ericson: 00:03:30 That too.

Ken Harvey: 00:03:32 Now, are there also monsoons that come through-

Jeff Ericson: 00:03:35 Sure, absolutely. Absolutely.

Ken Harvey: 00:03:37 Which can cool things down, right?

Jeff Ericson: 00:03:39 Sometimes, yeah. I mean it's an incredibly dry place so the humidity is not a real issue, during monsoons it picks up a little bit. But the nice thing about monsoons is it dumps and then it moves on, so it's certainly not a lasting experience.

Ken Harvey: 00:03:52 So, do you recall, as a child with the family situations that you found yourself in, being a child who was outside playing a lot, or were you inside watching television? How did you occupy your time?

Jeff Ericson: 00:04:10 No, we were of a religious belief that didn't believe in TV and radio and all that so I didn't participate in that, but I found my freedom in work. First, I was a very small child just being industrious in the neighborhood, but then at the age of 12, I started working full-time and had done that ever since. Work for me has represented everything. It's the equalizer for me. It's huge amounts of freedom for me. So when other people dread their work, I always embrace it.

Ken Harvey: 00:04:45 So when you say equalizer explain what you're thinking and feeling when you're saying that.

Jeff Ericson: 00:04:51 Well, I mean without going into too much psychological detail, I was a very overweight child, single mother-

Ken Harvey: 00:05:01 And you're not very overweight now.

Jeff Ericson: 00:05:02 No.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:03 So this is a-

Jeff Ericson: 00:05:04 So I mean a lot of things that will put you on the outs. The great thing about what I call capitalism is you're only different for a while, when you're excellent you become equal, and so for me working hard and achieving success gave me all the emotional kudos that I was looking for and really made me feel like I was part of the people that were winning.

Ken Harvey: 00:05:31 The in crowd.

Jeff Ericson: 00:05:31 The in crowd. I was part of the in crowd, and I really carried that all the way through school. When the football players and all of those groups had their levels of success, I had mine because I was successful in work and could afford to buy some of the things that would allow me to be what I perceived as equal with everyone else.

Cindy Tingley: 00:05:53 So at 12 years old, what did you start out doing?

Jeff Ericson: 00:05:55 Oh my goodness, that would be a whole podcast. Whatever it took! It's really interesting because everyone talks about

business plans and good strategies, I am not one of those. I'm the whatever-it-takes opportunist.

Ken Harvey: 00:06:11 Find the opportunity and get it done.

Jeff Ericson: 00:06:12 Just go for it. Everything from washing dishes, to walking dogs, to doing yard work, to whatever it took. I remember at one point my mother would paint ceramics and I would take them to the mall and sell them in the center of the mall until the police came and told me to leave. And then I sold bubblegum-

Ken Harvey: 00:06:31 You need a license, you know.

Jeff Ericson: 00:06:33 Exactly. And then I sold bubblegum on the front of the sports Stadium in Tucson, one square at a time, whatever it took.

Jeff Ericson: 00:06:43 I learned a very important strategy many years ago, just buy it and break it up and sell it in pieces, and I've done that really my whole life. Whether it's real estate, or whether it's business, it's how do you buy in enough of a volume to get the discount. It's certainly not brilliance, it's just opportunism, and I've practiced that my whole life.

Ken Harvey: 00:07:07 So the school you went to in Tucson, what was the name of the high school? Do you recall?

Jeff Ericson: 00:07:14 Yeah. I think it's been shut down, but in the day it was called Peter Howell Elementary school ... Oh no, I'll just never forget it was great. The principal was literally my father figure and my problem with getting in trouble was never really getting in trouble, it was being mouthy, which I have lost. If I would get mouthy and the teacher would send me to the naughty bench. You were were in fear and trembling on the bench, knowing that Mr. McCurry was going to walk by and you'd get your paddling. All those things are gone now, but I needed a father figure, and he practiced love and he practiced compliments, but he also practiced a firm hand, so he was by default my father figure.

Ken Harvey: 00:08:01 Wow. It's interesting how individuals early in life can really serve such a critical role.

Jeff Ericson: 00:08:09 Absolutely. Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:08:13 Did you like school as you went through elementary school and high school?

Jeff Ericson: 00:08:18 Yeah, I liked it okay. It wasn't my passion, but I liked it. My grades were great. It was easy. All my formal education has been pretty easy for me, but my heart's never skipped a beat about any of it, which is ... Again, people talk about college and people talk about their aspirations for all kinds of things, I can honestly say that's never been my bent in life. I get all my juices out of starting another business.

Ken Harvey: 00:08:47 So then after high school, what was the path from there?

Jeff Ericson: 00:08:51 Well, I didn't really have a choice, I got a music scholarship because I played the violin, and I was forbidden to take that scholarship because the choice ... I had one choice, and it was to go to theology seminary, so that in a great way was what brought me back to the Seattle area to go to seminary and get my degree in being a pastor, of which from day one I knew I would never use, but I was fulfilling the wishes of my family.

Cindy Tingley: 00:09:24 Did you go back and pick up the violin? Have you kept with that?

Jeff Ericson: 00:09:27 I never did! I'm so embarrassed about it. It's still sitting there, looking at me, going, when are you going to use me? But well, I hope the muscle memory is not gone maybe I'll pick it up someday.

Ken Harvey: 00:09:38 So interesting because just ... Let me see, was it this ... I think just the morning I was looking at my old viola from when I was in seventh and eighth grade, and I still have it in the case. Of course, the whole thing is falling apart now, because it's several years later, but there are those influences, they can be people influences, they can be cultural influences, they can be spiritual and religious influences in our lives early on, and they can ... Sometimes they're trying to guide our path and sometimes they're pushing our path and sometimes they're pulling us down a path.

Jeff Ericson: 00:10:21 Right.

Ken Harvey: 00:10:22 So you went down this path of then going to theology school, but you said that there was this bent about business?

Jeff Ericson: 00:10:34 Always. It's just ingrained. I don't think that people can't choose to wake up and be an entrepreneur. I really don't believe that. I think our paths are in us. It's finding those paths and ... Even playing the violin, bringing back that experience, my passion was for conducting the orchestra, being the president of the

orchestra, of course being first chair because there was no room for anything but first chair, and doing fundraisers, and so the path was very organic. I could fight that path by going to seminary or whatever, but the path was there and I would never be comfortable unless I followed it. That's really existed through my whole life.

Jeff Ericson: 00:11:22 In college I remember the dean calling me in and saying, exactly why are you here? Because I always took the least amount of classes and I always worked multiple jobs. He said, you obviously don't have a passion for ministry, and I said, "You're right. How can I get out of here? And that's the last time I'm going to look back." But again, I feel most comfortable and I feel most alive when I'm creating.

Ken Harvey: 00:11:48 So, Jeff, what got you into coffee?

Jeff Ericson: 00:11:50 Well, let's take a step before to kind of explain how my path evolved. I was driven in business, maybe a little over-driven, at the risk of everything else. Literally nothing else in the world mattered, I was going to be successful because to me it represented that I was somebody, that I was as good as the people that were around me, and I achieved it. Because if you want something bad enough, you're going to achieve it. What I tell people when I'm mentoring them is you always give something to get something, and I gave everything.

Jeff Ericson: 00:12:27 At the age of 30 I had a life-changing experience, and you can listen to my TED talk about and that will explain that, but this life-changing experience allowed me to look down on my life like I was at the top of the ladder and realized that I was completely bankrupt. Very successful, but incredibly bankrupt. And all of a sudden all these things in my life, whether it be seminary, being brought up in a religious home, taking care of my mother and sister, all these issues of my life came up to my face and they're like, these are the tensions that create value and you ignored all of them for one goal. Well, that epiphany was life-changing because my life was in a bad state and so I made a dramatic change. We moved to Washington state, I retired at the age of 30-

Ken Harvey: 00:13:22 Moved from where?

Jeff Ericson: 00:13:23 Arizona. Moved my wife and kids up. Didn't know anyone when I moved to Camano Island, and one of the reasons I love Camano Island so much is because they embraced me even though I was a complete outsider.

Cindy Tingley: 00:13:37 How did you pick Washington?

Jeff Ericson: 00:13:40 I went to college in Kirkland, so I was connected to Washington but I had never heard of Camano Island.

Ken Harvey: 00:13:45 So, how did you find Camano Island?

Jeff Ericson: 00:13:47 A Sunday drive. Drove on the island, you know typical type A entrepreneur, no critical just go for it, jump off the cliff and hope there's a parachute! So anyway, it was great. It's been a fantastic. Sometimes the best experiences are the unplanned, spontaneous experiences.

Jeff Ericson: 00:14:07 So anyway, I retired and I had hit the American dream, I thought. The problem is I was way too young, still had way too much energy, I tried golf lessons, I tried ... And nothing. Nothing got my juices going. It was just awful. I'm thinking, I can't do this, I don't know how to retire, I don't like hobbies, I'm not into fishing, I want to do business. I started consulting, and that was the most irritating thing I've ever done because I'm getting paid too much to tell people what to do and when I come back they haven't done it-

Ken Harvey: 00:14:43 They don't take your advice.

Jeff Ericson: 00:14:45 But they want to pay me! At one point I said to the guy that I was consulting, I said, "I'm firing myself from this job," and he said, "But I'm paying you." I said, "If you think that it makes me happy to get paid when I see what a wreck your place is, you got another thing coming. So I'm going to forget this. I'm going to go back into business."

Jeff Ericson: 00:15:05 So here's the whole landscape of how many business are there, and Washington is such an entrepreneurial place and there's so many things out there and I thought I can't do it for money this time, I have to do it for passion. There was a lecture by a man in Seattle who was an international attorney, born in China, grew up in Guatemala, lived in Seattle, he was a mixed up man, his name is Skip Lee, and he started Agros, and he was giving a talk about the agricultural poor in Third World countries and how the harder they work, the more behind they get. I had been involved in the ESOP industry, the employee stock ownership industry, and I said, this makes sense. Something got me, and it was that mix of spirituality, business, definitely profit driven, definitely anti-charity-

Ken Harvey: 00:16:03 But caring.

- Jeff Ericson: 00:16:05 Benevolent. Capitalism is not as ruthless as some people think it is. People are ruthless, but capitalism is really just being defined by your excellence, and excellence comes in many forms, not just profit. There's triple bottom lines all over the place.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:16:21 So I went up afterwards and I said, "You are my Mother Teresa. I totally believe in what you're saying. If you will continue to do your work, I will be the fuel for your engine. I don't want to be the engine. I like resorts, I'm into nice places, I'm not into groveling in villages ... " That has changed over the years, but in the beginning it was like, I'll just write checks, you do the hard work. That has started me on this new path of compassionate capitalism, and it's been the greatest journey of my life. It's never exhausting. It's always energizing. I feel like I was given a second life and a second chance to really define my legacy in a completely different way.
- Cindy Tingley: 00:17:08 Yeah. I was going to say that leads me to think of something you said in your TED talk about the table of capitalism, "We need to quit having dinner parties without the poorest in the world at the table," I love that.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:17:21 We do it all the time. Churches are the most famous for it, they love to have parties in Third World countries, and fly their young people on planes, and dance all over the bodies of the people that are struggling, and it's like a really great party but you forgot who you were there for. And I tell them, why is a church in Seattle down in Nicaragua? Don't they have churches in Nicaragua? Don't they have young people in Nicaragua? Why are you here? And one of the things I love about Agros is you don't see the great white male being the answer. We work with people in the country and we esteem the local communities. It may go a little slower and it may not be real magical because we didn't flood it with money, but the thing that's great is I've never to this day had one of our villagers, and we have 24,000 villagers, I've never had any of them say because of you this. They always stand up, give their dreams and visions and say I worked hard and I made it. Isn't that what every human being really wants, is an opportunity to create their own future and not to have somebody else-
- Ken Harvey: 00:18:31 And a sense of accomplishment.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:18:31 Absolutely.
- Ken Harvey: 00:18:31 Achieving it.

Jeff Ericson: 00:18:32 Absolutely, yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:18:33 Rather than being given it.

Jeff Ericson: 00:18:35 Yeah, exactly.

Ken Harvey: 00:18:38 So compassionate capitalism, is that another name or phrase for social enterprise or social business?

Jeff Ericson: 00:18:46 It can be. You have to remember social business was only coined in 2004. This is a baby, baby industry. Muhammad Yunus came up with the term social business and got the Nobel Peace Prize, but that's not very long ago. I've been at this a lot longer than that. And in the beginning, of course with the theology degree, I called it [Kingdom 00:19:07] business, mission business, businesses mission, we called it everything searching for a term until Muhammad Yunus came up with social business, and that defined it. It put a stake in the ground and it created opportunity.

Jeff Ericson: 00:19:22 Now, this is very different than the old business called cause marketing. This isn't buy a pair of Tome shoes and we'll give a pair to the poor. Where do the shoes get made? Who got helped in the meantime? Did you just give them shoes? That's cause marketing. Social business is when you go through the whole supply chain and you make sure all shadow groups, all disadvantaged groups, are taken care. And at the end of the day, it's never about giving them something for nothing. It's about walking with them. In the American axiom we say, it's better to teach a man to fish than to give him a fish, well, that's a bunch of baloney. Because, first of all, they don't even have a pond. Social business, I come down with a shovel, many shovels, I grab one and all my friends grab others, and I say, let's start digging a pond and I'll show you how. And by the way, when we get that pond dug, let's fill it, let's get some fish going, and I'll help you with marketing and let's start selling the fish at a premium. Let's grow excellent fish. And with that premium, you could own this pond, you can own the land around it, you can start creating a future. That's what social business is all about.

Ken Harvey: 00:20:34 So, is this the nugget of the idea that you shared on the TEDxSnoIsleLibraries stage?

Jeff Ericson: 00:20:39 Exactly.

Ken Harvey: 00:20:42 Let's just shift gears for a second, what made you want to use that platform to get this out? I'm going to lead you into what

the process was like for you, but what got you started down the path?

- Jeff Ericson: 00:21:01 It's very interesting because, Ken, you've talked to me a few times, I am not a very what-motivated person. Anything I need to know I can find on Google so don't try to what me into anything. But I can be why-ed into anything. If I find my why, I'm all over it. So when I was first approached with the TED talk, I said, okay, I'm an entrepreneur, I'm undisciplined, I have plenty of money, so from outside appearances I'm extremely successful, but when it comes to discipline, accountability and pain, this is a weak area for me. So I'm going to take this TED talk as my spiritual journey and I'm going to be submitted to the people in authority and I am going to learn to do something that is not at all normal. I have given thousands of talks, I lecture at universities, I never bring a cue card and I never have a format. Oh my goodness, so the first time I go to my TED talk rehearsal, or whatever you call it, basically they all went, "Okay, we're missing something. I went, "What? This is the way I always do it."
- Jeff Ericson: 00:22:14 So the whole thing was so ... And I'll just use the word, it's a negative word, it was painful. Every time I would drive back to my office I would just be angry and say I'm never coming back, and then I would say no, this is your journey and accountability, go through the process.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:22:31 I had told so many people this was not a fun process. I'll just be honest, it was not a fun process, but the end result was so gratifying to me because I had people that knew what they were doing, coaching me ... The greatest thing, the unintended consequence, because with all journeys we have unintended consequences, is that it has captured so much business for us because the Sno-Isle Libraries system forced me to encapsulate my world, and my thinking, and my life into just a few minutes. I put it on every email that I send out, it's on our website ... We literally send it all over the world, and people respond to me on a daily basis and-
- Ken Harvey: 00:23:14 What do they say?
- Jeff Ericson: 00:23:15 I watched your TED talk, and that is just phenomenal, I learned so much. When I mentor students, the first thing, did you watch my TED talk? No. You got to do that before you can call back. And it what it does, in business we talk about an elevator pitch and being succinct, my life is very difficult to makes succinct, but the TED talk actually allowed me to create my elevator talk, and so it was great.

- Ken Harvey: 00:23:44 Let me just jump in for members of the audience who are hearing us talk about Jeff's TED talk, and I've mentioned TEDxSnoIsleLibraries, what we're talking about is a locally independent TEDx style event that's licensed through TED.com, so something that we obtained a license for, and Sno-Isle Libraries essentially hosted, a set of TED talk opportunities for speakers like Jeff Ericson to step out on a stage and deliver and share an idea that they were passionate about. We received opportunities to present these events in 2015, 2016 and 2017, and so with TEDxSnoIsleLibraries, Jeff was one of, essentially about 50 speakers that stepped out on the stage over the course of three years.
- Ken Harvey: 00:24:54 Jeff, you talked about the process of taking that idea and your story, and shaping into something very succinct, as painful, but gratifying at the end, in some ways it sounds almost like a pregnancy, labor and delivery at the time.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:25:18 It was! My version of it, for sure.
- Ken Harvey: 00:25:20 The closest that a man can come to that.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:25:23 Yeah. Well, I think I've honed a skill of being able to talk off the cuff and connect with people. I remember at the very beginning when I did, they all looked at me and said, "Now type it." I went, "What?" And they said, "Type it." I said, "I'm not typing it. I'm not going to type it. I speak verbally." "No, you type it."
- Ken Harvey: 00:25:46 Like, I don't do that?
- Jeff Ericson: 00:25:47 Yeah. You type it. I went back and I'm like that's going to take me months. What are they talking about? So I went ahead and went through the process, mad the whole time, and typed it and then I went through it, read it to the group, and they said, "Well, it's uninspired." I'm like, "Well, yeah, I typed it!" But each one of these ... It's like an onion, and this is what all great things in life are like onions and you have to peel back layer by layer by layer to get to the core, and what was happening was not the TED talk, what was happening is it was peeling off the layers of superfluous talking and information to get to the essence of who I am and what I was trying to converse, and it became my bull's-eye. So now when I give my tours or I give my lectures, I actually start out with a PowerPoint of my TED talk and go through the basic talking points. It's become an effective way to get to the bull's-eye of what I'm trying to discuss.
- Cindy Tingley: 00:26:51 So definitely some growth in this whole process?

Jeff Ericson: 00:26:54 A lot of growth, yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:26:57 Well, it's interesting, I would just say to you and the audience as a TEDx speaking coach, that it is painful in some ways for us as well because we're experiencing and we know that we're causing pain to the person that we're trying to prepare for the TEDx event, and that stripping away of the layers, trying to get down to the kernel of the idea, can be an excruciating process and a maddening process for some, and yet it is truly amazing what happens when that kernel is exposed and shared from the stage.

Jeff Ericson: 00:27:44 Right.

Ken Harvey: 00:27:46 In many ways, it can be magical.

Jeff Ericson: 00:27:49 Exactly.

Ken Harvey: 00:27:50 So just for the audience's sake, just take us through what it was like for you actually stepping out on that stage as someone who was given, as you said hundreds, maybe thousands of talks, or speeches, or presentations, or whatever ... So you're stepping on the stage and you start delivering this talk and then it's done and you're stepping back off stage, just walk us through what that was like.

Jeff Ericson: 00:28:21 I was ready for the talk, but-

Ken Harvey: 00:28:25 Yeah, we tried to make sure you were ready.

Jeff Ericson: 00:28:26 I was ready, but the person right before me gave just really a life-changing talk. I started crying while she was talking and I'm like, oh crap, this is not good. I got to straighten up before I get out there! And of course, the audience gave her a standing ovation, and then I'm next. That was a little bit of a freakout moment-

Ken Harvey: 00:28:49 Moment of pressure.

Jeff Ericson: 00:28:49 Yeah, a little pressure because she was absolutely amazing. But then I went out and I did my job, I gave my talk and I felt after just a few seconds, clicked it, because my memory muscle took over and there was no ADD randomness going on because I had been disciplined to the point where I had it. That is so great because-

Ken Harvey: 00:29:12 You're welcome.

Jeff Ericson: 00:29:14 Thank you. Every lecture, every talk I've ever given, I walk away going, how did I miss that point? And it feels good to be prepared and know that when you walked away you gave what you needed to give. Also, when things weren't clear, and being coached to create imagery that allowed people to connect to it was huge. My dinner party and the guests at the table, that was a great piece of imagery for me, even now today, to make sure when I'm giving a talk that I talk about every member at the table. And so, in so many ways it was a very valuable experience.

Ken Harvey: 00:29:55 So I just want to remind the audience that we're chatting with Jeff Ericson who's the President of the Camano Island Coffee Roasters company and Frozen X-Plosion. He's been talking about his experiences at TEDxSnoIsleLibraries 2015 event speaker, but let's transition from that, now back to that question about moving into the coffee business.

Jeff Ericson: 00:30:20 Yes.

Ken Harvey: 00:30:21 So you had mentioned that you had met and heard this person who had talked about, I think, Agros, and who had been inspiring to you, and so take this from there, about getting into coffee.

Jeff Ericson: 00:30:37 You know, I didn't really try to derail that question. The truth is when people say why did you get involved in the coffee business I say I'm not in the coffee business. I got involved in the whole social business world. So these are some tidbits that a lot of consumers don't understand, coffee is the second-largest commodity on earth.

Ken Harvey: 00:30:58 The second largest?

Jeff Ericson: 00:30:59 Next to oil, and I couldn't afford to get into oil so coffee was definitely there. We were also in a great time in the Northwest coffee and the Northwest ... Seattle is the mecca-

Ken Harvey: 00:31:11 Synonymous.

Cindy Tingley: 00:31:11 Absolutely.

Jeff Ericson: 00:31:12 So being in the mecca of coffee, this is a great place to start a coffee company. Now, there's a lot of boutique coffee companies, there's very few that are profitable, so stepping out of that 90% that's boutique into the very few that are profitable is unique.

- Jeff Ericson: 00:31:28 The other thing is I don't do anything unless my rules are attached to it, and so from the very beginning I made my list of rules. Number one, absolutely, unconditionally, under no circumstances would there be chemicals used on my coffee. Well, in the day, nothing in coffee was organic, and I insisted on certified organic so it had to be actually USDA certified. The second thing is none of my coffee could be grown without the rain forest intact over [crosstalk 00:32:00] so all of my coffee, to this day, is shade-grown coffee. And then the third thing is this whole movement of fair trade, which in its day was very ambiguous, now it's less ambiguous, but also more bureaucratic, so what does that mean? Is it relationship coffee? Is it fairly trade coffee? What is it? Well, we basically set, from at least two times, the fair trade set price, up to three times the fair trade, because the fair trade price was just too low, you can't make a living, and we wanted to create a living local wage.
- Ken Harvey: 00:32:33 And when you say local wage you're not talking about Camano Island local wage you're talking about for the farmers growing the coffee?
- Jeff Ericson: 00:32:40 Yes. For those people that really just doesn't make sense. Let me drive it home to you, first of all, people think Hawaii has such phenomenal coffee, which is great marketing, not true. It's way down on the quality list. It is so expensive to pay wages for a coffee farmer in Hawaii that to buy a pound of pure Hawaiian coffee ... First of all, you have never bought one, but if you did it'd be \$80, \$90 a pound, maybe more. We're the only place on earth that allows you to blend 10% and 20% Hawaiian and still call it Hawaiian. If I tried to do that with Sumatran, or Nicaraguan, or Ethiopian, I'd be in jail. That's a felony. So it just goes to show how great we have it in this country. These people, when I started, were making \$.40 a day working like crazy. Coffee is very difficult work. I go to these growing regions ... It's not only that the harvesting is difficult, but the slopes are difficult, the altitude is difficult, everything is difficult, and if you actually paid a fair price for the coffee you drink it'd be more in the range of a Coke, but you're paying \$.22 for a cup of coffee. How am I going to create a story and a value so that these people can have a future.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:34:02 Well, I had to make my list of things that were paramount to me, I don't want to create coffee poverty. We have a coffee crisis in the world, the more they grow, the worse it gets. The governments don't understand it, they've created the worst crisis in coffee yet, the mission programs don't get it, a lot of groups don't get it, how are we going to create a difference? And 20 some years later, I'm proud to say that through the

process of good critical thinking, good capitalism and great marketing, we have created that story. Our members will attest to it, we ask from the very beginning that we would not just schlep coffee around, that we would actually have subscribers and, in those boxes that shipped to them, we would tell stories of our people.

Cindy Tingley: 00:34:46 I was going to say, I found it fascinating in just reading through some of the things you have posted about the heartburn related to coffee because I have been a coffee drinker most of my life and I absolutely loved it, but you tell me whole bunch of new stuff because I've been one of those frequent people going, I've had too much coffee I've got heartburn. And the fact that the shade-grown plays such a role in that I had no idea.

Jeff Ericson: 00:35:12 Well, like all things in life if we do them the way God intended us to do them, everything's just fine. It's when man gets involved in it then everything gets screwed up. Coffee is meant to be grown in the shade.

Jeff Ericson: 00:35:23 By the way, this is another thing I love to tell people, for those of you that drink wine and think you're so great for it, wine has 200 chemical compounds, coffee has 800. We are so much more complex than wine. You guys that just think it's coffee, don't even have a clue. If you smother it in milk and sugar and all that, you're not really learning about the flavor profiles of coffee. I say drink it naked, and that's our definition of drink it black. Try to taste it.

Jeff Ericson: 00:35:56 The coffee that I brought you guys today was from Ethiopia and it's growing alongside blueberries, it has a blubbery note to it. It's amazing. Coffee has its own special flavors and nuances, and the land actually creates those flavors. It's not a burnt product, you're not drinking an ashtray, that's what man does. So the things that create your acid reflux in your heart burns are your acidity, sun creates acidity ... Sun is steroids, so we want to grow coffee in the shade so it grows slowly and cultivates its character traits. We don't want to over-roast it, that's a carcinogen that's creates ash stacking and all kinds of issues, and you want to keep it fresh. People don't even know that coffee's a bakery item that has to be drink fresh. If you drink it fresh, you're going to be great. But if you go to the grocery store and buy year-old coffee, you're going to have issues.

Cindy Tingley: 00:36:50 Fascinating.

Jeff Ericson: 00:36:51 Don't get me started on the coffee thing, I'll just get going.

- Cindy Tingley: 00:36:53 I know, I could listen to it all day because, honestly, I have learned so much.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:36:56 Even if you do everything right and you have great coffee and you're one of those 2% of people that just have an amazing acid issue, then you do the last thing, which 100% of the time works, and that's you brew it cold. If you brew coffee cold, you take all of the acidity out of it. So when you drink coffee drinks, and I'm not talking actual coffee drinks, drinks with coffee flavors, when you eat ice cream with coffee, when you have candy with coffee, that is usually a cold-processed coffee, so that the spark in the coffee does not take over, the flavor. Well, the same with cold brew coffee, if you drink cold brew coffee you're going to get a thick, heavy coffee but you're not going to get any of the acidity or the issues that are going to affect you.
- Cindy Tingley: 00:37:47 Were you always this into coffee or was it something you've grown more into with the business?
- Jeff Ericson: 00:37:51 I think I've always drank coffee, but the more I know about it, the more I absolutely love it. It's just such a great agricultural crop, and more importantly every time I talk about coffee my mind is with my farmers and my people whose lives have been transformed, the women that have come to me and said their daughters will never have to live the life that they lived because they have a future. So, why do I never get tired of coffee? Because coffee has been the greatest thing for good, it's also been used as one of the greatest things for evil, so we have to make sure that it's used for good.
- Ken Harvey: 00:38:28 So tell us a little bit more about the number of countries that you and your work have been dealing with farmers in. Yeah, let me just stop there.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:38:42 Well, through the Agros organization there's very few countries, probably 10, 12 countries, but through affiliated programs where Agros can't go we work with other groups that are into the whole human rights process and so forth. Then the great thing is the unintended part of this is we've had so many other human rights programs that have come in to purchase the product because of their bent and we've actually created social business opportunities in India, and Korea, and places where they're not coffee-growing regions. So again, I say coffee is a story stick, and that story stick gets passed from one tribe to another, from one generation to another, from one country to another, at the end of the day we all have the same needs, the same desires, the same wants, I don't care what anyone tells you that there's far-right, far-left, the point is we all have these

basest instincts and these basest desires, and coffee is that warm fuzzy that can connect people from one group to another with those basest desires.

- Ken Harvey: 00:39:45 So you mentioned that with your coffee subscribers that you have ways of sharing stories of those who essentially help originate this coffee to them, do you want to share a story or two?
- Jeff Ericson: 00:40:06 Yeah, I'd love to. We also work with influencers, and when we have an influencer like a radio host or whatever, then that's through our other company, Buzz Box. Same coffee, just a different box because people in Alabama say what's Camano Island Coffee? So we had to have a different name that ... Yeah, I'll give a great example.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:40:25 I was in Nicaragua one year, and it was probably my worst year in business. I was going through the villages and a woman was laying on the porch of the Argos office in Managua, and she had slit her wrists and she was dying. She was bleeding all over the porch. I'm not a real good one for people that are bleeding so I grabbed the Argos people and screamed and yelled, get out here now, this woman ... They nursed her back to health. End of story. That's the end of my story. It was that small. It was that insignificant. It was that little. I left and years later, in Nicaragua, I actually had my son on this trip, and we go into a village and this woman comes running up to me and gives me a hug and she says, "Do you remember me?" First, no, but then as she started talking, I did, she was the woman. I was with some business executives, giving them a vision trip of the villages to show them by purchasing the product what they've been able to do, remember, we don't accept charity so I have to show what purchases can do, and she takes us over to the hut that she has built with her daughters, two daughters, and she has these white painted sticks in front like a picket fence with flowers and this little 12 x 12 hut, and she shows us the new concrete floor she just had poured, which is very important in Third World because dirt floors are one of the worst causes of sickness. And then she took us to the outdoor kitchen ... Second, maybe the most dominant reason for illness in Third World is the kitchen being in the hut because of the respiratory issues.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:42:12 She's showing the outdoor kitchen and she's actually taking her six-month corn reserves, which is one of our initiatives, and she's mashing it up in the stone bowl and she's telling these people how she makes corn tortillas, and I'm looking at this woman and I'm mesmerized because she is every bit the CEO of

any CEO I know, but she's the CEO of her home. But she owns it. There's no pleading. There's no sorrow. But as she's talking, she makes a statement, she says "Seven years ago I made a really bad decision," this is the decision she made, she had three daughters, one was sick, she had to sell her oldest daughter to get enough money to pay for her sick daughter, and no woman should ever have to do that. No human should ever have to do that. But when you have no opportunities you make decisions that you will regret the rest of your life. And of course as soon as she did, she was despondent, she tried to kill herself, and that's where I walked in for just those few moments.

Jeff Ericson: 00:43:18 So here we are in the village and she says, "Seven years ago, I made a really bad decision, but I know because of where I am today my daughters will never have to make that decision." That was that one moment in my life where I say everyone has goals, everyone has desires, but everyone always wonders when those goals and those desires ... Are they really what I should be doing? When she told that story, I ran out of the hut, through the hut, into the coffee fields, my son came running after me and he's like, "What's wrong?" I said, "I couldn't quit doing this, even if I was homeless." It was the day God allowed me the opportunity to realize that I had surpassed my goals and moved into my purpose, and my purpose was that one woman and that one conversation and that one moment. I don't need really need anything else. When things happen I just say, thank you that's extra, but my life was exchanged, 20 years of easy life was exchanged, for one woman's life transformation and it all happened without her getting a charity check.

Jeff Ericson: 00:44:29 So when people come to me and say I'm a customer, I always say to them you're not my customer, no one that drinks my coffee is my customer, my farmer is my customer, you are just the lucky person that gets to participate in an excellent product that they worked so hard to grow. You better just count yourself lucky that you found it. But when I go to my villages, I look at those people and I say they are my customers, I must serve them, I must do this. When people save why are you in the coffee business? I say I'm not in the coffee business. So it's kind of a different take on it, but it's helped me to find my purpose in life.

Ken Harvey: 00:45:07 Wow.

Cindy Tingley: 00:45:08 Yeah. Powerful.

Ken Harvey: 00:45:10 Well, you and I have had a conversation recently about public libraries, and you mentioned to me that you had a point of view

about libraries and that your sense of Sno-Isle Libraries and the public library had changed a little bit. Do you recall that conversation?

Jeff Ericson: 00:45:46 Yeah.

Ken Harvey: 00:45:47 Do you mind sharing what you're thinking is these days from a business person's perspective, a caring capitalists perspective, is there still a need for a public library? In your view, anything about Sno-Isle Libraries that has surprised you, or intrigued you, or you've seen as valuable?

Jeff Ericson: 00:46:28 Yes, I won't-

Ken Harvey: 00:46:29 I'm not asking all that just to-

Jeff Ericson: 00:46:31 No, no, no, no, no. I won't go into too much detail or I'll never have anybody buy my coffee, but I am a very strong libertarian and I absolutely despise government programs and things that are supposed to solve all our problems when they never do, they make the problem worse. I'm used to walking with people to create their own solutions, so to me the library was just one more make-work government social program for people that couldn't make their own way in life. That was how uninformed I was.

Jeff Ericson: 00:47:04 I had developed this property, this downtown Camano Island, and owned everything except for one building, which the library actually worked to get and they created a library, and I'm like, great, now I got to be in a complex with a social program, but I'm going to to keep my mouth shut and smile for the community. They come and ask for money and I'm like, catch you later. But it's been interesting because I've been in the complex with them for however many years, eight years, whatever, and I've seen how important the library is to community, and I guess first of all I'd like to say, as ignorant as I was, the library is not about books, although that's an important part, it also has become ... For me, I bring people over there all the time that are new to the community because it's a huge connecting point, and we have the good fortune of a really nice library, and a fireplace, and a reading room-

Ken Harvey: 00:48:10 Let me just jump in, you say nice library, it was a former restaurant.

Jeff Ericson: 00:48:14 It was totally a farmer restaurant. It wasn't so nice when it got started, but yes.

Ken Harvey: 00:48:20 They vacated it and was renovated because the community decided to vote the-

Jeff Ericson: 00:48:24 Yes. I remember the first day I walked in, I thought, oh great, all I'm going to think of is pizza or something, and I walked in and I went wow, this is really nice! I'm not feeling pizza at all. It's great. But when someone is new to our community, we are a beautiful community, but like all communities in the Western part of the world, we're busy working and then we come home and we lock our doors. Isolation is very huge in the Northwest also, and so the libraries become a safe zone for people to connect and meet when they come to the island. I take them in there and introduce them to someone so that they can connect. Of course, the people in the library that work there are very caring, but that's not the issue, it's a neutral zone where people can come and connect, and that's been huge.

Jeff Ericson: 00:49:14 The other thing is, in a small community, it's great in the summers and after school to have all the kids programs at the library has, and they have it in my amphitheater area. The kids are doing everything from art, to reading times, to whatever, but again, it's a safe thing for kids to do. The library has never been a divisive part of our society, which I absolutely hate divisiveness on either side. I won't let one political party or the other even have a voice in my complex because I'm about finding common ground, and the library has been so great about common ground.

Jeff Ericson: 00:49:53 The TEDx, who would've thought the library was involved in business development? I never thought that.

Cindy Tingley: 00:50:00 Back to walking with, right?

Jeff Ericson: 00:50:01 Oh my gosh! And so I'm doing these TEDx and I'm sending it out and I'm getting international clients, I'm thinking I didn't have to pay the library a commission for this! So all of these things are-

Ken Harvey: 00:50:12 Is it too late?

Jeff Ericson: 00:50:14 Yes, it is too late.

Ken Harvey: 00:50:14 No, that's a joke. That's a joke.

Jeff Ericson: 00:50:15 Story's over! No. I remember when I was doing the TEDx I saw a poster, it was a wheel of all the things the library does, and I remember looking at it and I remember during that time thinking, well, I though they just did books. And now I just see

that circle getting wider and wider, and I really appreciate the library in our community. I really appreciate it.

Jeff Ericson: 00:50:49 Do I believe in social programs and do I believe that these things can really fix problems? No, I probably still have the same belief, but I make an exception for the library because they have really immersed themselves in the society of Camano Island, and I'm thankful for it.

Ken Harvey: 00:51:07 Well, I know that it is very important to us, as a library system, to serve as a community connection point, a doorway to knowledge and information, a way of creating a sense of community. The point you made about the surprise about the libraries essentially helping walk alongside business and economic development is a point that a previous guest that we had, Andrew Ballard, who actually ... A businessman, cohead of a business marketing firm and a previous, I think I mentioned TEDxSnoIsleLibraries speaker, made about his work with the library helping other entrepreneurs understand the basics of getting started, new business startup and then getting through first year, second year, and then how to accelerate your business growth toward success, and that's an important part of the work that we're doing. One of our strategic priorities to come alongside business, and business people, and entrepreneurs because their success helps maintain the success of a region, a community and a region. So it's really important that we have a full wheel that ensures that no ones left behind.

Jeff Ericson: 00:52:44 Well, and I think we all talk community because that's the thing to do, but acting in a community-oriented way is a little different, and so the thing I've appreciated about the library in my complex is that they always put their best foot forward in now how they can build the community of the complex because it is our downtown environment, how do we represent that to our neighbors? They have always been a partner with us in everything that we've done, instead of just being one group that owns one building. And so in so many ways that does build community within our group.

Ken Harvey: 00:53:21 Well, we appreciate the opportunity to be a part of your complex and of having had you work with us as part of the TEDxSnoIsleLibraries' effort. I'm wondering, in the final minute that we have, what you might say to individuals out there who may have a dream of starting a business or doing something that helps take their business to another level? Just in terms of that table that you talked about as part of your TEDx talk, what would you say to them?

- Jeff Ericson: 00:54:03 I get asked this a lot when I speak at universities ... I only have a minute? I better go fast.
- Ken Harvey: 00:54:09 Remember your training from the TEDx.
- Cindy Tingley: 00:54:11 There you go!
- Jeff Ericson: 00:54:11 So first of all, get mentors. Mentors make your journey and your path so much better. So ask people that have been on the journey before, that's really monumental. Nothing is really that new under the sun. But secondly, I don't care whether you work in a corporation, I don't care whether you're self-employed as an entrepreneur, you're an accountant, there's a new wave coming and it's coming and it's strong, and that is of value added form of capitalism. Our young people are screaming out words like socialism, which I absolutely detest that word, but they're screaming out those words, but those words are not what they're saying. What they're saying is there has to be more to life than making a profit. You have to be helping the environment, you have to be helping the workers around you and you have to be helping the people in your supply chain. In that desire for meaning, there is truth that will boil its way to the top, and what I call it is the ageless, no man is a vacuum in himself. Everybody works with in their village. Capitalism is great because we can all strive for excellence and know that we achieve when we achieve excellence, we achieve equality and money and all that. Fear words are words that keep you suppressed. Abundant words are words that bring you up and above the ceiling. I'm into the abundant words. I don't want to speak the scarcity words.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:55:40 So I love capitalism, love it, I'm unashamed, I love our young people searching for the truth, they will not aimlessly do what we did, they will search for truth, and bigger is not better to them, better is better to them, and so I love the fact that the next generation is going to fix a lot of things and make things better. Grab mentors, get knowledge from mentors. You're not always going to get that from a book. Get out there and grab mentors and look at their journey, good and bad.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:56:13 I'd like to end with one analogy I have from Skip, who is my Pope, my mother Theresa, and started Agros. He said he had a vision, and it's a story that's been told before and it's really just an analogy, that he died and the angels ushered into his room, his decision room, his story room, and there was a huge tapestry hanging from the ceiling. He looked at the tapestry and he's like, oh my God, that's is the ugliest thing I've ever seen. There's all these random threads coming out, the colors don't

make sense, this is one screwy ... And the angel said this is your life, and he's like, oh boy, I really messed up. I have failed this whole journey. The angel grabbed him by the arm and took him to the front of the tapestry and said, this is what God created. You had intention, you had purpose, you made your moves, God turned it into the most beautiful tapestry. I think that for me is my analogy of life. I am such a screw-up, I make so many mistakes, I fail so often, but I know my creator is on the other side of the tapestry, making something beautiful. If we all would just remember that our Creator will make our journey worthwhile, just move. I think that a lot of things will get fixed.

- Ken Harvey: 00:57:35 We've been talking with Jeff Ericson, the President of Camano Island Coffee Roasters and Frozen X-Plosion, and have spent a delightful hour with him, along with my cohost Cindy Tingley. Jeff, thank you very much.
- Jeff Ericson: 00:57:50 Thank you.
- Cindy Tingley: 00:57:50 Thank you.
- Cindy Tingley: 00:57:53 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.
- Ken Harvey: 00:58:00 Our special thanks goes to our legacy sponsor, Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation.
- Ken Harvey: 00:58:05 Your private tax-deductible gift to the Sno-Isle Libraries foundation provides seed money to expand and foster extra early learning and lifetime 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 lifelong learners like you, or someone you care about.
- Ken Harvey: 00:58:34 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: 00:58:51 We love hearing from our listeners and subscribers, so drop us a line at 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: 00:59:29 By the way, emailers 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 maybe free theater or performance tickets from time to time. Keep in mind these are prizes provided by sponsors. No actual public dollars were killed, or harmed, or used in the making of these prizes.

Ken Harvey: 01:00:01 Be sure to visit us at 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.