

SEEKING THE EXTRAORDINARY

Ep 16 - Promise and Deliver: Alex Sheen

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Michael Nathanson: Welcome fellow seekers of the extraordinary, welcome to our shared quest. A quest, not for a thing, but for an ideal. A quest, not for a place, but into the inner unexplored regions of ourselves. A quest to understand how we can achieve our fullest potential by learning from others who have done or are doing exactly that.

May we always have the courage and wisdom to learn from those who have something to teach. Join me now in seeking the extraordinary. I'm Michael Nathanson, your chief seeker of the extraordinary.

Brace yourselves my friends! On this episode of Seeking the Extraordinary, you are about to get an electrifying jolt of energy and inspiration, possibly enough, and of the kind that could change your life. I say that because today's guest has already done that for countless people. In fact, he started an international social movement and nonprofit organization, and he's not even 40 yet. Himself inspired by a personal tragedy, today's guest founded "because I said I would," a movement and organization dedicated to the betterment of humanity through promises made and kept. He and his organization are changing lives through an innovative concept called promise cards, as bolstered by chapters of volunteers, character education programs in schools and global awareness campaigns.

One of the world's foremost experts on accountability and commitment. Our guest is a five-time TEDx Talk speaker, an author, a podcast host, and an internationally recognized humanitarian. His work has been featured on the Today Show, Good Morning America, The Steve Harvey Show, CNN, Fox News, and many other programs.

A highly sought-after speaker. He donates 100% of his speaker fees and by the way, he's made over 700 worldwide speeches and donated some \$5 million already. Please welcome the extraordinary Alex Sheen. Welcome Alex.

Alex Sheen: Hey, how's it going? That is a, that is quite the introduction. I appreciate that. That's given me some self-esteem over here.

Michael Nathanson: You are every word of it. I'm dying to have you tell our guests more. I'm dying to learn more as well. I've spent, several weeks now researching you and learning about you and "because I said I would," and I actually think that while you are certainly gaining a lot of traction and many people do know you, many of our audience members will not. And I think it would be helpful if you could start by talking about "Promise Cards" and "because I said I would" generally.

Alex Sheen: Yeah. You know, they came from to me from a interesting part of my life. You know, my dad was a man of his word. If he said he was going to be there for you, he showed up, you know, handshake means something kind of guy.

Unfortunately, my dad was diagnosed with stage four, small cell lung cancer. He smoked cigarettes for most of his life. Now he quit years before he was diagnosed. Sometimes things just don't work out. My father, initially had the cancer almost kicked, according to the x-rays and scans, but it came back into his lungs is spread into his liver, into his pancreas and into was brain.

On September 4th, 2012. My father, he passed away, you know, in our family home. And I was asking him my family to give my father's eulogy and speak to his greatest characteristic and his greatest quality as a man. And I kept coming back to this thought of the importance of a promise. I mean, Michael, even in you, you and your life for anybody who's listening right now, we all know someone who's reliable, like who is that most reliable person in your life, the name might just come straight into your head.

But we also have the answer to the question who is the least reliable person in your life. And I think many of us are tired of living in a world of broken promises. And we also can very quickly understand how the world would change if we just did what we said we were going to do. Right? And so with that, I gave you father's eulogy.

I introduced that concept of a promise card. For those who are listening, just visualize, it's about the size of a business card. It says, "because I said I would" on the front, on the back there's literally nothing else. All you do is you write a promise on the card, you give it to someone, you tell them I'm going to fulfill this promise.

And when I do, I earn the card back. It's a symbol of my honor, my respect, it's my property. I'm coming back for it. You go, you fulfill your promise, you earn your card back and you keep it as a reminder that perhaps you are a person of your word. Someone like my dad was to me. So, I offered to send 10 of these cars to anybody, anywhere in the world at no cost to anyone.

And I guess it's where the story really started to take a turn.

Michael Nathanson: Wow. And so the name, "because I said I would," I do I understand correctly, that came from a eulogy, you delivered at your father's funeral.

Alex Sheen: Yeah. It was the title of my father's eulogy, but its origin of the name is a little counter intuitive I'll explain that. My dad never said, because I said, I'm going to do this because I said I would, he never said that. But what he would say, what he would say is, oh your mom said she was going to do this. And you said you were going to do this, and you know, your brother. And, you know, I kind of had an angry dad, right.

He was like, you know, an angry dad. Right. You know, some of us know what that's like. And, and part of the reason I would discover and just kind of begin to understand was the part of the reason why he was angry is because he did what he said he was going to do, but other people weren't. And he just couldn't understand why that was, you know?

If you made a promise, why wouldn't you keep it? So, so that, that thought of my father honoring his promises and, and trying to take the energy of not saying, because you should, or because you said you would, but really pointing that back on oneself and having a sense of pride in the words that we have and helping that reach our goals, not just for ourselves, but for the betterment of humanity and charitable purposes, you know, that's really how the name came to be.

Michael Nathanson: So, the concept, I'm going to get to some of your TEDx talks soon. I think I heard in one of your TEDx talks and I listened to all of them, but I think I heard you say something that the world is built on our promises. And so, I'm paraphrasing, you may not have used those exact words. This is now much more than sending out some promise cards.

Do I understand correctly that you have now delivered some 13 million promise cards around the world? I think in over 150 countries, is that correct?

Alex Sheen: Yeah, we're at 178 countries, so I think we were missing like 17 or so countries. I can't remember what the count of sovereign nations is right now, but they've gone around the world, and I think part of it is, is because it doesn't matter what language you speak. It doesn't matter the color of your skin, how much money you make, how old you are or who you love for at least this one thing we all understand the importance of a promise, it's like core and elemental to human existence. If you were to talk to a historian or an anthropologist who studied human culture, and through that found an isolated tribe, a group of people who knew only of themselves still in that isolation, you and see the importance of a promise living every single day.

I think there are biological reasons, literally why we care so much about commitments, about promises, about broken promises. I think they are deeper psychological things behind this cause that were somewhat accidental. I mean, I was just trying to say goodbye to my dad, you know, but it turns out that these words and this concept is just a deeply human.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. And I was, I was researching some of the promises that have been made that you've shared with the public and some of the promises are what someone might expect with a mission like yours, things like I'm going to recycle, or I'm going to help educate others. Or I'm going to give a certain amount of charity or I'm going to donate a certain amount of my time.

But some of them, I think I read one of them was I'm not going to commit suicide. I'm not going to take my own life. And I'm going to love myself more.

Alex Sheen: Yeah I remember one promise card, a young woman handed me at a college that said on December 28th, I will testify against my rapist. No matter how hard it may be for me.

Michael Nathanson: Wow.

Alex Sheen: She felt that as unfair as her life has been through that sexual violence, she reflected on accountability and realized that, you know, there's, there's no one else that can hold this man accountable. And if I don't do it, no one else can. So, really she wasn't making that promise to seek a sense of justice or even for herself, she was, she said she made that promise for a complete stranger that she'll never meet. That if he gets away with this, then maybe he'll just do it again. So sometimes the promises that people make, they're obviously very serious. They have consequences beyond just an inspirational story, a click, a share, or some kind of social media moment. You know, these are real people, these are genuine struggles and it's also true that while in this case the promise is kept, a lot of these promises aren't you know, you can make a commitment and intent is great, but intent and \$4 buys you a cup of coffee.

I mean, intent is not enough. So that's why our programs have expanded well beyond just promise cards. That's just kind of how things got started. But what I would come to realize is that in these, the seriousness of these promises, a lot of people didn't know how to keep promises like they didn't have the skill so inspire them as much as you want, give a bunch of Ted talks, right? Get a million views, go on The Today Show blah, blah, blah. That's not going to change someone's skill-set, right?

That's a flash in the pan emotion that we just doom school pack anyway. So that, that's why I'm so proud to have programs in schools and prisons or work with juvenile detention centers to help build self control in a practical way through habits and tactics.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Yeah. And I I'm going to come to the Ted TEDx talks later, but just to skip around a little bit, one of your TEDx talks is entitled something to the effect of why people suck at making promises and it's good effective title and it's right there for you. And it's pretty clear what you're talking about and you were just touching on this a little bit that we're not necessarily good at making promises. Could you speak to, I learned a lot listening to that Talk could you speak a little bit to the message and some of the things you talked about as to why we suck at making promises?

Alex Sheen: Yeah. And it's actually, I'll say this, Michael it's, we're good at making promises. We're not good at keeping them. It's that side of things that becomes the challenge. And to really understand that, and I'm going to share a couple of perspectives that aren't in that TEDx Talk, one is, is really look at the definition of what are promises from, like a dictionary perspective, right? A statement telling someone you'll definitely do something or something will certainly happen in the future. The future. That's the biggest word here. When you make a promise, quite literally like literally you are predicting the future. That is a very hard thing to do, right? And the mechanics of that breakdown in a lot of different ways, one of the lesser appreciated ways that actually happens a lot is the fallibility of human memory.

Dr. Elizabeth Loftus has a, a Ted talk and, and great research around, around this topic. But I don't think she mentioned it in her research, but as I was digging deeper into this concept, you know, the average American speaks 15,942 words a day. You do not have the biological capacity to remember everything that you say, and a portion of what you say, you know, even if it's 1% in a day are promises.

Oh yes, I'll do that. Oh, of course. Sure. You respond to a text. You press accept to a Facebook invite or whatever it is. And if the volume is just beyond our memory. So if we don't write things down, if we don't keep a good calendar it's just going to break down. And then when you go to that person and you say, oh man, I'm sorry.

I forgot. Well, that's actually a very easy excuse to use that people don't really actually believe. And so if your integrity, if your character, if you value that as almost an asset, let's say, right? Like your reputation is as important to you, then you can't leave it up to the chance of you just forgetting and other people aren't going to do that either.

You know? So. I would discover why people are good at keeping promises in a number of different ways. A lot of people want to just talk about motivation and staying inspired and how do you wake up? And what's your exercise routine and this, that, and the other. And some of it is just like, I write it down, you know, I put it in my calendar, so I don't forget it.

And that saves me 30% of the time. I don't know. It's not actually interesting. And that's the other part of the tips and tricks and advice. Everyone's looking for a silver bullet. Everyone's looking for a perspective that no one else has ever said before, but the blocking and tackling of what it takes to get something done is actually sometimes boring is sometimes right in front of your face and it's whether or not you're going to do it.

And so that's, that's how I see some of these problems, like memory.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah, memory is a big part of it. And you speak to people being overly ambitious in their promises. And you just spoke to it a little bit now, just the difference between being able to predict the future and making a promise. One of the examples you gave, I believe was a young college athlete who said she was going to win the Division 3 Championship in whatever it was that she was participating in. And you said to her, what?

Alex Sheen: Yeah, you know I said I don't think you can promise that. That's a goal. That's not a promise. A promise is that you are going to show up to practice on time. A promise is that you're going to have and develop the self control, not to get an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty that can cause a turnover. You know, you can promise a lot of things that may add up to that goal, but you can't promise, promise that, and, and when you talk about that ambition,

I think that's where the blurred line comes in, where people are promising things that are actually beyond their capacity.

You know, we're a non-nonpartisan, nonpolitical, nonprofit. So I'll just give a small example though, that feeds into that part of life. You know, politicians will promise things that literally are not in the capacity of that branch of government, right? Like the Executive Branch promising something the Legislative Branch is only capable of doing or the Judicial Branch promising something that only the Executive Branch can do.

You know? And so I just give that as a, sort of a colloquial, example that we can all kind of understand from our days in social studies to say, yeah, you should only promise what's in your capability, but people tend to get grandiose. They want to make that other person feel secure. They like the idea of this movie-like moment of promising the end result. But sometimes that's not what we should be committing to again, what we should be committing to is a lot more tactical, tangible and boring.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah and those are easier to keep I infer from your speech because you talk about the concept of sometimes we can almost see ourselves as two different people. If I make a promise now, when I'm supposed to be thinking about it, maybe two years from now, I may be an entirely different person at that point. I'm not thinking about what I was back when I made the promise.

Alex Sheen: And so, and it's not bad to have goals. I got ton of them, right? And I take them very seriously and I work them on each and every day.

They just, to most people, they sound like goals and promises sounds similar, but they're very different and they just should be applied differently and has real consequences, not just semantic ones.

Michael Nathanson: Great. As I said, I learned so much from that Ted Talk. It was very insightful. Highly recommended. And you can check Alex out by just looking up Alex Sheen, S H E E N or "because I said I would" and just put TEDx next to it and you'll find all of his talks.

Alex Sheen: Yeah. Even on our website, becauseIsaidIwould.org/Ted. All of my Ted talks are listed there.

Michael Nathanson: Thank you. Speaking of your website, I spent quite a bit of time on it and a lot of interesting stories and very inspirational. And one of the things that I focused on was, most organizations, including my own, we talk specifically about values. You have an Elements of Honor list, and you talk about, I'm going to let you talk about whichever of them you want to talk about, but I found it interesting how you speak about each of them specifically in the context of your mission and around promises made and kept. Do you want to speak a little bit to some of your elements of honor?

Alex Sheen: And Yeah. When I look at those, those values, I think the most important thing to start with is how do you use them? Because the thought of values, core values, principle. I mean, this is not, again, it's a blocking and tackling thing. That's not that interesting, but its application I think should be kind of specific.

And I like to use those values. Things like compassion, honesty, self-control, sacrifice. We have seven. I like to use those as a filter for my decision-making, in a literal sense, I will say out loud, Alex, are you doing what is honest? Alex, are you using your self-control? Alex, are you making a sacrifice if needed? Right.

I just say the word with a question and I filter through that. It's honestly not that different than someone at NASA using the scientific method. Right? When you come to a problem in that field, you run through the six steps of the scientific method and you come out on the other side with a better answer, right?

That protocol is very important, even though it may seem basic. And, and I wonder how often people are doing that, right. Are making decisions with a protocol. Because I feel that in most of my life, I react with my five senses and just the spur of that moment. Right. I tell myself, oh, this is the quote unquote right thing to do.

If you were to ask me in the heat of that moment, while I'm making the decision, what does right thing mean? You know, I, I'm not sure if I would have a firm answer in past days, but with this, come out on the other side with a better answer, a more consistent way of living my values and honestly quicker, because before I lived this way, I really would spin my wheels on a decision that I eventually would make maybe a week later, maybe a month later. But then I lost all the opportunity costs that that promise that impact could have had. I was going to end up doing the same thing anyway, but I just was so slow because I didn't have confidence in my decision. Cause it was, cause I shouldn't have, because I didn't have a process for my decision.

There was no foundation for confidence versus now I'm like, okay, I run through the list. I think this is, this is the right thing to do according to these principles. And then even when I make a mistake, Which of course I do constantly. Right. I, at least I can say to myself, you know, I went through a process.

I try to be reasonable, but you can't predict everything ahead of you and I'm not going to make the best decisions, but I did this at least the right way and whatever may have happened. Yes. I shouldn't be held accountable for, but I gave it a fair shot at a good decision.

Versus a lot of times I felt in the past, I hadn't. So that's how I apply things. But speaking to the seven specifically, my favorite two are self-control. There are actually four different types of self-control. If you really kind of look into it, I won't go into that in the moment, but I do think that self-control would change the course of humanity.

We don't teach self-control in school. I think that might be a good idea, but then also the number one for me is compassion, because you can make a promise to do terrible things. People spend their whole existence doing that. A promise alone is not a good thing. It's gotta be pointed in some direction.

And so alleviating suffering, bring happiness to people, establishing peace, the components of compassion. That's really what this charity is about. Not just keeping any promise.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Terrific. I love that. You've made some pretty big promises yourself over the years. Do you want to speak to some of the things you've done?

Alex Sheen: Yeah, I'm extra dumb. You know. I once volunteered or promised to volunteer at 52 different nonprofits one each week for a year, I promised to walk across the entire state of Ohio in 10 days to raise funds for those three Cleveland women who were held captive in a house for 10 years. If you remember that story, about eight or nine years ago? I once made a promise to pick up trash for 24 hours and walk like 40 miles, just picking them up. I mean, I can mention a bunch of different things, but what I wanted to do in, in these commitments is of course make the impact of them, but also learn the lessons myself.

I mean, I could read promise card messages all day, but some learning is experiential. So pushing myself to the limit with my commitments, not only just hearing what our supporters and all of these promise cards said, but, you know, experiencing those challenges myself, I think it was only fair given the position that I'm in.

And so, yeah, it's been a, it's been a process and after what will be nine years next, next week is our nine-year anniversary of my father's passing. You know, I've, I've tripped across a lot of lessons

Michael Nathanson: Yeah and you've written a book and, you've got a podcast all under the, "because I said I would" brand. And it just strikes me as you're using multiple forms of communication, to provide the same consistent messages and stories. And I think storytelling was of course, a very important way of communication as people. Any other stories that our listeners might be interested in hearing? Stories about promises made and kept?

Alex Sheen: And Yeah, I'll share one of ours that is undoubtedly the most viral promise story that we've ever shared. I remember this is about 2013. And I'm in Lakewood, Ohio, which is right next to Cleveland it's somewhere in the summer-time. And I'm down in this Metro Park area, quite literally just finished a adult league kickball game, right? Like there's like the high skill level and the low skill level. I was in a low Thursday adult kickball league game. And I'm walking back to my car, after what I can only suppose is a victory. And I'm looking at my phone at the Facebook account for "because I said I would," and I see a message and I know it's cliché, but I literally stopped walking.

Like I stopped in my tracks and just sat there and read this message. And this gentleman was describing a night in, in June of that year, where he had been drinking. He got belligerently drunk in fact, got into his truck. He went the wrong way down the highway. He struck a car and he killed a person.

This person said that no charges had been pressed against him, to this point. And this was months after now, and that he wanted to make a promise to make the world any better because he hadn't ruined part of it. This person was confessing to vehicular manslaughter, to killing a person in this, in this Facebook message.

And so time would progress. And I, I talked to him. Try to understand what his motives were, because obviously this is a very unique situation. We had gone viral with some other things. I was on like the Steve Harvey show and stuff. And I don't know how he came across us, but like we had some momentum and I was kinda worried about, you know, folks latching onto, "because I said I would," and then trying to use that for some personal gain that was, you know, beyond the betterment of, of individuals and humanity.

So I was like, is this guy trying to get out of it? Why would anybody do this? Why would anybody confess to something like this? And so as I started to talk to two attorneys, they said, yeah, if this person records a confession video with you, as he's saying, he wants to, if he does that, they will use that against him. The law doesn't even require the type of sympathy Alex, you might be imagining they're going to give him more time. That's just how it's going to work. So I talked to this kid is like 22 years old and you know, I actually meet with him, you know, talk through like what his hope is.

And he's like, I just want to, I want to do something that catches people's attention. So that for that moment, I can convince them to not drink and drive, to not kill another person as I have. So we ended up recording his confession video and it would go viral to the, I mean, I'm talking The Today Show, CBS This Morning, Good Morning America, Oprah's people were blowing up my phone and Standards and Coopers people are trying to get an exclusive, I mean, I've been around the block and nothing like this had ever happened or ever will for us. BuzzFeed rated at one of the most important viral videos of that year. And, uh, Matthew Cordle would be sentenced to more time than the average person for the same crime by 50%. So there, there was no show or gimmick to it as far as it's real criminal justice consequences. But rolling back to that night where I literally, we finished editing the whole thing, I'm literally about to press the button, to post this to social media, to send this email out, an irreversible action.

I told him I'm like, I understand promises. You don't have to feel like you made a promise to me and you cannot turn back. This is basically hearsay at this point. We can reverse course and you there's other ways to go about this because most of the time, when you plead guilty, it's after negotiating a plea, you know what I'm saying? Like, you, you reduce your sentence, but he's like, no, that's not gonna convince people not to drink and drive this video will, you know, press the button. So I do, and a moment or two kind of just passes as we're talking.

And then he says to me, he says, Alex, you know, there's something you said a while back during this whole process, that was true.

And I said, okay, so, so what are you talking about? He says, you know, there's this one day you call me out of the blue. And you told me that I had to promise you that you wouldn't kill yourself. Right. And the reason why I called this guy and told him that is because I've seen promise cards of people writing, I will not kill myself. And in that moment, when I called him randomly, I was thinking about why would anybody promise this? Why would anyone give up years of their life in their youth to, to do this? Even if they felt guilty, there's other ways to go about this. You can volunteer for Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

You can donate, you can, there's stuff you can do. You don't have to give away your freedom. And it dawned on me. I thought to myself, OH, he's going to kill himself. He's going to record this video. And then he's going to kill himself because people who have substance abuse challenges may also have challenges in mental health.

And so this random call that I had with him and he agreed to it. He said on the day I press this button and shared it. He said, that's what I was going to do. Just gonna kill myself. But then, you know, after doing all this, you know, maybe I can, after I get out, encourage people not to drink and drive, maybe there's a, you know, a bigger, a bigger purpose here.

So I'm just, you know, I know I'm not going to do that. So Matthew Cordle would be sentenced to prison he's he was sentenced to six and a half years. Uh, which anybody listening to now and say, well, is that all he got? I mean, in the state of Ohio, the average sentence for aggravated vehicular homicide after that plea deal is like four, a little more than four years, five years. So with that, and then the max being like eight, I believe, given these circumstances. So, you know, with that, he graduated with a degree in, in psychology. He wants to work to help folks with, mental health challenges and things of that nature, you know, we'll see where his life goes from here, but at the very least he inspired a lot of people to stop drinking and driving and making the same promise that I, I have also made. So yeah, Michael these stories are absurd and sometimes unbelievable, but you know, 13 million cards out there, you I mean, I could keep going, but that's one that obviously stands out.

Michael Nathanson: I'm tempted to ask you to although it's hard to imagine. You're going to tell a story that's more compelling than that one.

That is an unbelievable story. So you're still in touch with him, you said his name is Matthew?

Alex Sheen: Yeah. His name is Matthew Cordle and yeah, he, he and I still talk once in a while and we were actually gonna, I was gonna try to. You know, help in different ways to get his message out, but then he literally gets released into a pandemic basically. Right, and we actually did a video with him after he got out of prison because we were in this interesting moment, like in March and April, where we're worried about how our actions can accidentally kill somebody. And we're also worried about isolation and what that's doing to us mentally. Well, Matthew Cordle, his actions accidentally killed somebody and in a very different way, he spent time in isolation because he was in prison, you know?

So this being released into these conditions for him, you know, it just, it was like, he could see how those things married, married up. So we, we released a PSA, you know, sharing some unique perspectives that connect the, all these thoughts. But yeah, we're, we're still in touch.

Michael Nathanson: You, you made a, at least I read that you made a pretty big promise, in order to honor the victim who I understand was a 61 year old gentlemen. What was the promise that you made?

Alex Sheen: Well, there, there's a couple of thoughts that surround that, but, this 61 year old man named Vincent Canzani, he was, a veteran of our United States Navy. You know, I remember landing one night in Cleveland. I was giving a speech somewhere for the charity and it was the night that he, the one-year anniversary of him dying.

And at this point, I believe Matthew Cordle is in jail, you know, in prison, I should say. And I was like, I don't know what to do to honor this person. Right. It's obviously not about Matthew or Matt. You know, this is about innocent loss of life, so we should do something. So I went to a bar and I just held up a sign that said, someone I knew, I know one year ago killed a man.

And if you've been drinking and driving, I will take you home, you know? And just, just to keep the roads safe. So it was, I just literally stood there with a sign by myself and most people just kind of laughed or people are intoxicated, reactions ranged as wildly, as you could imagine.

And, but some people actually took me up on it. Right. They're like, yeah, I'm drinking and yeah, if you're gonna drive me home. Sure. Why not? I mean, it's a memory of this guy. Let's keep the road safe. And so I just all night just drive all these people around. So then, uh, you know, I made promises like that, but then the daughter of the man who died in that crash, reached out to me and said, Hey, I saw what you did.

If you do that next year, I'll do it with you. So that's what we did. You know she's the one who held the sign you know, she was a younger woman and didn't maybe feel as comfortable driving strangers around. So I was the driver. She would hold the sign up and then we just drove a bunch of people home, and did the same thing.

So. I don't always think that the promises we make have to be. So I don't even want to say creative. It's not creative. It's just, doesn't have to be confrontational, like holding a sign and saying these things and driving people home or something weird like that. Sometimes it's just like be on the other side, just don't drink and drive, you know, like that's, that's something that we all can do to keep other people safe. And at the end of the day, legislate as much as you want for the not drinking and driving, it's maybe that's good. Maybe it's not, and people can have their opinions, but there's some things that you just can't control with laws or money. It just is going to come down to a sense of personal responsibility to the issue of drinking and driving or raising your kids or whatever it is.

And that's what we're trying to do with this charity is to instill that feeling in the kids that we work with and then give them the tools to execute, to keep the promises they make.

Michael Nathanson: Alex, as I hear you talk about "because I said I would," and I hear you talk about some of these stories. You seem to always be in the center of it.

And I know that this was your brainchild and that you were the energy behind it, but you have a staff as well. So I, we do a lot of research for this show. And we did look at your 990 and I know that you do have other team members. Are they out there doing this with you as well? Or is it really just them supporting you, doing all these things?

Alex Sheen: Yeah. You know, a lot of the promises that I would make that would catch people's attention in the way that we've described is, was never really the intent or, and is not the mission nor a program of our charity. If that makes sense, I would just do these things because. Well, that's how a promise card is supposed to be used.

You make a promise to keep the promise. And so that's, that's what I would do. So our charity doesn't fuel my promises or things like that it was just a way to grab people's attention to make them think about what personal responsibility meant to them.

But yeah, prior to the pandemic, we had 17 full-time employees, three part-time, you know, with our programs and schools and prisons and mailing promise cards around the world it was going pretty well there for a second. But if you imagine an organization that is fueled a lot by speaking engagements, right. I give them all my fees to the charity. So that helps fund our programs. If you imagine organization with programs in schools and prisons, well, all three of those things shut down entirely like speaking engagements, all went to forced cancellations and schools and prisons, no more extra-curricular activities.

So we were just sitting there. Not only losing 80% of our funding, but then losing my 50% of our staff. It's weird because we teach lessons about keeping promises and facing life's adversities. But then, yeah, and I often just, I have to read that myself to get this charity you know, to keep, keep it alive.

That's happened multiple times, just in the nature of trying to run an organization. So yeah, we've been, we've been really challenged in this moment. Now we have seven full-time employees, we're hiring six back. We've got the generosity of a donor who's helping us with that along with all of our supporters, but lots, lots challenges, lots of challenges.

But yeah, it's not, it's not me. And the last thing I'll say, as it relates to that question Michael is it was never honestly designed to be about me. I did those things because I knew it would help the organization get a reach. But if I were to ask you right now who's the founder of United Way or Habitat for Humanity or Big Brothers, Big Sisters, you and I, and most of the people listening right now would not have the answer to that question because the impact of that charity was so far beyond that have a single founder or character that, that's the reason why it can sustain. So my hope is that in a decade or decades from now, my name will start to fade away and the impact of the charity will stand for itself because that's what we need is sustainable humanitarian effort across a lot of different issues.

And I don't, so I don't want this to be the Alex Sheen show, as ironic as it is to say that while I'm on a show talking about myself,

Michael Nathanson: Well, you're not just talking about yourself, you're talking about the greater cause, which does transcend you. And I greatly appreciate your comments. So I, I wanted to get to a couple of your other TEDx Talks and one of them is called what all great superheroes have in common.

Are you a superhero fan?

Alex Sheen: I am. I definitely, I definitely say I am.

Michael Nathanson: Who's your favorite?

Alex Sheen: You know, it's weird because this is not a traditional answer, but *Voltron* from the eighties, the team of five. I remember all the rope robot lines. They come together, they make a *Voltron*, they make *Voltron* with a huge sword. The show doesn't make sense. If you can turn it back and look at it in your thirties. But that's one of my, my favorite characters in cartoons and comics.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Oh, interesting and do you have a sense, before we get into your TEDx talk, do you have a sense for what your superpowers are?

Alex Sheen: Yeah you know, if I were to look at super powers in the, in the state of our seven. I would say that in, in compassion, contemplation, accountability, self-control, sacrifice, honesty, and hope.

Those are our seven. I think mine would probably be sacrifice or hope. Like it's not hard for me to give up something.

It might be hard to do something, to pursue something, to wake up every day and work. But if it says, if it's like, you have to give up this money or you have to give up this opportunity, this thing isn't going to happen. I don't know. I just I'm okay with sacrifice. It's a little easier button to press for me, but I think also hope is one of the things that I would say is because, you know, I'm a little bit of a gambler and I mean, that almost literally, like, I don't mind playing poker and things like that. And I think if you're going to work in charity in a very different way, you have to be a gambler because every person you help, there are going to be multiple scenarios where it doesn't pay off. There's gonna be multiple scenarios where it just didn't work.

There's going to be multiple scenarios where, you know, you offer something to somebody and they take advantage of it, like some sort of financial support and they don't use it for what it's for. I mean, you can imagine all of the reasons why charity doesn't work, but are we going to let, even in a set of 10 people, let's say three or four people doesn't work even seven people it doesn't work. Are we going to say, well, because these people took advantage of it or it didn't work here. We're just going to abandon these three, four or five people over here. Now that, no charity should use that as an excuse for inefficiency. I'm not saying that right. We need to push very hard to, to make sure that our organizations are doing the best with the donor dollars and tax benefits that we have.

However, at the end of the day, perfection is impossible and we cannot leave these families these children, and these issues behind simply because we're not willing to except reality of how things work. So hope gives you that gambler's mentality. It's like, no, this is possible. I can still change this person's life.

Well, that person is a rapist though. And it is in a maximum-security prison. Well, yeah, that's true. But they're also going to get out in a year and there's a chance there's a shot. We can reform this person to some reasonable degree to at least prevent another crime. They may not be the next mayor or superintendent of a school or something like that, but they, they can get to a good neutral spot and that would be good for, for society.

You gotta have hope but the last thing I'll say to that question about superpowers, that doesn't necessarily relate to promises at all, but I, I feel like I have an answer for it, so I might as well give it. Is the power of persuasion. Like if I could pick anything to be the fastest human alive, to be as strong as human alive, the smartest human alive, I may choose to be the most persuasive person alive because with that, I could garner the support needed to change things in a positive way. So that's my super long answer.

Michael Nathanson: That's a great answer. And of course, you know yourself best right? But, uh, I would have said, I would have said it's inspiration and your ability to inspire you are a fantastic speaker. You and I had a conversation prior to this podcast, just to make sure that it made sense for you to come on the show.

And you know, I could, I could tell during the conversation that you, you had a lot to say and a lot to contribute, but you are quite a speaker and maybe this gets to persuasion, but I think you persuade with your inspiration if I can be so bold. So in your talk, it's called What All Great Superheroes Have in Common. So what do they all have in common?

Alex Sheen: Yeah, they all keep their promises. They may all have different abilities. They may have different origin stories. In fact, there was a clinical psychologist that did basically an evaluation of superheroes and like why they get started. Like if that, if Batman was a real human being, a real child that witnessed the traumatic end of life of their parents, why would they emotionally react to become Batman? Right. And so it was a very interesting, interesting article, but regardless if the origin was tragedy, if the, or origin was fate or what have you, it all comes down to the thought of, of superheroes, do what they say they're going to do, even if they have to sacrifice, that type of storyline is not just in, in superhero movies, think about every book you've ever read.

Every movie you've ever watched, it's always, it's like, is the boyfriend going to show up and do what they said they were going to do in the romantic comedy? Is a superhero going to, you know, make the sacrifice? Even in Saving Private Ryan in war films, it's all, you know, it's all about a commitment to your country or to your, you know, brothers in arms and all these different things.

So of course I'm a little, you know, when you're a hammer, everything's a nail. So of course, I'm going to say the things that I'm saying, but I really do believe that it is almost like a biological part of storytelling of human interest, the ability to, to say I'm going to do something and I will fight external and even internal battles in order to see these words through. It's very, I think it's inspirational to people. So I hope my speeches are good and the stories of our supporters inspire others. But again, I think there's like something elemental that we've accidentally just fallen into that makes the job easy.

Michael Nathanson: Another talk is entitled. Why altruism is not enough. What's the, and again, I would say that I would say to our listeners, please listen to the talks. The talks are great. They're not that long. They're very impactful. So Alex's answers here should not be a substitute for listening to the talk, but what's the shorthand answer?

Alex Sheen: Yes. So, you know, right now in the United States, approximately 75.1%.

So 75.1% of Americans do not volunteer a single hour in an entire year. And, and that's not to say that we're not one of the most generous nations because we actually do proportionately of our income give more than other countries, but that still can be a sliver, you know, a fraction of a fraction kind of thing.

So if we want to change the nature of our communities, if we really want to make things a lot better, it turns out that it may not actually be that hard. We just needed to get some people who are on the sidelines, not to quit their jobs and join a nonprofit, not to volunteer every single week, but just do you know, one weekend volunteer few hours.

If we could get that 75.1% average, even one hour, we're talking about literally billions with a B dollars of humanitarian impact because of know the charitable good that those that work can do. So the title of the Ted Talk is Altruism is Not Enough because this number has, has not changed in decades that it's been tracked.

It's about the same, regardless of who's the president, regardless of whether we're in war or not, or, you know, it's just like economic conditions. It's like people volunteer and people don't volunteer and there's just two buckets. So if we're going to say that altruism is what we're going to lean on. It's only like doing the right thing. That's what should inspire people. I don't think that's going to be enough to better, better the world, any different than it currently is. And this kind of falls into even some thoughts that you see, related to people like myself. There are people listening to this right now saying, oh, well, do gooders always got to post something, always got to share a video, always got to make them the centerpiece of it. Why isn't it just doing the right thing enough for you guys, right? Can you stop it with this? And I would say that's a fair kind of perspective. However, we need to get people interested in helping other people. Altruism is not enough. We've got to find ways to tap into, even someone's own ego.

I mean, think about the words, "because I said I would," it's egotistical. It's all about me and what I said I was going to do and stuff well, if I can take the energy of that self-centeredness but then point it towards helping other people and saying, I, because I said I would volunteer, right, fine. Then have your egotistical moment, have that feeling of, of pride as long as it helps somebody else.

And it didn't have a negative effect. I think that's kind of okay, because there's gotta be different ways is that we appeal to this set of folks who don't volunteer. And the last thing that I'll say as it relates to that is just how a lot of this talk is about how non-profits need to change their culture.

To think that altruism is not enough. I think I was even so bold to say that in that like TEDx talk that I was like like make a singles night or something. Right?

Like people aren't going to volunteer maybe because they care about the food bank, but they're like, oh yeah, maybe I'll meet somebody. Do whatever you can to get these people into to your charity, get them involved.

They'll get hooked. I mean, there's health benefits. There's mental health benefits to volunteering. They'll they'll like it, but we've got to get them in there with other things and treating them like a consumer, treating them with other value propositions rather than just altruism, which again is unfortunate. But I just think it's the human condition.

Michael Nathanson: Alex, you went to Ohio University. As far as I can tell you were working at a software company, before you started “because I said I would.” So my question for you is could you ever possibly imagined that this would be your career going forward?

Alex Sheen: Yeah, this is definitely not by intent and to be honest, if I could step away from it, I would. And I'll qualify that statement later on, but yeah, I went to a higher university, the best university in the world go Bobcat's. OU oh yeah. I was the commencement speaker in 2019. I'm very proud alumni. Anyways, I worked at an enterprise software company.

I love my job. Like I said earlier in, in the show, I was just trying to say goodbye to my father. And, but when I, when I saw it gaining traction, I don't think it would be fair to others to have let it go. And when I mentioned that, you know, if I could step away, I would, it's not, it's not easy to do this. If you are the founder or CEO of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, all you have to do is not drink and drive. And, uh, and then there won't be any PR disasters. You won't be a hypocrite, there, there are certain things that you have to do, but it's not so wide as our charity. Everything I do Michael, being ready for this call. On time. Every promise I make is an opportunity for hypocrisy. I'm trying to live as an example for this nonprofit is extremely taxing, but I reflect on the words of a very wise man Spider-Man's uncle. Spider-Man's uncle once said with great power comes great responsibility. There was a point in my life and the life of a lot of people who are listening to this and kids where we see like some bad stuff happened on the news.

Maybe a person in a position of power taking advantage of that. Maybe a billionaire, not helping the world, whatever it is. And we say to ourselves, what? Like if I had that power, I would do good with it. Right. I would, I would make the world a better place. Well, so now it's time to pay the Piper, because of, whatever has happened to me, I've been afforded the opportunity to make a change.

And so as much as sometimes I just feel very tired, over the last decade. It's something that I'm committed to and something that I do believe makes a difference.

Michael Nathanson: So, with great power comes great responsibility. Uncle Ben loved that, that quote. Can you see yourself doing this in 10 or 20 years or is that just too far in the future?

Alex Sheen: No, I could definitely see myself, continuing the mission. I must bring “because I said I would” to sustainability beyond myself. And until that happens, I just, I don't see a way a responsible way out. So, you know, we're continuing to fight the good fight and you know, as much as this pandemic has challenged, this charity and in fact even destroyed others.

It's a, yeah, we're really hoping to come out on top as we turn the corner, hopefully after the Delta variant. One of the things I didn't mention earlier Michael, was what did I do after all the programs shut down and everything. I just kind of sit there and twiddle my thumbs.

No, "because I said I would" used our volunteer experience and our resources to create one of the largest volunteer face masks sewing operations in the entire state of Ohio, with over 270 volunteers, sewing over 20,000 face masks at the peak of shortage.

At the beginning of this pandemic, we started paying for funeral expenses for families who had lost loved ones to COVID-19. We did public service announcements to encourage people, to use their self-control, to help public safety. We created an unemployment transition program in the darkest hours when people had lost their jobs to help them build skills so they could sit in the next interview and say, hey, I've been working on myself, you know, and, uh, maybe give me a shot. So, you know, we've been, we've been working hard during this pandemic to fill gaps that this disease has, has caused. And now hopefully we can turn the corner back to our programs in schools and prisons soon. We have the support of, of one of our most generous donors, to the effect that we have this conversation about starting a, a summer camp. Buying like a hundred-acre property so that we could have more meaningful, differences in impacts made on the lives of these kids. And even separately in different seasons, do reentry programs for inmates so that they can get started on a good path.

You know, he told me to, he told me to go shopping. So, we'll see, uh, we'll see if that summer camp actually happens you know, I'm hopeful for the future. I'm hopeful for the new hires that we'll have because the thought of character development volunteerism in our country in the world will be forever needed. And so we just got to find a way to make it work.

Michael Nathanson: I'm guessing that you say more than 15,942 words a day, and you seem to just have unbridled energy, although a few minutes ago, though, I did see a little bit of a, you know, maybe a little bit of honesty about how hard it all can be sometimes. Do you find balance in your life and if you do, how do you find balance in your life? I mean, do you have a family? Do you, you know, tell us a little bit about some of that.

Alex Sheen: In some of the sacrifices that that I've made and maybe that's a big word, you know, but compromises, whatever term would fit it, you know, I, I don't, I don't have children and I've made the conscious choice not to because I don't believe that if you're going to, if you choose to become a father or mother. You can't be on the road 300 days a year. Like I was prior to this pandemic, that child deserves your attention and commitment, your support and love. And you know, so you gotta, you gotta make choices that are not always centered around you.

So, you know, things like that have been I'm not going to say necessarily difficult cause I'm so committed to my job that I'm blinded by other parts of life, or blinded to other parts of life. But yeah, I, I really focus a lot on this work, but when you get to that question that you were asking Michael, about what does it take to find that balance?

There are three things that I will never feel guilty about. And that's in a life where I do feel a lot of accountability and guilt sometimes does motivate me, right? I gotta, I'm the one who needs to do this. You know, I'm a CEO, I've got to do it. I gotta do it. Guilt can be a good thing in this weird way, but in the guilty life I lead, I will never feel guilty about sleeping.

I will never feel guilty about exercising and I will never feel guilty about feeding myself correctly. These things. Are so foundational. So for, so foundational to someone's capacity to keep promises that I think it's wildly overlooked. People think that maybe it's intelligence or motivation is some kind of energy that's just pulled from the air.

No, energy comes from sleeping right. Energy comes from, having a balanced diet, energy, motivation, same word sometimes comes from exercising and having a good, you know, a good routine there. So yeah, I could talk about calendaring and word choice and accountability partnerships and using apps and you know, all that kind of stuff.

But if you're not taking care of those three things, it's really everything else is just going to be harder. So that's where I strike my balance. I sleep, I sleep seven, eight hours a night, as busy as I get, I mean, with flights and stuff like that. But I try to eat decently.

I exercise if I take a break in the middle of the day to exercise and I'm, uh, not miss or miss a meeting, I just don't choose not to. I'm going to feel bad about that. You know? I'll work hours later. I'll do that. I'm not going to feel bad about those three things.

Michael Nathanson: Alex do you have awareness around how much you've likely already changed the world? Do you, do you ever think about that?

Alex Sheen: That's a problem with nonprofits. It's hard to quantify our difference, right? How many people made a promise at all with those cards? Right. They received them. Do they ever write anything down? Okay. Then how many people actually kept that promise? Okay. How many promises did people make? But then after they broke the promise and failed, it affected their emotions and self-confidence so much that they chose not to ever even pursue that goal at all. You see how, like the theory of change in a nonprofit and the logic models that we have to have in order to say, you know, we're really making a difference is super complex. Even with the right resources, effort and intelligence.

It's hard to say if you made it the difference or not, but that's where that hope comes in, right. Is like, you know, I've seen it and I'm doing my best to try to quantify it. But you, you just, I kind of never know. I mean, I've met people randomly, like in airports and on the street, who will say something about, like a moment that they had with their child and they use this card to make a commitment to them because they're having a rough time being bullied or what have you. And so I think it's made a difference. I just, I kind of don't know how much and in a weird way, that's what keeps me going, because if I never can quantify the impact of this charity, then it's never enough.

And so then it just needs to be bigger and better and more efficient and more impactful. And that can't be a bad thing so.

Michael Nathanson: Any regrets?

Alex Sheen: All kinds of regrets, I became the CEO of "because I said I would" at 27, you know. As you know, people ask me for my perspective from something just a little bit more than a child, you know, as I reflect on things.

Before my dad died. I wasn't even good at keeping promises. Like they, people thought I was good just because I started it. I was like, no, I'm, I'm literally talking about a different person right now. You know? So I've made a lot of mistakes. And the one that I would say I regret the most is just, you know, taking care of my employees better, you know, it's, I get into a groove where whatever choices that I've made and the compromises that I have in my life, I know that I'm making that to help a child or an inmate reform or whatever, but not everybody has to ride that same wavelength.

And sometimes I put too much in our, our employees where I'm like, no, these, this has life or death consequences. I'm not saying they don't, but you don't have to bring that energy to every conversation and, you know, kind of thing, right. Humans are not designed to play at high stakes constantly, and it's really just not healthy for you. I found mechanisms to cope, to strengthen myself through that, but I'm not everybody and that's not fair to everybody. So trying to be better to our employees. It's just really a balance that's hard for me to, to understand because, you know, we've got to survive, we've got to impact, but you gotta be healthy and you gotta be, you know, have a good work-life balance. And I don't, I don't always know where to strike that. But I would say that's one of my regrets that I continue to work on it as a leader.

Michael Nathanson: That's great that you're thinking about that. And it's, again, you have a, you sense that you have a sense of humility about you. That that goes well, in my opinion, with your inspirational style.

So, Alex, this is a show about seeking the extraordinary and I hope at this point in the show, our audience understands exactly why we had you on as a guest. I think you're pretty extraordinary, but part of our show is helping us understand what it is that makes people extraordinary.

And I like to ask people some of the same questions, toward the end of the show. And let's let's think of this as the extraordinary teaching segments. So I'm going to ask you some questions. You can answer quickly, or if you want to expound, that's fine as well, but I'm going to ask you several questions. And the first one is what single tip would you offer that has helped you be your most extraordinary self?

Alex Sheen: Hundred percent calendaring. Calendar all the time promises you make. Calendar your sleeping, your eating, your time to get ready, your drive time, your meetings, your prep time for those meetings. Calendar everything out. Why? Because if you do that in the weeks ahead of you, you will spot problems before they happen.

If you put everything, all your obligations on that calendar, you will spot problems before they happen. You can create plans to repair those issues before they become irreversible. And you will manage your stress, much better because of that process. You will sleep at a better time because your phone will go off reminding you to sleep. You will have time to exercise because things won't accidentally bleed over and cover up that time. And then you say, well, I'll just do it tomorrow. No, you will have guarded that time with this level of contemplation. A lot of people say that time management is, you know, about reaching your goals and being productive.

I think time management is about stress management. I do not like breaking promises to people. I do not like having to make difficult choices on what I'm going to do or not do because I've run out of time. I don't like to half-ass, efforts, when they deserve more attention, but I just don't have anything left in the hourglass. So I would really say a hundred percent calendaring and if you go to [youtube.com/beansaidIwould](https://www.youtube.com/beansaidIwould), we have some videos about these concepts, but that's the one thing that, that helps me the most. It may not help you the most listener, but because we're each, we're all different. There is no magic bullet, but that's what I would say.

Michael Nathanson: What's the best advice you've ever given someone?

Alex Sheen: Best advice I've ever given someone. I don't know if I could say best, but I can say one of the top. And that came from a supporter of ours that I just pass on their words. I don't even know where he got it from, to be honest. So don't credit this to me, but I often say I have to do something.

I mean, Michael, you can already tell him my tone and word choice that I feel a sense of, of duty to charity. So I keep saying, I have to do something. I have to do this. I have to do this. And he said, you know, you should change maybe the wording to I get to. For example, I don't have to wake up and let my dogs out.

I get to, I get to live in a house where I even get to have dogs. I own my own house. My dog of 14 years old died last year. I would, what I would give for an extra 10 minutes with that dog. Well, I have plenty of time with this dog and that dog. And so I don't have to let my dogs out. I get to, I don't have to call my grandmother. I still have a grandmother I'm 36 years old. I still have a grandma. I get to call my grandma. I don't have to do anything I get to. And so that is some of the best advice I've had. Now, when you dig deep into this, this is really called cognitive reframing or perception, reorientation and is, is kind of a basic principle in human behavior, psychology, cognitive behavioral therapy, blah, blah, blah.

But you know, you really got to work on those wires inside your brain and try to reset some of those feelings. I live in a developed country where I turn on a faucet, clean water comes out. I have the right to vote, the right to freedom of speech. I have the ability to make an impact through volunteering.

I have a job, I have a roof over my head. I have lots of things. And so, because I have those things, I get to do all the stuff that I usually complain about. And we got to look at it that way. Gratitude is a awesome motivator but not in sort of like a greeting card type of way. Like you've got to, there's different ways to have thanks for things.

And for me, that phrasing, I don't have to get to is the advice I would pass on to another person.

Michael Nathanson: I know what the mission or at least I think I understand the mission of, "because I said I would" but do you have a personal mission and is it different?

Alex Sheen: If I did have a personal mission, I would want to make it as tangible as possible.

So I'll say something like this. If it were up to me, I would change the federal legislation in the United States to mandate a level of character development programming. And whether that's, we all say, Hey, every American is going to be honest, or every American is going to have self-control or developed these skills.

I kind of don't care, which one of the values it is. I just really would like it, if we could all agree that school should be more than just reading, writing, math and science, that is all incredibly important. But if we do not teach our children how to be decent human beings to one another, then what's the point of society at all?

So that we have no political aims as a charity currently. We don't lobby. We don't do anything like that but if I could have my way. You know, that's something I would change because then these whole generations would be equipped with a foundation that could make our country better. And the world better.

Michael Nathanson: What's been your biggest mistake, or if you prefer to think of it as a learning opportunity,

Alex Sheen: My biggest mistake is probably that I started with adult chapters. If you look at the top list of a hundred charities in the United States, you will be hard pressed to find any charity that doesn't have local chapters. Why? Because people give local, they act local. That may also be biological. And so my theory in the beginning was I'm going to start chapters of adults to make and keep promises to go through this personal development lessons and stuff. And then, you know, with them in the community, they'll connect me to the schools that their kids go to and everything, then we'll start the same type of chapter in schools and things like that. But it was, it wasn't the right path.

The right path was, was to start in schools and I wasted, no I didn't waste, that's not the best word but there, I could have been a little further along in something that was a little easier in a good way to get started. It turns out adults don't like to join clubs and routinely show up and routinely work on themselves. It's, it's an interest of few no matter how much it may or may not be needed. So that's one of, one of my regrets.

Michael Nathanson: I'm wondering if my next question if you'll think of it as a dumb question, because I wonder if the answer is just going to be your father, but I'm going to ask it anyway. A key role model or mentor

Alex Sheen: I'd say Mahatma Gandhi, you know, I, I'm not a religious person, but just Gandhi's interest in helping people in his sacrifices. Certainly not a perfect person, but that reading his, reading an autobiography about him and things like that, I just really found to be moving. Fun fact, his name is not Mahatma. Mahatma is like a title is like his actual name is Mohandas, but anyways, The other mentor that I would say, then that's not mentioned as a role model. Another person I would say it's like, all of our supporters like glued together, you know, like I just, I don't actually get inspired that much by people like Gandhi, celebrities, athletes, things like that. Because to be honest, Michael, I look at that person and I say, you were biologically born different. What you have, I can not have.

Right. But when I read the stories of average, everyday people making promises to their children, to themselves to fight addiction, to go to chemotherapy, to whatever it is. That is a person that is just like me, you know and has flaws like me. And doesn't want to wake up in the morning like me, you know, on a tired day. So I can relate to that.

And so it's this machine of, "because I said I would" just sharing these stories is actually in a weird way, it's better for me to be motivated by tens of thousands of people rather than just kind of seeing one person as a north star

Michael Nathanson: In the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* one of the things that the author Stephen Covey says is, is begin with the end in mind. So my last question for you is going to be about that, which is what will be your legacy?

Alex Sheen: Yeah. If I could we would change character development in schools, not in only the United States, but around the world. If I could, I would change that 75.1% of Americans who don't volunteer. Give me like three more percent. You know, if I could say even half or quarter percent I got in throughout the course of my existence, I think that would be worth it.

Michael Nathanson: Thank you, Alex. This has been a really, really interesting interview from my perspective and I'm confident that our listeners are going to want to learn more so how can they learn more about you?

Alex Sheen: Yeah, as a charity, you know, we're a 501C3 nonprofit and you can go to, becauselsaidIwould.org to learn more about our programs and character development in schools, prisons, and juvenile detention centers. If you're interested in learning more about perhaps bringing me in as a speaker, becauselsaidIwould.org/alexsheen and a hundred percent of my speaking fees go to the nonprofit.

So lastly, I would say, you know, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, we're out there. We're constantly putting out inspiring stories, perspectives on what it takes to keep promises. And, uh, that could hopefully be something in your journey that helps you along. I really take a lot of lessons from all of those cards and, and try to drive things a little bit academically too, not just, you know, what sounds good on a podcast, but things that are backed by an amount of science and so I really appreciate folks visiting our webpage.

Michael Nathanson: And that is the extraordinary Alex Sheen.

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