



Sound Financial Bites 068 - Aviv Shahar Part 2

Episode Transcription

“How can you be in a leadership position and not be intentional?”

Aviv Shahar: The people in your world, your customers, your family, your community will be better off today because you have lived that day and created a contribution, and unless you're very clear, you are not likely to create a kind of impact that you can.

Narrator: Welcome to Sound Financial Bites, where we help you with bite-sized pieces of financial and life knowledge to help you design and build a good life. The knowledge that has been shared from stages at conferences, pages of national business magazines, and clients living across America, our host, Paul Adams now brings directly to you.

Paul Adams: Hello, and welcome to Sound Financial Bites. I'm Paul Adams. It's great to have you with us today, and it's great to have Aviv Shahar back for part two of the questions that I had, and I think our audience would have around his book, Create New Futures. For those of you that haven't heard his bio and intro, or one of his other podcasts, I would highly encourage you to go back and listen to those. He was on our podcast prior to his book releasing, and now, of course, post-book, we're getting a chance to go a little deeper on some of these topics.

Aviv's background is working with Fortune 100 companies and their leadership teams, helping them focus and transform an entire section of the business that they may have been working on for three, four, five, six months, or a year not being able to make headway or progress, and Aviv is able to be called into those companies internationally, different divisions from across the world, and help those teams, sometimes in just a matter of days, get through a lot of the barriers that they had either within the company or within the team that they couldn't get through on their own.

In our last podcast, we talked with him about how people complain and how we can think differently when somebody is complaining to us, and then we also talked about how your present and your future can update your past. If you haven't heard that on our last episode, I would highly encourage you to go back and listen to it. With that, let me welcome Aviv back to the podcast. It's so good to have you again.

Aviv: It's great to be here with you, Paul.

Paul: You talked about, in your book, and in our conversations, just you and I, about the idea of people being intentional in the way that they talk, how they communicate with people, and the lack -- I don't want to talk about, yet, what we should do to be intentional, because I think that is key, though I want to talk about what the automatic outcome is when people are unintentional about their conversations, and I think it's the kind of outcome most of them don't notice. Could we just start there? What's happening for people when they're not intentional, especially business owners and executives around the conversations they have?

Aviv: My first response and thought about this, Paul, is that how can you be in a leadership position and not be intentional? There is a cognitive dissonance in the idea. You are leading, which means you're there to create a new future. You cannot create a new future if you are careless and not intentional about your life, about your work, about the team, about the company, about the endeavors, about the customers. These are all important elements of your



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life, and work, and cosmology, and you have to be intentional. I actually don't see a lot of people that are not intentional. I see people that are seeking to have intentions that are not very effective.

Paul: This is what I would add that I think might be the differentiator. I'm not talking about people not being intentional at all. I mean those executives, and it could be water cooler conversation for them, it could be when they're out having drinks after, the business owner when they're just meaning to joke around with an employee. But, people end up having some conversations that are unintentional, even if they might be very, very intentional.

I go back thinking about when you were on the podcast, which is episode 46, if you guys get back to it, on Conversations, The Currency of Leadership, you were teaching our listeners this idea that back at the beginning of the day, what they should do is think about every conversation they're going to be in, and what exchange is happening in that conversation, what positive outcomes could be there, and those are the things I think we're all used to, and I think most of our listeners are in that space of trying to be intentional most of the time, and yet, it doesn't happen all the time, and there's an impact to it.

Aviv: Well, exactly. You manage and you help people manage their money. I'll ask you and I'll ask the people listening to your podcast, are you ever careless about the way you manage your money? Sometimes, people are, but do you just throw it away? You probably would say, "No, absolutely not. I work hard to earn my money. Why would I throw it away?" So, why would you throw away an even more precious currency? Why would you throw away the currency of your time on Earth? And why would you throw away the currency of conversation? These are even more precious currencies than your money.

This is what I will point out, first of all, that when you show up to work every Monday morning, you have to know, be very clear about first, what are the two or three big things you will work to achieve this week, and what's the one or two important steps you will move towards those today, and how will you curate your time, and effort, and energy, and mental focus, and therefore your conversation to achieve these results? That's what I essentially believe is the job of a leader.

Paul: I think the thing that gets missed, and I could be wrong about it, and if you can, I'm going to give everybody listening a little shot behind the scenes for us. While we were setting up, I had a small technical problem. Aviv said something that's like brilliant, like he tends to say things that are brilliant, and I made a joke back, and Aviv, you were just like flat, like no laughing, no nothing and I said, "Oh, that was supposed to be a joke," and you're like, "Uh-huh."

Here's what I think is key about that and what I experienced. I was spending conversational currency unnecessarily in like the joke to take the air a little bit off the discomfort of the technical issue I was having, and I think that happens a lot even to the most intentional executives where they are saying something, and it could be anything like a silly joke around the water cooler or a funny something. Not that we shouldn't have any unplanned things in our lives, but it's only when you get around somebody real intentional like Aviv that you find that you're wasting some of the precious currency coming out of your mouth in the way of conversations.



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I was going to ask if that's happening to somebody, if they're doing that, what are the things they're likely to notice around them, because often, like the wind, you can't see the wind; you just see the tree blow. What are the things people listening to this podcast should think about? Like, they might not be being intentional if they're saying these kinds of things in their lives.

Aviv: Paul, let's just, first of all, say the following, which is we are human beings. We like to banter, we like to joke. That's okay. Nothing wrong with that, number one. Number two, sometimes the best conversations and the conversations that lead to new breakthroughs are extemporaneous, and conversations that where you go with the flow and you allow yourself to assimilate new ideas.

But, the point we are making is you have to have the central thrust, and often the central inquiry that guides your work. It may be, "What are we doing today and what can we do this week to improve customer success?" Customers love it when they come to us, but we seem to not have the kind of follow-through and loyalty that we would love to have, and there isn't the kind of customer retention that we would like to see.

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If that's an inquiry that you're engaged in, then you become forensic and focus about it, and you will engage your team, and you will ask about what is going on and where is the breakdown in terms of the customer experience, or it can be anything else that relates to the operational aspect of your business, or the value proposition of how you educate and train your customers to use your service, whatever the case is, as long as you have the central clarity of what you are about and why customers engage with you, and therefore, what must you do to meet those expectations, you are in business.

My assertion, Paul, is that you're in business for one of two reasons. Generally, we are, all of us, wherever we are, whatever business we are in, we are in business because of one of two reasons. The first reason you are in business is because your customers find you to be mission critical, and mission critical is defined as they cannot fulfill and actualize their purpose without your contribution. That means you're mission critical.

Now, not everybody is in a niche or in a service where you're mission critical. Actually, a consultant would often not be mission critical unless you are dealing really with the supply channels, or a critical piece in the value flow of that operation, you will be hard-pressed to be what is purely defined as mission critical, and if you can't be mission critical, you are in business for a second reason, which is you create overwhelming value. What does it mean? How do I define creating overwhelming value?

Overwhelming value means you help your customers achieve what they're trying to achieve faster, better, more effectively with greater grace, makes them happier, whatever better is for them and how it relates to your service. But, you do this in a meaningful way that, therefore, qualify you and them to say, "You know what? You are creating, for me, overwhelming value, and that's why I will spend my hard-earned money to use your service."

I essentially view those relationships as sacred agreements. You make contractual agreements with people that you will make them better as a result of using your service, and when I say sacred, what I mean is you are committed and dedicated to deliver their promise, and that must



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“Wherever I am, whatever I’m doing, I’m observing, I’m listening, I’m learning, and I’m debriefing.”

guide your effort and your work, and you have to be intentional about it. That doesn't mean you can't be humorous, and light, and happy, and joking, but you never lose sight. You never lose the focus of what you are here to do and the value that you're here to deliver. If you lose that focus and you're not engaged in the way that you are called to be engaged, then to your question, you will see that the energy drops, the focus drops, and people are engaged with all sorts of peripheral tasks that are not necessarily designed to add the transformative value that you initially promised.

Paul: As I hear that idea of the sacred promise between you and whoever the customer is, if you're an executive right now with -- if we've got an Amazon executive listening, or Microsoft, or Univar, for that matter, they're also in that same commitment to their employer that they are handling something, they need to be intentional about that, and they need to continue to work toward that ending, keeping that commitment to the company.

You said something about the conversational currency and being present to what they all are, and I've gotten some requests to do a podcast specifically on my entire morning routine because of how I treat the first couple of hours in my day now. But, I took something from what you said, Aviv, is I now hand-write, as a part of my morning routine, my entire day schedule even though it's already existing virtually for me, and I think about what's the outcome that's going to best serve that person that I can somehow influence in that conversation. That comes out of you being on episode number 46 that wouldn't have been there otherwise, because I had a hard time trying to really get beyond scrolling through my day with my thumb, and instead sitting down and actually rewriting my calendar for the day puts me in enough pause to actually think about all the conversations.

Aviv: Right. Let me make three comments about this, because this is right there in the lane of being intentional, because when you write, you are actually engaging a different brain circuitry than when you just read, and if you wrote it and spoke it out loud, you will engage even another brain circuitry. If you were kinetic, and were jogging, or walking, or doing any physical exertion and practice, and still were speaking out loud your intentions and your focus, then for some, that's the way that you really get into gear, and how that relates to your previous question, which is you often see in some of the movies where they try to depict the perfect athlete, or you saw that with Usain Bolt and how he jokes all around before the race. But, there he is very focused when he is preparing to start the 100 or 200-meter dash.

What you then have in that, whether it's natural, the baseball movie where he shuts out the noise, to a degree, you have to do that every day at work. You have to shut out the noise, because there are so many devices, and alerts, and digital noise, and other kind of psychological and political noise, and unless you show up for your day with high-voltage focus about why the people in your world, your customers, your family, your community will be better off today because you have lived that day and created a contribution, unless you're very clear, you are not likely to create the kind of impact that you can. And unless you show up for any team meetings, or any one-on-one conversations with that kind of presence, you will do okay, but you will be perhaps at the 6 out of 10, or 6 and a half or 7 out of 10, but you want to be the 8, 9 or 9.9 out of 10 that you can be.

For me, if you lived the day in which you operated on a 6 out of 10 instead of 9.9 out of 10, when



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you could -- I mean, not every day you can. If you just landed from an international flight, you need a day to recover. We all need to have down days. We all need to have days where we bounce back or bounce forward, as I'd like to say. But, if you are there, and you are not present as you can be because you let the noise distract you, you're missing a huge, big opportunity. Your morning routine when you're most fresh is how you bring forward the kind of focus that your sacred contract expects you to, and your customers expect you to.

Paul: I think this is a perfect segue, and that was gold like what I hope is that last, if you need to right now, as you're listening, I would have you to push that button that jumps you back 30 seconds for about the last two minutes. That was gold. I think that you could write another book going deeper into the last two minutes. But, I think it cuts us nicely over to this idea of the debrief, which you cover in the book, the idea that much like when you were running missions in the Israeli Air Force as a fighter pilot and training fighter pilots how important that was, and I have used it with my wife and I more recently just in the last six months where when something doesn't go the way we'd like it to, I think my past practice would have been to step past it, and not come back to it, where what I do now is whatever the topic was, a miscoordination with who's going to pick up the kids, once we're past where the emotional charge is, just circling back, usually in less than 24 hours and just saying, "Hey, what could we have done better? What would have made that go?" and it is doing amazing things for our marriage toward the good life, but I'm seeing the same things in business, and debrief is like a popular term, but you go deeper than that. I want you to take it from there, because I don't think I can do justice for the way you talk about debriefing.

Aviv: Let me first address the business side and then maybe make a comment about relationship and marriage, which deserves a whole book by itself. My observation, Paul, is that even in some of the most admired companies in the world, the learning cycle gets broken every day. Actually, let me be more specific, and it may be shocking for some, but based on my observation, not more than 20% of learning incidents truly and fully reach the fourth phase of learning. The fourth phase is where people take ownership to teach and model the new learning, the new practice, the new insight to other people, to their teams, and to the people in the world.

What that means is that 80% of learning value in the good cases, 80% of the learning value or more is lost, which is quite a catastrophic loss of learning impact, if we want to talk about this in ROI terms. The return on learning investment, the return on time, the return on learning is catastrophically lost. Why? Because, we are not engage with the kind of debrief, and with the kind of disciplined learning that goes through the complete four stages of learning that leads to the kind of ownership and application.

You asked about my experience with debrief. In my case, it is so deeply ingrained in who I am and how I actually see myself as a learning agent, as a learning engine, and as a learning facilitator for others. Wherever I am, whatever I'm doing, I'm observing, I'm listening, I'm learning, and I'm debriefing, and as a result, I catalyze new awareness and new possibilities that create improvements, that deliver new progress, new development, and that's why we are able to create the kind of breakthrough value.

Because, too often, people rush from the first phase of learning, which is I'm introduced to new information, to a new insight, and they skip the second phase. They don't validate, they don't



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ensure that not only I understand, but that we have the same shared understanding, and they react and move forward to phase 3 of beginning the application, beginning to run water through the pipe of that new practice, that new idea, that new insight. I say, "No, you've got to slow down the process, you've got to be forensic about what you have learned, you've got to validate and confirm that you have the same shared understanding, then you've got to run water through the pipe, which is to practice and apply, and then you have to take responsibility and teach that learning to other people."

If you do that, your personal life and professional life will dramatically improve. One of the big epiphanies for me, Paul, when I started to embrace, more fully, this practice was that I recognized what I will frame to you. Because, the moment you begin to debrief, you see patterns. For example, one of the things you see is, "Do I make the same mistake time and again?"

Here is a mental model that I'd like to propose for all of us to reflect on and perhaps embrace: we all make mistakes, and it is okay to make mistakes. But, what is not so okay is to make the same mistake again, and again, and again. That's the groundhog day story when a person lives through the same day and day, and they reproduce the same pain points, and the same problems, and they recreate the same cosmology that led them, last time, to fall on their face, and so many people do this all the time.

Just in your space, for example, with money and with managing money, if you actually debriefed carefully the majority of traders, and I know you're not recommending trading, but if you did debrief with the majority of traders and investors, the shocking realization is that most people make repetitive mistakes. They have not developed a system that will make them safe from themselves. I know I'm playing here to your expertise because I want to give you that ammunition to use in the way you communicate your value.

What I will say is that the charge of living responsibly is making sure that I progress. How do I know that I'm progressing as a human being, as a professional? I'm discovering that I'm, this year, making new mistakes, this year, I'm facing new challenges, and therefore, this year, I am engaging with new opportunities. If I make the same old mistakes, I'm not progressing. All this comes out of a life and a practice of debrief.

Paul: The practice of debrief, what I'm thinking about very quickly, I want to hit where I see that happening work-wise, is how easy it is that two parties could think the other one made the mistake, and it may have not been either one. But, by pausing long enough to debrief, they come to a shared understanding of maybe what had it not go optimal so that both parties can act more responsibly next time.

That definitely applies to marriage, where it's kind of like, "Ah, that wasn't that big of a disagreement, or that little thing wasn't that big of a miscoordination of our schedules." So, both spouses let it go. But, it creates a negative in both person's columns, and I would imagine this is also true for business, but it takes a little love bank withdrawal from both people, and now those accumulate over time and people get further and further apart in relationships, and then it's harder to come back together and debrief.

I've got a money one in a moment, but I think the biggest benefit of really debriefing on your



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personal finances is to do it in a budget. Like, there's all the other more complex things, but if every month, you set an intention of, "Here's how we'd like our spending to go," and then find out how close you landed, there's a reason why it takes six to eight months of people budgeting every single month to actually land on the new budget, and have an agreement, and have their spending revolve around it. It's like dropping a rock into a river and letting the river work its way around it. It just takes time.

Can I ask you, when it comes to debrief, if you've not made a practice of doing this, whether it's marriage or it's business, do you have a suggestion of should somebody start with a big thing, have a pre-brief about it to say, "Hey, when we're done with this big conference, or an important lunch with a lot of customers, or whatever it is, we're going to debrief about that. We're letting everybody know ahead of time we're going to put it on the calendar so there's space for it and credit try to set the space so it's like nobody's getting accused, everybody's going to make mistakes, we're going to get through it" or would you suggest people start on something really small to debrief on and get that practice in their organization?

Aviv: That's an easy question. Always, with any new practice, start on something small where the risk is low and where you can get quick results so that you build a momentum of positive experience with practice. But, even before you start with something small, I would say the following, which is because the wrong way to take this message of debrief is to think, "Okay, this is going to be a new tool for me to fix the other people in my world," and that's the wrong way to internalize the message of debrief.

Rather, the way to internalize this is if you said to me - I'm going to use a different term here - "What's the spiritual core of the practice of debrief?" The spiritual core is being curious. The spiritual impulse that energizes the practice of debrief is the desire to continually learn and improve, and being curious about how you can be better and about how you can be a better husband, a better wife, a better partner, a better leader, a better manager, a better everything.

When that becomes even more important than the defensive muscle of one's ego, or one's wounded self-view, then essentially, debrief and continual learning becomes a way of life, because you are prepared to settle to the mental model that, "I'm a work in progress. I don't need to be perfect. I make mistakes every day. I fall on my face. Let's just make sure that I don't make the same mistake and I don't fall on my face in the same place, but rather that I make new mistakes, because I expanded into new horizons, new possibilities, and as I take on new responsibilities, it's natural that I will meet new challenges and new resistance, and I will learn through this process."

If you come at it this way, then it's not threatening at all. Rather, it's the way to engage with the beauty and the grace of new possibilities. I will say relax into your learning journey with the practice of debrief rather than develop tension around it. Because, once you are curious and interested, it simply is a fascinating journey.

Paul: It just occurred to me this podcast could be the tool that you use to implement that in either relationships, or the business work that you do. If you've never been in a practice of debriefing with others, this is kind of the extreme version, but I tend to live that way. I would have those key people in the team I'm going to do the debrief with listen to this podcast, and



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then give somebody on the team the authority to throw a flag on the play if somebody gets beyond being curious about, "How do we better arrive at the outcome?" and begins to start fixing people, and that could be a really neat way to start introducing it in, is you just -- for a lack of a better word, you all can introduce Aviv to them by being able to share this podcast with them.

Aviv: In that context, if you think about the team setup for a morning debrief or a Monday or Thursday huddle meeting, you're all standing or you're all sitting in the boardroom or wherever you are, remember the law of the tree. The law of the tree says that the tree grows from its roots and from its trunk, and how it relates to learning, and to adult learning specifically, is that we grow from our strength, from the roots and the trunk that support the development of who we are as human beings and as professionals.

I will often ask, "What's working well here? What are you enjoying and celebrating today? What are some of the recent successes? What are the strengths of this team?" and I will ask the further question, which is, "Where are the opportunities for us? Where are the gaps? Where are those gaps that we must bridge if we are to be true to our commitment? Where did we experience breakdown and why? What caused that breakdown?" But, I asked these questions after I initially asked people to bring forward their best strength, because once you bring that in the room, the intelligence, and the power, and the focus, and the presence of the best of us is there to facilitate and address the gaps and the opportunities.

Paul: Aviv, this is so good. I think this is absolute gold for our audience and our listeners today. Everybody leaving this podcast today, you have the idea of how to be more intentional with each conversation that you have and the ability to begin to implement real debrief, like that every action and undebriefed action is a wasted action, I think I'm quoting correctly from Aviv's book, and you can take those two things, and even amplify, if you've got that small team around you, how powerful this podcast is going to be to you by sharing it with them, have them listen to it, and then have a debrief about what everybody took away from it to kick off your practice of debriefing and being more intentional in all the conversations you have, including the conversations of your team. Thank you again, Aviv, for being here, and I hope you all join us next week with a fresh podcast with fresh new thinking like what you got today in Aviv Shahar.

Narrator: I want to acknowledge you for taking the time to tune into Sound Financial Bites. You stopped long enough in your busy day to reflect on your finances and your future to help you design and build a good life. Please take a moment to subscribe to this podcast and follow us on social media. You can find us on Facebook and LinkedIn. If you have a topic you would like to hear us discuss, please send us a note on Facebook, LinkedIn, SoundFinancialBites.com, or email us at info@sfgwa.com. Be sure to check out the show notes for links to any resources that were covered in each episode. For our full disclosure, please check the description of this episode, the description of this podcast series, or you can visit our website. Make it a great day.

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