Olson, Randy-08-06-2024-raw (Completed 08/06/24)
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McNally(00:00:02):
(00:01:05) Hello, I'm Terrence McNally welcome to FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK. I'll be speaking today with RANDY OLSON, marine biologist turned filmmaker turned communications advisor, author of DON'T BE SUCH A SCIENTIST and HOUSTON, WE HAVE A NARRATIVE. He's developed a tool he calls the Narrative Index and it predicted Trump's 2016 victory. You can learn more at A-B-T…-A-B-T framework, all one word, A-B-T framework.com.

On Free Forum we explore the lives, the work and ideas of individuals I suspect hold pieces of the puzzle of a world that just might work. (00:01:42) We look at provocative, new, informative angles in economics, politics, environment, science, health, culture - all based on the fact that I believe we can do better and I want to find out how. The show streams weekly on the Progressive Voices Network on TuneIn. Podcasts are available anytime anywhere on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, most major podcast sites and at my site, terrencemcnally.net - T-E-R-R-E-N-C-E-M-C-N-A-LL-Y dot net.

I got an email a couple of weeks ago from today's guest. He wasn't pushing his latest book or another promotion-worthy event or product. His email began: "Do you remember the discussion I did with you a few years ago about Steve Bannon when he was on 60 Minutes? And did you see David Brooks' "unsettling" interview with Bannon in the Sunday NY Times? Bannon cited Marshall McLuhan, evolutionary biology, and Trump…"

Well, while deploring some of his goals, allies, and ethics, we share a grudging respect for Steve Bannon's analysis of society's ills and his understanding of contemporary communication, as well as his protégé Donald Trump's instinctual ease with narrative. (00:03:07):

Having watched the first few minutes of Trump's first debate with Clinton, I turned to my wife, and said, "We're in trouble. He's a narrative machine." And I'm often reminded and I tell other folks about Bannon's last lines to Charlie Rose on 60 Minutes: "A populist revolution is coming. The only question is whether it will come from the right or the left."

So with this email began an exchange of memories, insights, questions, provocations, and so on that led to this conversation.

In my introduction to the 2017 conversation that included our exchange about Bannon, I wrote much of what follows: These are strange times for our relationship to science. We rely on the latest technologies for more and more of our experience, our consciousness, our relationships, our work. And to some extent this is true now for rural as well as urban dwellers. (00:04:06) It may be more true among the young in many areas of life, but in medicine, for example, it's likely most true for seniors and the aged.

Yet at the same time a significant segment of American society will admit to - or proudly claim - an adversarial relationship with science. Millions who trust science with their lives numerous times on a daily basis, will tell you they "don't trust science".

What does that mean and does it matter? As long as they buy in in their daily lives, isn't that the bottom line? No, because science that warns us about the likely future consequences of our actions, they often find suspect. That's the science they don't trust. And that leaves them susceptible to a message that means things don't need to change. Sold to them by those who profit in the short term from delaying our response to science's warnings.

RANDY OLSON, says this is a new time. Age old rhythms have broken down. (00:05:06)We're all receiving a firehose of information, we no longer can deal with separate bits of information, so we look for higher levels of organization. We look for narratives. He says scientists are lousy communicators and we can't afford that. He's got an interesting theory of why scientists don't understand media, and he's actively working to change it.

OLSON earned his Ph.D. in Biology from Harvard and was a tenured professor of marine biology at the University of New Hampshire when he quit and moved to Los Angeles to attend USC film school, learn narrative, and bring that knowledge back to his fellow scientists. He's written and directed a number of short films and feature documentaries, written books, including DON'T BE SUCH A SCIENTIST and HOUSTON, WE HAVE A NARRATIVE, and developed what he calls the ABT framework to guide folks in learning to speak in narratives. Old industries and old prejudices that don't want to change use narrative to attract and influence a willing audience who also don't want to change. We need to come up with narratives that alter the perspectives of enough people to speed things up by reducing the friction that slows our pursuit of solutions we so desperately need.

Welcome again, RANDY OLSON to FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK.

Olson (00:06:27):
[laughing] Thanks. That was a great introduction. Way to go. You're right. And I tracked down that episode and jumped in the middle of it and listened to a couple of minutes of us talking and thought, “Wow, that was really a great conversation.” You had kind of forgotten, and I sent you the link, and then you wrote me back the same thing. “Wow. That's kind of an interesting conversation we had back then. Yeah.” Let me start off here with just a little challenge to you.

McNally:
Sure.

Olson:
Let me read you three or four sentences that is the opening of an article in a popular publication. And I want you to guess the year that this came from. Here's how this article opens. It's the very beginning of this issue of this publication. It says:
“To be confused is to be weak. To be weak is to be lost. Yet many people profess to be confused by the shrieking world erupting around them…”I don't
know what to believe,” they say, or “I can't make heads or tails of anything anymore,” but it seems to me that the confusion is superficial.
And now what year do you think that came from?

McNally(00:07:32):
Well, I wish this were a real challenge, but you mentioned that article to me.

Olson (00:07:39):
Yes.

McNally(00:07:40):
And so I have looked it up and it was 1941.

Olson (00:07:45):
Precisely.

McNally(00:07:46):
And it was Reader's Digest.

Olson (00:07:49):
Yes, precisely.

McNally(00:07:57):
Six months before our entrance into World War II.

Olson (00:07:59):
That's right. It was May of 1941, and it's just, you feel like you hear the same words spoken by people today. The world is in chaos and everything's erupting around us, which, I don't know, leaves you a little baffled about “more things change, more they stay the same.” Maybe

McNally:
I know…,

Olson:
…or maybe not.

McNally(00:08:17):
Let me just read a little more. I had put a little of this in my interview script here. This is Brooks Atkinson…

Olson (00:08:31):
Who was a Pulitzer Prize winner,

McNally(00:08:34):
…and the article was originally in The Nation…

Olson:
Yes.

McNally:
…and then reprinted in the Reader's Digest. Now, I don't know even if the Reader's Digest still exists…

Olson:
It does.

McNally:
…but in its later years, was not reprinting things from The
Nation, believe me… (00:08:52) The Reader's Digest had grown more conservative and The Nation, perhaps had grown more progressive, but it was funny to me to see that

the twain met back in 1941. Brooke Atkinson goes on to say, and I love this, “If the democratic way of life were not based on a moral concept of human relations, it would not be worth preserving your freedom. Were it not the vital source of the present future, it would not be worth the staggering price we must pay to retain it.” He was talking then about Hitler in Europe and the fight that loomed, but this “Save democracy. It's precious. It's in danger,” is today's news.

Olson (00:09:46):
That's the crazy part of it all, isn't it? Yeah. Who could have guessed even 20 or 30 years ago that we'd end up in a situation today where it's seriously being questioned and doubted and worried about.

McNally(00:09:57):
Although he did say, “Democracy is a fundamental idea, which cannot be regarded as inefficient because it has yet to be achieved.”

Olson (00:10:08):
Oh, that's a great line. Wow…

McNally:
Isn't it?
Yeah. You know what, doggone it, that line connects directly with what I wish more politicians would say, which is the catchphrase from the very beginning of, “In order to create a more perfect union…” The founders were so smart, and I think they had an intuitive sense of evolution basically. They knew that you had to get the process started. You're not going to start with something perfect, but that over time, if you work in that direction, you will slowly create a more perfect union. That phrase ought to be used more in public discourse. And that sentence you just read connects directly with that, right?

McNally(00:10:50):
Yeah. Well, one of the things about that I think is implicit in what you're saying, is that - because I’ve done a few shows recently on minority rule with Daniel Ziblatt and with Ari Berman. Both talking about how the
Republican Party has exploited weaknesses or gaps or sort of norms in the Constitution to end up with minority rule. And one of the things that struck me was that the founders knew that what they were doing was a start. It was a draft.

Olson:
Yeah, exactly.

McNally:
There are quotes. It's very clear that they expected that it would need to be perfected. And what happened was the following generations ended up turning it into a sacred document.

Olson (00:11:47):
Right? That's right. Yeah, exactly.

McNally(00:11:49):
We haven't had a meaningful amendment in 50 years.

Olson (00:11:54):
Yeah, no, you're right on the money with that…

McNally(00:11:56):
…and how we could go from these revolutionaries who wrote the thing to within a couple of generations, people… The Bill of Rights… There's 10 amendments right there. But after that, people got very scared about messing with the Constitution. And we all know… I say, we all know, but it's pretty clear, I think, that there are gaps and weaknesses which leave us open to minority rule currently.

Olson (00:12:26):
Yeah, definitely. But let's get a little less erudite here and let's dive in back where you started.

McNally(00:12:32):
No, what I want to dive into first since we have an hour, Randy, is a little bit of your story, because, as I said, you are a scientist turned filmmaker turned communications advisor. Talk a little bit about that for me in two ways. One, why you decided that you'd go to film school and leave a tenured track position and research and so on. And then, how what began as, "I got to help scientists communicate" has now become a much broader approach to your work in communications.

Olson (00:13:14):
Yeah. Okay. Start off with the departure from the science world and the tenured professorship that I had. In theory, by my early thirties, I had kind of my whole career locked in and solved….

McNally:
Yeah.

Olson:
I did get tenure around age 37 or so, but the academic world was too conservative for me really, in terms of not politics but in terms of change and innovation. It's just very, very hard to innovate within. It was back then, and it's more so today than ever. And innovation is kind of the only thing that interests me.

So I left academia in 1994, meaning that right now is exactly 30 years that I've been on this journey. And I've now landed at the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I tell people, had you told me 30 years ago that I'd end up where I'm now, I would've said, "Oh my God, I can't wait to get started."

I'm working now with the very best of groups. It's an innovation lab in Seattle called Global Health Labs. And it's a long time part of kind of the Bill Gates world. It's an innovation lab for the work they're doing in global health. (00:15:33)

And they support scientists there to develop mostly a lot of diagnostics to be used in low resource settings. So in some of these different countries where it's really hard to get medical help in there, they try and design new techniques, approaches, gadgets, things like that. And then I work with them on their communication of the research that they've done.

And I think because they are oriented towards innovation to begin with, they have been so open-minded to the innovation that I've developed here with the ABT. And it's been a really fun, productive collaboration, much better than any other group I've worked with. …an awful lot of other groups. They basically, they just don't quite get

it on innovation. It takes a lot of time and effort to take a new idea and make it work. We've been working with them for two years and a lot of what we're saying right now is different from two years ago because we're making this stuff up as we go along. (00:16:28)

The vast majority of people take that as a signal – "They don't know what they're

doing." But innovators can see it when it's happening and realize, wow… We're going back and forth, my co-instructor, Matthew David, and I, every two months go up there. We just spent another week there working with them, and the head of machine learning said, "Every time you guys come here, you're saying a different thing - and that's a really good thing."

McNally(00:16:58):
Oh, right. I have to tell you, and I think you knew this in the past, I spent 20 years in the entertainment industry and wrote movies, wrote songs, acted, produced. And then I spent about 20 years helping organizations including the Gates Foundation at one point, with storytelling and narrative. So similar path there. And what I found, which echoes, I think what you're saying, you were talking that it's fear of innovation. I think it's fear of just about any change. I would go in, we would do a workshop. People would usually respond very favorably and they'd say, "Wow, this is going to help." And I would never hear from them again.

Olson (00:17:45):
I know that. I know that syndrome.

McNally(00:17:47):
Right. In other words, the idea of integrating a new skill doesn't seem to fall into anyone's job description. So they go back to doing what their job description said yesterday, and thank you very much.

So the fact that you have a partner now that is willing to invest and willing, like you said, willing to respond not just to one innovation, but to innovation within innovation is very exciting. And as you say, it's partly because their orientation is not to do more of medicine business as usual, but to serve needs that haven't been served. I ended up doing a podcast - we both have some time at Harvard, I was a student there, and you got your PhD there, correct?

Olson:
Yes.

McNally:
Yeah. And I ended up doing a podcast series for their Wyss Institute, W-Y-S-S Institute, which is all about innovation. And I found them so different from other organizations and other places that I had worked with. The notion of innovation and change was their North Star.

Olson (00:19:11):
That's great.

McNally(00:19:12):
Let's go back. As we both know, and as you say, we've got existing
reality, problem, solution.

Olson:
Exactly.

McNally(00:19:30):
So let's dive into the existing reality that has created the problem for which your work aims to be a solution.

Olson (00:19:42):
A lot of what my journey consists of is that I was brought into academic
world in the mid 1970s and looked at that world, really liked it, and said, “Yes, I want to be a part of that world.” But by a decade later, by the ‘80s, that world was changing drastically. And by the mid-80s, I was beginning to realize I didn't want any part of that world. That world in the ‘70s was not suffering from information overload. By the ‘80, it was. The information explosion took place, and it's just gone on unchecked since then. What you mentioned early on with the Steve Bannon quote is that Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s was a media visionary, and he tried to warn back then, “We're turning into a media-driven society.” And media is at the edge of human consciousness. People really don't understand… (00:20:36)
There's nobody that can totally understand how media works, particularly the transition from written to visual as you've worked with. You know what it's like to write a script, picture things, and then to see what you wrote up on the screen and realize, “Wait, I didn't really grasp that at all”.
So he warned of that, and, of course, now as that progression of information explosion has continued, we've now moved even further from a media-driven society to a social-media-driven society.

McNally:
Right.

Olson:
And we're just in chaos now where absolutely nobody has complete understanding of how this all works. But along the way, it's begun to select for people who emerge out of the media world. And that's what happened with Ronald Reagan. That was what I

began to realize in the ‘80s. For people that don't remember back then or didn't experience… Our country elected an actor, the co-star of Bedtime for Bonzo ,as the President. (00:21:31)

Five years later, you got to see in Back to the Future, the scene where Doc Brown is told in 1955…Marty McFly says that Reagan becomes the president, and he just explodes with laughter. I mean, that was absolutely laughable when I was growing up as a kid, the idea that this country would ever elect an actor as a president. But that's all a byproduct of this media- and social-media-driven society. And then this other term that Marshall McLuhan coined in his last years, the “information maelstrom”, and said that we're going to hit a stage where we produce so much information that the amount of misinformation is going to be equivalent. And at that point it'll be this maelstrom where it is all spinning in circles and nobody can make sense of anything. And that's exactly what happened in the pandemic and continues to happen now. (00:22:27)

And I don't know who's going to get a grasp on it, but it's certainly a very different era now, and the one thing I firmly believe is that anybody who emerges out of the media world and has a grasp on how media works, even to some extent, has got a huge advantage. And that's been the story with Trump, and that's what Bannon was talking about.

I hate to say it, but his words were very enlightened in this jaded, cynical, rotten way that has emerged in today's world. And the other thing that he said that was really stunning was that - showing some understanding of evolution science - and, of course, that's what I got my PhD in was evolutionary biology. I was there in the late ‘70s, early ‘80s, and kind of the really prime years for the Museum of Comparative Zoology there and the tremendous scholars that they had. (00:23:14)

I got to spend time around evolutionary biologists, the greatest of whom was Steven Jay Gould, the greatest communicator ever, in my opinion, for evolution science. If only he were around today, and if only there were some way socially to have politicians actually listen to his insights, because some of his essays that he wrote are so relevant about the basic science of…

That's what evolution is, it's the science of change. And what politics is dealing with endlessly is that changing environment. And what's happened is that the communications environment, as we're saying, has changed so much, and these institutions have not even begun to try and innovate to keep up with that change. And that's what Evolution Science teaches you you've got to have the variation in a population so that you can cope with a changing environment. And if you end up with a population that's just rigid in what they do, that you get selected against, and that's what you see happening.

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Olson (00:24:10):
And that's what's happened to the science world. I've tried to explain this to them. I've somewhat given up in all those efforts. I mean, I've hit enough brick walls. They're going to do what they're going to do. Scientists are so driven to just engage in self admiration that they get to the point where they'll only listen to voices that are admiring voices that tell them that they are the visionaries and the way of the future. And of course, my first book Don't Be Such a Scientist, was the exact opposite of that. They made the mistake of training me with a critical mind, and then when I turned that critical mind on their profession, they just stuck their fingers in their ears and said, "Get out of here."

McNally(00:24:46):
Let me jump in and respond about a few things. One is about the science world. I recently interviewed Zoe Schlanger, whose book The Light Eaters. Do you know of it?

Olson (00:25:01):
No, I don't. Yes. Tell me about it.

McNally(00:25:04):
At least when it was published about two months ago, it hit the bestseller list. It is about agency in plants, the amazing things that plants can do that shake our whole understanding of what intelligence is or what consciousness is or how we begin to draw lines between, okay, plants…

Olson (00:25:25):
Yeah, I have heard some mentions though. That's great. Yeah, keep going.

McNally(00:25:28):
So…a big part of what goes on in that book is not just about plants, it's about the institutions of science and how conservative it is.

Olson (00:25:39):
Absolutely. Absolutely. That's why I left science. Exactly.

McNally(00:25:42):
That was what you were running into back then, and that's what any of these people working in this field run into. They have to couch their things… They can't say what they've discovered almost because they will be rejected.

Olson (00:25:58):
That's the truth. Yeah…

McNally(00:25:59):
I was going to say, I think most people think that science is radical and changeable, and in fact, the institution is very conservative like a religion.

Olson (00:26:10):
Well, and it's not that there's anything pejorative about that or evil about it. It has to be conservative by nature because you're building this edifice of knowledge. And if you're not conservative, if you're just open to any idea… "We'll throw out there…" And that's what it's moved towards a little bit, I think, with some of this. the public library science or these open publications, it's clearly… Entropy is coming into play more and more, where it needs a lot of order, and the byproduct of that order is this conservative nature.

So I knew that going in and accepted it, and you had to write these peer-review publications and you had to submit your grant proposals for peer review. It's just that I was drawn to innovation. And so if you go back to the little bits of research that… I published 20 or so papers before I left there, and you could see review papers that talked about the work that I did was novel and innovative. So verbatim, and yet my first seven National Science Foundation grant proposals I submitted once I became a professor, all got rejected. (00:27:12)

And the reviews would come back, and the peer reviewers would say, "The work he's done in the past is really good, but what he's proposing now isn't worth giving money to." And I would sit there and look at that and say, "Look for this teeny tiny little topic I work on, for the starfish larvae, I'm the world's expert on it, and why won't you listen to me when I tell you this is the work that needs to be done?" So it was anti-leadership. You are not allowed to use your own instincts to try and lead the field and say, "Everything in my gut tells me we should do this work." It was facilitation. And this is the fundamental divide in our society right now, and it's the arc that we're undergoing. Obama talked about the unbending arc of moral justice. Well, there's this bigger arc that's gone on for the last half century, which is the arc from leadership to facilitation. (00:27:59)

And you want the perfect example of it? Just take a look at Steve Jobs to Tim Cook for Apple. This blindingly clear, brave, bold voice of individualism of Steve Jobs and a true leader, and then this bland, dull facilitator guy that has been the head of Apple and just raking in the money and not innovating like they used to.

That's really the arc, and it's an interesting topic right this moment to figure out what's going on with this new candidate for Democratic candidate for the President. I don't think there's a lot of leadership there. I think it's possible she could prove to be one of the great facilitators of our time, and that could be a recipe for success - that she can pull together all these different people. But I don't know, because that sort of facilitation runs the risk of so much mediocrity and dullness and just no individual voice, and we're programmed to follow the individual, the singular narrative.
(00:28:57):

That's what we've dug into with the work I do with the ABT structure is this realization that it's about The One in the business world. There was a bestselling book 12, 13 years ago called The One Thing, and lots of those people in the business world get that. This is some of the battles I got in the thick of during the pandemic, trying to get these prominent epidemiologists and biomedical folks to understand that you've got to respect the singular narrative.

They were doing press conferences on TV with three spokespeople on the screen. They had the White House, the NIH and CDC. And then the next year they added one more person, so they had had four people on the screen. That is such a fundamental violation of how mass communication works. You need the singular one voice, and there's just tons of literature to back that up. And yet, I don't know who runs the show when they just make this stuff up as they go along. “Well, let's have everybody on the screen all talking at once.” Doesn't work that way.

McNally(00:29:55):
I can understand that they see a value in that. It shows collaboration. It shows they're…

Olson (00:30:06):
Sorry, this is where Steve Bannon would weigh in and try and explain to them, “You're just stupid. You people are stupid.”

McNally(00:30:12):
I can understand the appeal from one side, but not if you're looking for - which you should be looking for in science, which is efficacy, success, effectiveness. And that means you have to take your urge to collaborate and say, “We collaborated. Now you tell the story.”

I wanted to do one other thing before we move on, Randy, which is you referred to McLuhan, we referred to Brooke Atkinson. I wanted for people who want to go back

and look a little more at people who saw the future coming, the work of McLuhan is definitely important. Neil Postman -

Olson (00:30:54):
I was just about to mention that…

McNally(00:30:57):
His book Amusing Ourselves to Death is probably the one I have given to people more than any other.

Olson (00:31:04):
Okay. So I'll add another one with that. Since you already know that book, that was transformative to me. It was published in the mid-80s. Exactly. And I read that as I was beginning to have these thoughts about heading. But the other book that was really foundational for me and continues to be at an incredibly deep level is The Powers That Be.

McNally(00:31:25):
Yes…That was a new one to me.

Olson (00:31:26):
…by David Halberstam.
And I, thankfully… I don't know how I got a copy of it, but when I was a postdoctoral fellow in Australia at the Australian Institute of Marine Science, doing my little experiments and every night just sitting in the lab for hours and on the weekends, just such a solitary profession so often in science, but… That's a big fat book and I read that slowly and soaked in every… and it's tremendous storytelling. David Halberstam was just a brilliant communicator. And probably the most important lesson in the whole thing is that…

He picked four main media outlets that were important in the US and matched up the individual voice behind them. So Time Magazine with Henry Luce and CBS News with William Paley. He told the story of CBS news. And it's such a fascinating story (00:32:20) and sadly, George Clooney, with the best of Intentions, made that black and white movie about Edward R. Murrow, but really missed the boat.

I don't think they quite grasped the deeper depths of what's significant about Edward R. Murrow’s life, which is right there in The Powers That Be. In World War II, there were all these radio correspondents over in

Europe, Eric Sevareid and Harry Reasoner, that all became correspondents that we grew up on TV watching them. But they emerged… It was before TV existed, in the early 1940s, and they were the voice of the reporting from Europe live. And everybody huddled around the radios at night and listened to what was going on over there.

And they were idealists, and when they came back from World War II, Edward R. Murrow was part of the group, and television began to emerge. (00:33:10)

And they had this idealistic vision that this at last is this medium that we can lead the public with. We can educate them through this medium of television and people will tune in and they will know what their government's doing. And they had so many dreams and hopes with it.

And they tried in the 1950s and he had his show, I think it was Here it Now or something like that, and bits and pieces of good stuff. And they expanded. William

Paley got behind it. They created the CBS News Department. Murrow's news show was an hour long, and they were kind of getting there.

And then as David Halberstam tells about in painful detail, something happened. And that something was literally Gilligan's Island, Beverly Hillbillies, Petticoat Junction, The Munsters. All those shows began to emerge and make massive amounts of money for the TV stations, (00:34:11) and they began to realize, "We want money. We don't want to educate the masses. We want money." And they began to cut back Edward R. Murrow's projects and everything, and again, that's what Halberstam details in there. And Edward R. Murrow drank himself into his grave, was a chain smoker, and was depressed his final years. None of that's in the really clear in the George Clooney movie, but that's the story that needed to be told.

It was the emerging of this media-driven society, and it was in that milieu that Marshall McLuhan began to put the pieces together like, "Oh my God, this is not good." The land of the Lotus Eater. There's all these people just getting drunk on entertainment television. Jumped to fifty, sixty years later where we are today, which is exactly that. It's just seductive as we know, (00:34:58) and it just keeps on going.

And so when you look way back then, the pattern was already there. And then you jump to the mid-80s with Neil Postman's book Amusing Ourselves to Death. And that's what he was predicting. And basically a lot of the subtext of that

book was “You'd better watch out. If you ever have a political candidate that emerges that is popular, with humor and things that the masses really connect with, because they'll be seductive.

This is where the ABT starts to get fascinating. The
ABT is basically the fractal unit at the core of communication, of storytelling, of argumentation, logic, and reason. It's the tripartite structure and it's the three forces of agreement, contradiction, and consequence.

McNally(00:35:44):
Hold on one second, Randy, you teased it. Now let me take this mid conversation break and we'll come back to that. The one other thing I will say before I go to this break is that two movies I would suggest people take a look at. One, of course, is A Face in the Crowd.

Olson (00:36:03):
Oh yeah… God, exactly.

McNally(00:36:04):
…which, if you haven't seen it, will blow your mind and scare the crap out of you. About an operator who finds a country music guy and turns him into, first, a national celebrity, and then a political power. The other one that is done much more sort of crazily, but has something to say is Idiocracy.

Olson (00:36:34):
Yeah, you and I are so much on the same wavelength.

McNally(00:36:38):
Idiocracy is a movie that didn't make it big, but it is a future 500 years from now where someone arrives in a time machine and in the current day he's an idiot and he becomes the most powerful sort of political figure in the future. So those are two movies of warnings, and then Postman and McLuhan.

Let me tell people you're listening to FREE FORUM: A WORLD THAT JUST MIGHT WORK and I’m Terrence McNally, speaking with RANDY OLSON, marine biologist turned filmmaker turned communications advisor, author of DON’T BE SUCH A SCIENTIST and HOUSTON, WE HAVE A NARRATIVE and a series of books that put into practice what we're about to talk about, which is his solutions for this maelstrom that we find ourselves in. And they are called Narrative Gyms. And what he did was he wrote a book called The Narrative Gym, which is basically a way to work out and get better

and better at communicating with narrative. And then he has made the series for different professions, Narrative Gym for the Law, Narrative Gym for the Environment, Narrative Gym for Politics, for Medicine, and so on. And you can learn about all of this at Randy's website, ABT Apple-Balloon-Texas, ABT framework, A-B-T framework dot com.

Okay, so I've just introduced it. What is the ABT framework?

Olson (00:38:14):
For starters, I'm beginning to get to the opinion that this may be the only podcast I ever want to do. You and I are so much on the same wavelength that it's really fun to not have to do all this introductory explanation things. And all the books you're citing were kind of the exact same.

So let's see, in a nutshell. I went to USC Film School, did the whole master's program, in the mid-90s, took five writing courses at least, just writing, writing, writing. And then in 2009 wrote my first book, Don't Be Such A Scientist. And there was a chapter title, Don't Be Such a Poor Storyteller, and I pointed out all the problems that scientists have when it comes to telling stories, yada, yada. I didn't have a solution. And people began to invite me to do workshops at NIH and CDC and all these places. And it got really good reviews in Science and Nature and everywhere like that, so it was all fine. But eventually some people started to make some little snide comments that were actually absolutely right, which was, “Nice job of critiquing how bad we are at storytelling. Where's your solution?”

McNally:
Yeah.

Olson:
Exactly. Way to go, tough guy…

McNally(00:39:22):
By the way, let me just say, you are aware, I'm sure, how often that is the case with so many books.

Olson (00:39:31):
Oh my God, oh my god…

McNally(00:39:32):
In other words, I'm sort of putting you in my position, where I look and someone has a

book on all these issues, all these problems in society, and then they have that last chapter often that sort of runs through some solutions, which are not going to happen. But go ahead…

Olson (00:39:51):
Well, you know what, I'm just going to tell a rotten little anecdote right here, and I'm sure a bunch of people hate me for telling this, but it's about Alan Alda, who has done really great work in the science world with communication. And the great accomplishment that he's done is that he validated improv as a teaching technique for communication. Because when I was working with the Groundlings 20 years ago, and I couldn't get the door open in the science world because I was a pipsqueak, and they would go, "Oh, improv, that's for idiots". And then he came along with his fame and things like that and really validated, and that's all really, really great. So all hats off to him.

But that said, about oh, twelve years ago or so, I was doing a workshop with EPA and this woman came up to me at the break and she said, we hosted Alan Alda at our university last year, and he was wonderful. (00:40:46) We did all these exercise and improv and everything was great, great, great, great, great, but he kept telling us, "You scientists need to do a better job of telling your stories." And we finally stopped him and said, we agree. How do we do that? And he said, "You do it by telling stories that reach down inside of people and grab them and hold them and excite them and inspire them." And she said, "We agree, that's what we want to do. Exactly. How do we do that?" And there was no answer.

So you know, you've got to have a mechanism, you've got to have a model. You got to have something like that, a tool…

McNally(00:41:20):
Let me guess, Alan Alda has that. He just didn't know how to articulate it because for him, based on his years of improv, his years of acting, it had become second nature is my guess. I'm sure… (00:41:39) I'm sure he used what he was unable to tell.

Olson (00:41:42):
No, no, hang on. There's a fundamental divide between the cerebral and the visceral. And so what he has is the visceral, and that's an ability to tell stories through experiential, years and years and years of doing this stuff, as well as probably some genetic component to begin with, that he already was probably as a kid pretty good at telling stories.

(00:42:07) And Hollywood has spent a century trying to figure out what are those tools? Because Hollywood's been driven by the need to make money, and they can't afford to present products that are boring or confusing. The science world can. The science world has just relished that for a hundred years. There are places that really just tell their scientists, We don't want you to waste any effort trying to communicate well. All we want is for you to focus on getting all the data accurate and just presenting them, and we'll figure out how to put it together."

At any rate, it's the absence of that mechanism. And so at this talk, I was presenting the ABT, and that was what cued this woman to come up to me at the break. And she said, "Finally, somebody's got an actual tool that we can do something analytical with this." And that's where we are now, is that, yeah, it's getting wider and wider use now. And I'm kind of getting swamped with all the stuff that we're doing, which is fun, but it's what's been missing and it took these number of years to happen.

McNally(00:43:06):
You didn't have it right away. It was trial and error…

Olson (00:43:10):
Well, so let me tell you about the probably three or four main points in the timeline. So timeline point number one is the 1700's, the great philosophers who identified the triad from Hegel and others, which is this tripartite structure, which they labeled as "thesis, antithesis, synthesis," and deeper than that, it's three forces. It's "agreement, contradiction, and consequence." If you really want to know the thing to learn at an intuitive level, it's those three things. This is how we communicate effectively: We begin with agreement, "Here's what we can all agree on." Then we introduce the contradiction, "But here's my idea." And then you pull it together into the synthesis.

McNally(00:43:47):
And another way that it's put often in screenwriting and so on, is "set up, problem, solution."

Olson (00:43:54):
But it's all the same thing. It's all the same thing. And…

McNally(00:43:57):
One of your partners, Park Howell, I love the way he says it, "Find the hurt, amplify the pain, heal the wound."

Olson (00:44:05):
Yes, yes precisely. And so there is that structure, and yet I didn't learn it in film school. I had these five courses. I had published that book and said, "Everybody needs to get better at storytelling". And then they said, "How?" And then I did the same thing I'm talking about with Alan Alda, which is. "…by telling good stories." "I know. How, how, how?"

So in the, let's see, November of 2011, Comedy Central had a half hour documentary about the making of South Park, and in the middle of it, one of the two co-creators of South Park, Trey Parker talked about this thing they have they call their "rule of replacing." And he said, "Every week we get a first draft of the script, and then we sit down and use what we call our rule of replacing. Where every time you go through the script and every time you see the word 'and' you ask yourself, 'Could I replace that 'and" with a 'but' or a 'therefore?' Every time you replace an 'and' with a 'but' or a 'therefore' the storytelling gets more interesting.
When I heard that the very first time I just about fell out of my chair. As I say, I'd been through all these courses in film school. Nobody had ever put it that simply, but I knew as a scientist the power of simplicity. And I immediately went to work calling up all my screenwriter friends and saying, "You ever heard this?" And none of them had, but they all said it makes total sense. It fits right into basically the hero's journey model.

And then eventually Marty Kaplan from the Annenberg School of Communications, the Norman Lear Center, my good buddy, sent me the transcript of a speech from Frank Danielle, who was the greatest of screenwriting instructors. I had his course the year before he passed away, he was at USC… (00:45:46)

In 1986, he'd given a speech where he laid it out very simply, and there's two paragraphs in that speech that I quote in my books, and the first paragraph says, "Whenever we write a first draft" - and he was talking about screenwriting, but it's the same for a scientific paper, it's same for a speech, anything you do – "Whenever we write a first draft, we always fall into the dreaded structure of, "and then", "and then", "and then", "and then." It's in the revisions that you go back and replace those "and then"s with the "but"s and the "therefore"s, and that's what gives the story its texture, its the changes of directions. But they did this, therefore they ended up doing this, but then they realize this. That's what the South Park guys were talking about. And I traded emails with Matt Stone, one of the other co-creators, and he gave a little more background.

McNally:
…of South Park..

Olson (00:46:31):
…the co-creators of South Park, exactly.
And as I got ready to publish the Houston book, I had a section in there where I talked about how I got this from them, and I really wanted to acknowledge them, and wanted them to know I wasn't just lifting it from them. And he wrote back a great email in which in the middle of it, he said, ‘This is what Trey and I figured out early on. The line I quote endlessly in talks that I give, he said, “We realized early on that structure is so important and yet so so hard to get right.” And that is the essence of everything I do now - accepting and understanding that it's so important. And then he used the word “so” twice for getting it right. You have to put all this time into it, and that's the catch. (00:47:18) That's the bugaboo in the whole system.

At any rate, then I took the three words and turned them into this template of the ABT – “And, But, Therefore,” and here we are twelve years down the road from that.

And an interesting thing - buddies of ours in the UK, David Pullan and Sarah Jane McKechnie. They have a business consulting group, and they flipped over the ABT a number of years ago, and they've just come out with a new short book and they've modified it a little bit into their version, which they call… DNA is their acronym.

McNally:
Oh, cool.

Olson:
Well, more importantly, what the DNA stands for is “Dream, Nightmare, Action.” We're now using that a lot. That is really at the core of anything you want to communicate effectively. I use it with all the scientists now, which is, “Don't start off by telling us the problem. (00:48:11) “Everybody's dying because of pollution…”

Start us off with the dream, “We think that we're making some progress on this technique.” I mean, this is what nuclear power would have for a narrative. “We think that we’ve got this thing that won't change the climate…” And use the tool “if then.” “…and if we can develop this thing far enough, then we're going to end up with a world where we can do all these things and not be contaminated, blah, blah, blah.” Only then, once you tell us your dream, are we ready now for you to start in with what the problem is? “But here's the problem…”

McNally(00:48:44):
Now let me say that when I was thinking about this, and before I went back and looked at all of your writing, but we had had our exchange, and I was thinking… I was going, “and…but… therefore…” I get the “but” and the “therefore’, what's the “and”, right?

Olson:
Yes.

McNally:
…because in a way “and” isn't really “and”. “And” is the current world, the current moment, or in this case the dream. Then you said something else. You said in one of our exchanges, you said “The past is emotional. The future is intellectual and has no power.” Now it sounds like the dream is the positive way of talking about the future. And let me read you a quote, which if you don't know it, you will love, it's Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the creater of The Little Prince.

Olson (00:49:40):
Oh wow, cool…

McNally(00:49:41):
He says, “if you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.”

Olson (00:49:52):
There you go.

McNally(00:49:53):
I remember reading that just shortly after Trump's election and going, “Yeah, we got to have something that's worth it. But that is the dream part, isn't it?

Olson (00:50:08):
It absolutely is. And probably about the greatest communicator in the history of this country was Martin Luther King Jr. And we use his, I Have a Dream speech…there you go. The first paragraph, the first full paragraph, the beginning of that speech is pure ABT. It's the model of ABT. You can see the ABT right there. It's really fascinating. And what he did in the first big paragraph in the speech was he began with the dream. He said, “A hundred years ago, this great American…” - meaning Lincoln – “…signed the Emancipation Proclamation and gave rise to a joyous daybreak, liberating, freeing all the slaves, yada, yada yada…” And he paints this wonderful glowing picture… Had he ended the speech right there, everybody would've gone home happy. Like, “Wow,

Lincoln solved it." But he doesn't end it right there. After about two sentences, he cuts to the word "but" and he uses "but" four times in a row. He says, "…but a hundred years later, look at what we've got… a hundred years later, we have this." (00:51:11) A hundred years later we have this. A hundred years later we have this. And what he's doing there is that, after painting this beautiful dream, now he's painting the nightmare. He's taking us down deeper and deeper and deeper, activating the crowd, getting everybody on the same wavelength, setting up the whole journey, and then the last sentence of that paragraph says, "…so we're gathered here once again…" to keep working on this. That's perfect communication right there. And that's ABT.

McNally:
Okay.

Olson:
So you can see it at work in places like that.

McNally(00:51:41):
Right, right. When you mentioned MLK as a great communicator, one thing that both you and I have quoted… and when I read you quoting it, I went, "I remember quoting that…" because as I think I've mentioned, I taught storytelling to folks as well, was that Obama, when he was asked, "What was your weakness in the first administration?" when he was running for reelection? He said, "I thought it was just come up with the policies. I didn't realize how much of the job was storytelling."

Olson (00:52:18):
That's exactly right. And in fact, the way he delivers it…as an ABT, exactly what you said there. "I thought it was as simple as just getting the policy straight - and that's important - but it's also the job of the president to tell a story to the American public. To go back to the MLK "I have a dream" speech for a moment I get really passionate about this because the more you learn about this stuff, the more beautiful it becomes. There are these things like art appreciation and architecture appreciation. You go and take a course on art and you learn about all these nuances that make up a painting, and then you go to an art gallery and you can see that stuff, and it gives you a deeper appreciation for how amazing some of these paintings are. And the same thing with architecture. (00:53:03)

Well, eventually, I think that's going to emerge for narrative structure because this is what we get into as we get an understanding of the ABT. In The Narrative Gym book for politics, I wrote a whole appendix in there that a bunch of people have written me about, and they really enjoyed reading it.

And what I got into there in terms of the I Have a Dream speech, is the fact that it's little talked about, but there were two versions of that speech. So the one that everybody knows and loves is from August of ‘63, but he gave basically the same speech, in Detroit in June of ‘63. And they showed up there for that event, and it ended up turning out a much larger audience than he had anticipated. And so he probably hadn't put as much work into the speech that first time through. (00:53:49)

And when you look at the opening of those two speeches side by side, the two drafts, basically what you see is that between June and August, his brain with deep narrative intuition, not with any ABT textbook to guide him, but simply with the deep intuition of a great communicator, he made all these changes that match up exactly with the ABT framework.

So namely, he took a whole bunch of informational details that were in the June version and dropped them. In the June version, he tells the name of Abraham Lincoln and he tells the exact number of years, and he gives the exact dates of all these things. By the time you get to August, it's all smoothed out with generalities. “A great American…” is all he says. He doesn't mention Lincoln's name, and he says, “…five score years ago…” instead of exactly the number of years. And, more importantly, in that June version, he had two “but”s. By the time he got to August, there's only one, but that's all you want. You want the one point, the singular narrative, the point of contradiction… and a number of other features. And it's just so cool to look at what he…

McNally(00:54:52):
Wow, yeah. Well that's like looking at someone who did painted a scene more than once…

Olson (00:54:57):
Yes. Yes, exactly. Yeah. And I wish more people would just read that appendix because it's basically narrative structure appreciation. The more you look at that speech, and especially that opening, you see what was going on was that he - and because I think he'd been a preacher and sort of had that training, that shaping of intuition for narrative - he knew how to shape these things. And I think he hadn't given as much thought to the June version. And in fact, in one of the books about the I Have a Dream speech, they talk about the night before, they were all at the restaurant, then he went back to the hotel and continued to work on that speech down to the wire. Yes, he had a speech writer, but I think a lot of the shaping of it came from him and his great intuition. And you look at all of his speeches, they've all got really strong narrative structure.

And then that connects with what you'd mentioned early on, which is these two metrics that we've developed now. And I had to tiptoe with these metrics in the beginning because nobody quite grasped them. But now we're getting more and more people, they get what we're talking about. And these two metrics, if I could take a minute here to talk about them….

McNally(00:55:57):
Yeah. Go ahead. We've got about five minutes left.

Olson (00:56:00):
Alright, this is a perfect thing to finish on, because the two metrics are incredibly simple. And they're so simple that you get all these scholars that look at them and say, "It can't be this simple." As a matter of fact, you mentioned that when Trump was running against Hillary, this is what happened. I developed the two metrics and the alarms started to go off. "Look at this guy. He's got double the narrative strength of Hillary." Hillary's out there "and…and…and-ding" and Trump was endlessly ABT-ing. And basically the two indices that I developed were, first off, just the frequency of the word "and." It's so damn simple. And not only that, there are these big language studies, quantitative language studies that have been done, and they have identified that there is an optimum value.

McNally(00:56:42):
I know that really surprised me, Randy.

Olson (00:56:44):
Yes. And what is it? Do you know it?

McNally(00:56:46):
Yes. That the optimum percentage of "and"s out of the total words should be two and-a-half percent.

Olson (00:56:54):
There you go.

McNally(00:56:55):
…one out of every 40. Am I correct?

Olson (00:56:59):
Yeah, exactly…precisely. And as a matter of fact, you start looking at Hillary Clinton's speeches and debate performances, and she was up to 4-5%. And if you hit 5%, then

that's one out of every 20 words is the word “and”. And a lot of these government reports that we look at get to 5, to 6 to 7%. There's a big study done by the Stanford Literary Lab in 2015 where they identified that the annual reports from the World Bank are unreadable. Why? Because they're these gargantuan “and…and…and” documents. You can't plow through that stuff. It’s not narrative. (00:57:32) And so that's what I began to see, and eventually every person I turned to in the political world just looked at me like, “Where are your credentials? You're not a political consultant.” They slammed the door in my face. Finally, one day I sat down at the computer and searched “Hillary Clinton, boring” and what do you think came up? An interview with James Carville, where the headline said, “Carville says we need to accept that Hillary Clinton's boring…” And I managed to get in touch with him. And we connected. And for four months, we worked together to try and get the Clinton campaign to listen to what I had to say about the ABT. The consolation prize I got out of it was he brought me down to New Orleans to give a lecture one night in his political science course that met in his living room with 50 students, all drinking beers. It was one of the most hilarious nights of my entire life. So that was 10 years ago….

McNally(00:58:21):
You got a night with James Carville and his students. We got Trump.

Olson (00:58:25):
Yeah, exactly. It's all so sad in retrospect. Exactly, exactly. Oh my God. And Carville’s amazing, and he's just a tremendous storyteller with deep narrative intuition.

McNally:
Yup.

Olson:
And yeah, we went to dinner that night after the class, and we just sat there and he told stories. He held court in this little restaurant.

McNally(00:58:48):
By the way, when you were talking about Martin Luther King, I wanted to mention someone else who's done very well with storytelling is Ira Glass and This American Life, who basically revolutionized radio in a way. And he sort of came up with a structure of the way you have to format This American Life stories. And he said, “…and I thought I was a genius, and then I realized it was basically what preachers do every Sunday.” So the fact that Martin Luther King was the best of the best is one thing, but the fact is that those guys tell stories to impart lessons to keep

people coming back week after week. That's a tall order.

Olson (00:59:32):
Well, you want to know who's the category that's one half a level beyond preachers, and I can show you what the metrics. It's standup comics,

McNally:
(00:59:43) Of course.

Olson:
Yes. And they're the ones who live and die on their ability to hold the interest of an audience and to not bore them or confuse them. And when you start looking for example, at the But-to-And Ratio - that's the other metric is the But-to-And Ratio. What we do is you look at the ratio, "but's to "and"s, you multiply it by a hundred to make it a whole number. Boring people tend to be under 10. Most politicians are in their teens. Great communicators, great politicians are in their twenties. And feature articles in the

New Yorker, for example, tend to be score in the twenties. But when you get to the really good comedians, they start to get above 30. And if you look as I have done… I collected a hundred of Bill Maher's monologues that he does at the end of a show. They used to put the transcript of them on their website and…

McNally(01:00:36):
Now we get a book out with them.

Olson (01:00:38):
But I'm sure that's heavily edited. But no, just the show, those transcripts… and they're about a thousand words each of the monologues, and that's about what you need for a decent sample size. And lo and behold, the hundred that I gathered, they averaged about 33, I think 33, 34.

The good comedians is their "and…but… therefore"-ing everything. They're setting up the joke, they're giving the twist, and then they're getting to the synthesis.
And so I wrote in the politics book that every politician should have a comic writer on their staff - not to write jokes. That's the problem - people get so literal minded, "I don't want a joke." Right? No, you don't want that person to write jokes. You want that person because they understand at a visceral level the need to do this ABT dynamic. And when you work with academics, they're so caught up in the information and they don't think that the form stuff is very important at all. They don't get it. It's just it goes on and on.

McNally(01:01:35):
No, that makes very good sense - that you're bringing in that comedian or the comic writer, not for the comedy, but for the structure.

Olson (01:01:42):
… for the holding of the attention.

McNally(01:01:45):
Yeah. Two things I noticed that are outside of all of this
pretty much, but have been fixtures in your life are surfing and improv. My question is, how do surfing and improv relate to what you're doing?

Olson (01:02:15):
Yeah, improv is my whole life, just making it up as I go along. So when I got to film school, I began to hear about the Groundlings Improv Comedy Theater and began going to their shows. And then very quickly burrowed my way in there and got to know a bunch of the actors and they worked with me in my Shifting Baselines project I did. I worked with about 25 of them back then. It's been a while since... although one of them, Brian Palermo, ended up being my co-author for the training stuff. And he still is a part of our course. Just about three weeks ago, we had him in the course once again. He was part of the Groundling main stage cast. So that's where improv has been a recurring theme all along. And then surfing, I got into it in my mid-40s when I moved here.

McNally:
Wow.

Olson (01:03:03):
Yeah, all those years as a marine biologist, I ended up at some of these incredible marine labs and amazing places. And every time the group would say, “Let's go surfing”, I would just groan like, “Oh no, it's going to be another day of having a board hit me on the head cause I didn't catch a wave.” And so I threw myself in deeply on that. So much so that finally by 2007, I was coming out to Malibu every weekend to surf, and I finally said to my buddies, “I'm going to do experiment, move to Malibu, and if it's too boring and lonely, I'll be back in a year.” And then I never went back, and so I've been here ever since then. And yeah, I got into it deep. And one of the most fun things was about, I think 2019, I helped produce a really great documentary called White Rhino that's on Amazon, and it's about three gigantic swells that hit Fiji and Tahiti. (01:03:53)

It's very relevant right now with, they just did the Olympics in Tahiti. And it was a young guy who had shot all this great footage but didn't have the story structure training. And so I worked with him and took his drafts of the film and just gave endless notes on shaping it. The film ends up telling lots of great fun little stories. It's such a high energy film, but it's rich in storytelling. It played at over 50 film festivals, and the feedback endlessly was people just said, “We've never seen a surf film that tells such good stories.” And it does. It's got a great story to it. So that's one of the most fun things ever. And along the way, I got myself good enough that I was surfing standup barrels on the north shore of Hawaii and surfing Fiji and places like that. So I did kind of the whole surf experience, but the pandemic kind of botched the surf thing around here. Everybody went and got themselves a cheapo boardat CostCo and now the surf breaks are double the crowd size as they were before the pandemic. And as a result, I've kind of gotten put off on that a little bit.

McNally(01:04:58):
Okay. If you were going to say the one thing to remember when you go out of this is…

Olson (01:05:26):
The most important thing in life today is the past.

McNally(01:05:32):
Wow.

Olson (01:05:34):
Without it, we're lost and we're losing it. Here's the one shocker to me, among many things. Two years ago, a producer in Hollywood named Ted Hope, veteran producer, wrote an essay on his substack venue, and he said, ‘Does everybody realize that these studios have gotten rid of their story development departments?” Basically, Hollywood did a cost-benefit analysis with the mass public of America, where everybody's shortened their attention span, and they've come to realize it doesn't pay to tell a good story. As a result, what we're getting now, the vast majority of is really bad, and it just doesn't have storytelling to it. You need it. And the big challenge is the whole setup. And nobody cares about setup anymore. It's all turning into entertainment park rides where you don't need a setup. (01:06:23) You go to an entertainment park ride, you jump in the little car, you're off and running. And so that's what everything is turning into in our society.
And as a result, I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that that is the problem: without the past, we have nothing. And that's why I wrote that editorial on shifting baselines 22 years ago.

McNally:
That's right.

Olson:
And that's why historians, in theory, could be the saviors of our society, but unfortunately, the vast majority of them don't know how to communicate well enough themselves. So I don't know what the future holds.

McNally(01:06:54):
Okay. So all that stuff that we hear about, if you forget the past, if you don't realize the past… and what you're saying is that one of consequences of the flood and the speed-up of information is we skip the past.

Absolutely. And that's the old Santayana quote about "…you're doomed to repeat it."

Olson (01:07:15):
And I think last but not least on that, in the appendix of my Houston, We Have a Narrative book, I laid it out clearly there, the prediction that Twitter was either going to have to double the size of characters there or it was going to go broke. And two years later, they did exactly that. They doubled the size of characters because we started looking at Twitter at tweets in the early years, and it was too short at 140 characters, you couldn't put the three elements there, set up problem solution. And what you got then was only problem. Everybody chopped off the setup and the solution. And even still, it suffers from that a lot, but not as much as it did back then. And I went into that in detail. So that's it. You get a short attention span world, you lose the setup, and then you lose the past, and then you end up just as a whole pack of gerbils running back and forth in a field and nobody knows what they're doing. And that's a lot of today's world.

McNally(01:08:09):
Yep. Okay. There's so much, as you said, we're very much in sync and there's so many things we didn't touch on that we could, but thank you. This has been great fun. Even though what we're talking about…

Olson (01:08:21):
I may never do another podcast with anybody else. I don't know anybody else that's just aligned with all my interest and knowledge. So yeah, this is awesome. You're great.

McNally(01:08:30):
I mean, it is dismaying and fun at the same time.

Olson:
(laughter)

McNally(01:08:36):
So the website is abtframework.com, one word, A-B-T-framework.com. The key book is HOUSTON, WE HAVE A NARRATIVE, but there are also the Narrative Gym series. You can find out about all of them at that website. For this conversation and many other interviews and articles, and to join me in pursuit of a world that just might work go to terrencemcnally.net T-E-R-E-N-C-C-N-A-L-L-Y - terrencemcnally.net, or a-world-that-just-might-work dot com - the same website. If you want to receive my weekly email announcement telling you who's going to be on, what we're going to talk about, and links to 10 or 15 articles to flesh out the conversation, email me at temcnally, T-E-M-C-N-A-L-L-Y, at mac.com. You can also subscribe and listen to the Free Forum podcast at Apple Podcasts and most podcast sites. You'll find years of podcasts at my site and at most of those sites. Archives include Michael Lewis, Jeremy Scahill, Naomi Klein, Robert Reich, Van Jones, Connie Rice. You can also follow me on Twitter @mcnallyterrence, thanks to Kiyana Williams in production, George Vasilopoulis at Progressive Voices, and most of all, to you, my listeners, please share this podcast widely.

And finally, thank you, Randy Olson, and keep up your good work.

Olson (01:09:55):
Thank you. And keep reading the books that I like.

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