

Check It Out! Podcast Transcript  
Episode # 13  
“How to talk about depression with Bill Bernat”  
Sno-Isle Libraries, Jan. 18, 2019



Jim Hills: 00:00 In today's episode we get a chance to talk with Bill Bernat. Bill was a speaker at the 2017 TEDxSnoIsleLibraries. Bill brings what I would say is a really unusual perspective about how to deal with depression, how to talk about depression, how to talk with others about depression and other mental health issues. I'm sure you're gonna find this to be as fascinating as we did talking to him.

Ken Harvey: 00:33 Welcome to season 2 and episode 13 of Check It Out, the Sno-Isle Libraries podcast for life long learners with inquiring minds.

Speaker 3: 00:40 The views and opinions expressed on this podcast may not necessarily reflect the official position of Sno-Isle Libraries.

Ken Harvey: 00:47 Hi, I'm your host Ken Harvey and my co-host for this episode is Jim Hills.

Jim Hills: 00:51 Hi, great to be here.

Ken Harvey: 00:52 We are really excited because we get to spend some time with Bill Bernat and Bill is a technology marketer, a story teller and one of our TEDxSnoIsleLibraries speakers, who's TEDx talk was actually picked up by ted.com and put on their regular web channel. Well, Bill thanks for joining us.

Bill Bernat: 01:11 Good morning, thanks, I'm really glad to be here.

Jim Hills: 01:13 I'm really excited to talk to Bill. So, I had an opportunity to see the preparation for that TEDx, I saw Bill on stage, but I didn't get a chance to get close and talk to him and learn more, so I'm just totally excited about this opportunity.

Ken Harvey: 01:26 Well, I'm not surprised you didn't get a chance, cause he was being mobbed by many uproaring fans.

Bill Bernat: 01:30 We were all in stress bubbles essentially. You had to pierce our stress bubbles to get our attention.

(Continued)

Ken Harvey: 01:38 Well, tell you what Bill, let's start off talking about TEDxSnoIsleLibraries. Tell us a little bit about the idea that you were gonna share with the audience that they can see on your TED talk.

Bill Bernat: 01:50 Yeah, absolutely. So, the idea had kinda been percolating in my mind for a long time because I think about the tone in which our society talks about depression, right? People will be, it might be a TV show or a radio show or whatever, and they are like, "Okay and we'll be back with some dogs in costumes later and now we're gonna talk about, depression."

Ken Harvey: 02:13 Depression

Bill Bernat: 02:13 Right, and they're like "Are we sad enough yet? Can we talk about it yet?" And so, I've been wondering about this and so I put together a few ideas as a mental health awareness advocate for this, and I was working with some storytellers leading a workshop for a non-profit, NAMI, a mental health organization for a story telling show. I said to the storytellers who all either lived with or were impacted by friends and family with mental health conditions. Here is a few ideas that I'm thinking of pitching for a TEDx talk, and this was the first one I pitched, I said, "To help normal people who don't understand how to communicate with people who have mental health conditions." And they all said "Oh, you've gotta do that, that's really important to get that message out." So, we didn't even go through the rest of the list and that became my mission, and they became my little guide post. These people said it was really important to them to get this word out, so, that was a guiding light for me as well.

Ken Harvey: 03:14 So that idea, I remember being put to us here at Sno-Isle Libraries as a potential talk, and I remember seeing that and being really struck by thinking, "Gosh that might be really interesting to see shared from the stage." I don't think that I was so concerned about it might sounding depressing to others. I just thought that, I bet there are a lot of people who will find that this talk touches some part of their lives based upon either some experience they've had themselves or someone that they know.

Bill Bernat: 04:01 Yeah, I think that's a fair assessment right, not everybody lives with a mental health condition or understands what that's like, but pretty much everybody knows somebody who does and it impacts them.

Jim Hills: 04:12 Or they think they do. So they think they are seeing something that they would call, that person looks like they're struggling, they've got something, I don't know what's going on there but there's something going on there. So, they think they see that, whether they know they see that or not.

Bill Bernat: 04:27 Right, and they get intimidated, so many people get intimidated by- [crosstalk 00:04:31]

Ken Harvey: 04:31 Because they don't know what to say, right?

Bill Bernat: 04:32 They don't know what to say, and it's scary on several levels to even talk about it or for some people to even think about it. So, that's really the mission here, is hey let's talk about it. This is a normal part of life, we don't have to be heavy when we're talking about, we can even laugh about it. I mean we don't wanna be disrespectful, but at the same time, it's almost more disrespectful to maintain that heaviness because if we want people to thrive, if we want people to be able to talk and enjoy life, we need to be able to talk about this without getting sad or worried about what we are saying.

Ken Harvey: 05:07 Well wasn't the other end of the scale on that issue the political correctness, this oversensitivity that you can't even acknowledge about yourself to others, how you're doing on a particular time or day or anyone else acknowledging to you, "Gosh, I see something's going on with you, can we talk about it?" It seems like people are afraid to even talk these days.

Bill Bernat: 05:34 Well, for sure, I have all of my life pretty much, I mean, kept a certain amount of protection of what's really going on, especially in a work place environment, how are you doing? Well they don't really wanna know generally. I mean I've literally even just a friendly answer have people cut me off like, I didn't really wanna know, that mean they [crosstalk 00:05:57] say that.

Ken Harvey: 05:57 TMI.

Bill Bernat: 05:59 Even if I'm like, "Oh, I did this, this weekend." Like halfway through the sentence they're like, "I'm gonna go get an apple."

Ken Harvey: 06:03 Yeah, where'd he go?

Bill Bernat: 06:06 Right. So, but there is for people who have deeper, deeper thoughts, darker thoughts or deeper struggles, there's a bigger hiding, you translate like, "Oh, is it okay to talk about this here

with this person? Is it okay to talk about this here?" There's an appropriateness too, just because you can talk about it, doesn't mean you need to bring it up in every situation, but to have the ability to bring it up when it's appropriate and have it be easy and remain really casual and effortless is what I'd like to see us moving towards eventually as a society.

Jim Hills: 06:41 I think you brought up a really interesting point there about in the workplace. So, if you're in a personal relationship with someone, you've already got some level of connectedness and there's an opportunity to build on that and talk about how you are feeling in a deeper way. In the workplace, being able to admit that is revealing, is somehow opening yourself to judgment that you may not want in the workplace. So I'm really interested in how you view that opportunity, to touch on that in a place where you might feel vulnerable beyond just how you're feeling emotionally. It could be you have some professional consequences.

Bill Bernat: 07:30 Well, it could. I mean, by and large, there's no need to even bring it up in the workplace, right? I mean, not all aspects of my life are relevant at work. At the same time, there was a point where I let leadership at my company that I work for now know, "Hey," this was several years ago. "I'm starting to talk about mental health issues as an advocate and is that an issue?" And they said, "No, no issue at all." Totally understanding, zero issue, totally supportive. That is not the case everywhere, right? So I've slowly come out more and more publicly, I have said more about my mental health issues in stories I'm telling or the TEDx talk, than actually have with my coworkers, 'cause it doesn't come up there, it's like there's an appropriateness of context, right?

Bill Bernat: 08:20 So, that said, I am working with an organization called the Stability Network. It's an organization of professionals living with mental health conditions who are willing to use their full names and come out publicly and say, "Hey, we're actual people who are quote unquote successful." I mean terms like success and thrive, are always is vague to me. People who are doing well in life and consistently doing well and they're saying, "We want people to be able to talk about it, and we're taking that first step," and we're saying, "Hey, this is who we are and come join us." Because the truth is, our numbers are massive, and so many people are afraid to admit it publicly, and so over time, that will change. Younger generations really aren't stigmatized at all they're like, "I don't see what the issue is, some people have mental health conditions, some people don't." That's like,

there's not even a stigma issue for them to dissect. They're like, "Why would there be stigma?"

- Bill Bernat: 09:22 As you move up, and probably also I'm in Seattle, so geographically I think there's a difference too in different parts of the country or world, you have different attitudes. So Seattle's a bit of a liberal bubble, but there is stigma, and it is likely to be noticed certainly when you're applying for jobs, if you're making a big public stance. So people do need to think about it and make a decision that they're comfortable with. Because once you've made that decision, you're not unmaking it.
- Jim Hills: 09:55 So if you're in a workplace or with your friends, I'm imagining, [inaudible 00:10:01] it's a huge group, right? So, in any workplace, you're not alone. If you have depression or you're dealing with something else, you're not alone because there are likely to be others, your coworkers who are also dealing with it, are there little signs? Are the little secret handshakes? That, "Hey, are we together on this thing?"
- Ken Harvey: 10:30 Code words. [crosstalk 00:10:31]
- Jim Hills: 10:31 That's an interesting question, right?
- Bill Bernat: 10:35 Right, right. No, I think in my case I can be like, I have found my people somehow intuitively, and I don't know how, I think maybe it's a matter of who laughs at which jokes. I will sometimes actually do little jokes and not even consciously, it's not like I map this out, but I can tell who's willing to laugh at what, and then go a little further with those people and just get a sense of who are my people, right? Those people that you work with and you like, I mean you have fun engaging at work, but you're not gonna hang out afterwards. There's other people, hey, we really have something in common, we have more to talk about than we'll talk about at the workplace. You just find them naturally, I don't really know of a-
- Jim Hills: 11:22 But being willing to look is the first step, right?
- Bill Bernat: 11:26 Well, I guess it's more like, it's innate. I mean, our drive as humans to connect is always there. I think we can't, not look right? We're always looking for who are we connected to.
- Ken Harvey: 11:43 Well, I just wanna tell you that you obviously connected with a lot of people with your talk, and your TEDxSnoIsleLibraries talk, I looked at a recent counter that we had, that's looking at the

number of views, and over 60,000 views through our TEDxSnoIsleLibraries YouTube channel. With it being picked up by ted.com, over a million and a half views. So individuals across the continents, around the world, really tuning in and learning from you or being encouraged by you to talk and share with each other, and not allow it to be a barrier.

Bill Bernat: 12:37 Right. Yeah, it has been very encouraging to see that a lot of people want this message out there, and are positively receiving it. I'll get, if I look at comments, I'll see people who maybe don't have mental health conditions, who just appreciate the laying out of how to talk to somebody who's living with depression. The people who will contact me, typically are people who've been experiencing depression themselves and they're just glad to see this message out there in a positive way, like, "Hey, we can talk about this, it doesn't have to be so sad, we're just living in our lives."

Jim Hills: 13:12 Yeah. You started doing some comedy around being open about revealing and talking about your depression, and then doing TEDx, the response that you've gotten to TED, that has to be so validating to yourself, about how you're feeling about your own conditions that you've been dealing with for your life and others.

Bill Bernat: 13:39 Yeah. So, I will say this, I used to do comedy when I was younger. When I was younger, I did comedy like in San Francisco and that was its own experience, you just go up and try to be funny at this or that, and I wasn't especially great at it, which is, standup comedy is hard in the sense-

Ken Harvey: 14:00 So, you're laughing about it now?

Bill Bernat: 14:02 Yeah, I'm laughing about it. At the time, I was very serious, I've got to get good at this, but there was an accessibility problem in stand up comedy, you need to appeal to a lot of different groups and I just didn't have that talent to do that. What I thought was funny, I thought was funny and I could do well in certain niche situations or inconsistently, but I was really wacky and I was so afraid of people, I would never connect with the audience. I did crazy things like a one minute opera, three pieces of silverware trapped in a bag, I mean, my comment was just nuts. They had a comedian who audiences don't laugh at, but other comedians think are hilarious, it's called a comic's comic. I was a comic's comic's comic, literally that's what they called me. At one time one of the big bookers in the area said, "Bill Bernat, the one guy that won't sell out." And I thought, no, I just don't know how, like I would love to sell out.

- Bill Bernat: 15:05 Then after I had been through a lot, I went through some very, very dark times around addiction, depression and a lot of years that were very dark for me. I came out of that and got clean and at around a year clean, they had this tiny little talent, Taco feed show, get tacos and watch people in this 12 step program, narcotics anonymous get up and do some sort of talent. I thought, if I could ever, this was like 15 years removed from since I had really done comedy, and I'm like, if I was ever gonna do it again, I would wanna just talk about the dark stuff, right? Make jokes about hiding what's going on, hiding my depression from people or just really that kind of stuff. I got out there, and I just did that and they loved it, and I thought, wow, you can actually not only have fun and make people laugh by talking about this painful stuff, but you're helping them feel better. That was a particularly unique crowd, because when you're in a room full of addicts you can get as dark as you want, and you're not gonna lose anybody.
- Bill Bernat: 16:15 So that was the spark that, hey, this is a direction I will eventually go. It was a while before that started developing to storytelling, and then public speaking for advocacy.
- Ken Harvey: 16:28 Just for the audience sake, I just wanna remind you, this is Ken Harvey and Jim Hills and we're chatting with Bill Bernat. Bill has been a TEDxSnoIsleLibraries speaker and has just been noticed by the world about the talk that he gave that was essentially encouraging us and coaching us on how to communicate and have a conversation with someone that we might know who has depression.
- Jim Hills: 16:57 So, you're just talking about your journey, and a little earlier in this conversation you labeled yourself as a mental health awareness advocate. So, at what point do you think you started to transition yourself and see yourself as that, where you were beyond helping yourself or helping others on an individual basis, but becoming a mental health awareness advocate?
- Bill Bernat: 17:24 Well, I mean, as a concept, it was really after I would go to storytelling, I would go to the storytelling event called Fresh Ground Stories in Seattle. That's where I started talking about parts of my struggles and things I had gotten through and processing them out loud in stories but with comedy, so comedy storytelling essentially. People would thank me for that and that was nice, but then one time, a couple of weeks after I had told a story about my social anxiety, which had at one point been quite severe, well at one point lay up for like 30 years, for 30 years it was quite severe. They came to me just randomly, a couple of weeks later at a coffee shop, somebody walks up to

me and this is one of those reasonably thin attractive people with good posture, the people that you assume don't struggle in life.

- Ken Harvey: 18:21 The ones you hate, right?
- Bill Bernat: 18:24 Exactly, yeah.
- Ken Harvey: 18:25 [crosstalk 00:18:25] had no sense as a teenager, no blemishes.
- Bill Bernat: 18:28 They were like, "Hey, I just wanna say thank you so much for that story." I mean, I didn't engage them in conversation because social anxiety, and I didn't know ... I eventually did get over it. I realized, wow, this is really sticking with people. They're not just appreciating, people need that message. I know from my own past, when I had seen little stories, just this or that, here or there even a little thing, like I remember seeing a TV segment on Patty Duke talking about her bipolar condition, and how she had found meds and was able to work again, but the fact that she was open about it and talking about it and living well, it was just like two minutes on some entertainment show and that stuck with me, that was a huge, it was just a little thing, but it was a huge glimmer of hope in my universe.
- Bill Bernat: 19:21 So, the more that people talk about it in positive ways the better, I think. Yeah. At that point I became a mental health awareness advocate without the label. The label just became a matter of understanding what society gets and assigning the appropriate words to it.
- Ken Harvey: 19:41 So we're gonna take a short break, and when we come back, we're gonna talk with Bill a little bit more about his TEDxSnoIsleLibraries experience, what it was like preparing for his talk, but also about some of the other work that he is doing and some other aspects of his life that I think are worth hearing about. So we'll be right back.
- Speaker 4: 20:02 Your donation to the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation reaches across generation lines, helping prepare children for their first year of school, and bringing reading materials to the elderly and home bound. A foundation gift provide seed funding for innovative library programs for potential entrepreneurs and small business owners, teenagers, new emigrants and lifelong learners. Please consider a onetime gift becoming a monthly donor or establishing a memorial gift to the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation.

Ken Harvey: 20:32 If you have a great library experience you'd like to share with us, we would love to know about it. Drop us a line at [checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org](mailto:checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org), again, that's [checkitoutpodcast](mailto:checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org), all one word [@sno-isle.org](mailto:checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org). Who knows, we might even invite you to share your story on a future podcast.

Ken Harvey: 20:55 We're back and we ... So Bill, tell us a little bit about what the journey to TEDxSnoIsleLibraries stage was like. I mean you were invited to be a speaker, after you had put forward this potential talk idea, did you go immediately from that and then the following week, step out on the stage and give this talk? Or was there a journey behind that?

Bill Bernat: 21:28 There was a definite journey and it really started with showing up here at this facility for an orientation and-

Ken Harvey: 21:35 You probably wanna tell the audience where we are.

Bill Bernat: 21:38 We are at the Sno-Isle Libraries, administrative offices. Is that the appropriate designation?

Ken Harvey: 21:43 Yeah, that's good enough.

Bill Bernat: 21:45 Yeah. So we're in Marysville. So I came here and I walked in for orientation and everything was really laid out nicely, I was impressed from the start. There was like, here's your little spot, your name is printed on your materials and you've got this packet here with these things and it's labeled TEDx and here's your mug and here's this and that. So, you came in and you felt like, wow, you felt like I'm really appreciated and being treated like a professional, cause people like me, we always assume we're imposters in the world like we're getting over it, and I'm like, all right, well just pretend I deserve to be here then. And so-

Ken Harvey: 22:31 I thought that was just me who felt that.

Jim Hills: 22:34 See, there you go relating to people again, what- [crosstalk 00:22:37]

Bill Bernat: 22:37 It's at least two of us then Ken. And then it was a very, very well organized program. Each of you, the organizers spoke on a different topic and you're like, this is the schedule we're laying out for you and this is how you work with your coach. So it was a lot of time to prepare and a lot of guidance from you folks, and then it really did become a journey of how do I write this talk? How do I become ... And so I would basically, I met with

my coach and talked about how do we start it, [inaudible 00:23:11] said, "Start with a ..." I said, "Do I start with a story, or some information or?" She said, "Start with a story." So I did, and then I built based on my point, backwards. I talked to a lot of people in my network of people who live with mental health conditions 'cause ... When I say my network, I mean my friends, I don't have a lot of friends who have just been stable and well adjusted all their lives, I don't really know people like that, but more power to them.

Ken Harvey: 23:46 Neither do I. [crosstalk 00:23:48] I could have said a thing about it.

Bill Bernat: 23:50 So, I said, "Hey, how would you want people to talk about depression?" And so I really went and spent some time researching with these people, what was the best thing for them? What would they want? So when I came up with the advice I gave in my talk, it was from my experience, but also validated and curated and refined through this network. So, basically it was a matter of putting that into talk format and writing drafts and then running them by coaches and revising them, until we got to the talk and then the performance, I was very worried about the performance. I have an actress friend and I said, "Look, how do I look like a TED Speaker?" I said, "Cause I generally walk around with my shoulders in a little bit, and my head down." And I'm like, that's not the thing we want here.

Bill Bernat: 24:45 So she pointed me to a teacher of this thing called the Alexander technique, basically somebody who teaches you, and I'll tell you, three sessions with that woman, and I have learned so much about how to walk on stage, confident, poised, and with appropriate posture and connecting with people. So, in addition to the training I got here, I actually went out and sought some help in how do I raise my game? Like, this is something I wanna do right, how do I give the best possible talk I can?

Jim Hills: 25:19 It's so interesting to hear how you viewed that as not just an opportunity to go out and talk, but this was gonna be something that you were gonna really invest yourself in, and participate fully, get into the process, even get some outside help. I just find that level of investment in the opportunity really interesting, how did you make that choice?

Bill Bernat: 25:42 Fear. I knew that once I gave a TEDx talk I was never again going to apply for a job without that talk being seen. So there was a combination of wanting to do right for the people that I was

giving the talk for and just a drive to, I'm completely out of the box at this point around living with mental health conditions and I wanna present that in a positive light and I believe it's possible, I believe that it really isn't a big deal, I mean, I'm a great employee, I work hard, I get a lot done and the fact that I live with bipolar condition or have had these other things throughout my life, it doesn't come up at work at all really. But it is something about me that if people know it, they might put me in a certain category in their minds. So I wanted this to come out that way, but really what was going through my mind when I was focusing in on the talk and when I was backstage was not work, it was thinking about the people for whom I was giving the talk. It was like there are people who struggle just like I do, many worse and they want somebody to come out and present a positive face on this.

- Bill Bernat: 27:04 Many other people give talks on this too, and so it's great, the more the better. I think what I really was trying to do, and this was an extra hard part for me, was I need to have a friendly, easygoing energy for this talk because I can have the words, we should not be depressed when talking about depression, but if I say it in a sad way or a heavy way or a struggling way, I'm not really living that message. So I really wanted to be sure that I didn't let the pressure of giving a talk dilute that feeling of just joy of being alive that should exist, whatever we're talking about.
- Jim Hills: 27:47 I mean you were part of a group of speakers who are going through and preparing for TEDx that year. Was there some sense of we're all in this together kind of thing where you're looking at other speakers and how their experience was like, and was that reassuring for you? How did that work?
- Bill Bernat: 28:07 It was a great group and we're all really supportive of each other. Absolutely. I mean, we weren't working with each other on our talks, but we would see each other at the meetings and the rehearsals and the workshops, and it was just a really, really friendly, wonderful supportive vibe. So it was great to have a group, in fact the group is getting together in December, to sort of like, hey, let's get together, somebody-
- Ken Harvey: 28:31 Celebrate the reunion, right?
- Bill Bernat: 28:32 Yeah, yeah.
- Ken Harvey: 28:33 An anniversary.

Bill Bernat: 28:34 Absolutely.

Ken Harvey: 28:35 Well there were two things that really popped out at me when I went back and listened to your talk, which I've listened to it several times by the way, myself cause I just think it's wonderful, and really wanna invite our listeners to check out the Bill Bernat TEDxSnoIsleLibraries talk and you can find it on the ted.com YouTube channel, you can also find it on the Sno-Isle Libraries website. One of the quotes that I pulled was you said, "I shifted from being miserable to being happy with life." That just really jumped out at me as just a remarkable thing to say, and you also said, "We can be sad and okay at the same time." I just wondered if you might wanna build on that a little bit for any of our listeners who might be going through a rough place in their life or because of some external things going on in their lives or might be going through a recurring internal rough time.

Bill Bernat: 29:42 Sure. Absolutely. Yeah. So I would say, the first thing that I want people to know, and I didn't even know it until I got to the other side, is that you can be trapped in like patterns of thought and behavior that are destructive or unhappy for like years or literally decades, you just can't break out of these loops. Then you can somehow hit your head against just the right bump in the wall and crash through it, and life can get a lot better. So, that's really a core message that I want anybody listening to take away, is no matter how doomed you think you are, there's a pretty good chance that you could actually break out from that. Because when you've been living in that mindset for so long, it doesn't seem like you can get out and for me, I didn't know I could get out.

Bill Bernat: 30:36 What happened was I hit a point where life was just too painful, I become totally isolated. Through drug addiction I had wrecked a lot of my life and then I got clean and after being clean for a little while, I was still just really depressed, and the isolation became really apparent to me, have very bad social anxiety as well. So I was like, I can't live like this, and the shift for me was that I realized nobody was going to solve this for me. If I wanted to just be miserable for the rest of my life, nobody could stop me. All of a sudden it was like these ideas that a lot of people have in childhood and some let go of in adulthood but I really hadn't, that somehow I'm owed some magical cure or somebody should come and rescue me from this suffering, I let go of that, because I realized, nobody is coming, nobody's coming, if you wanna get out of here, you got to start figuring it out.

- Bill Bernat: 31:40 At that point I made it literally a personal mission, I would say to myself, Bill, this is your situation. What are you gonna do about it? I would literally say that to myself, because lamenting that I shouldn't be in that situation was just a waste of time, this is where I was, what was I gonna do about it? So I set out in different areas of my life to make change. There were several specific areas that I wanted to make change, I wanted to lose a lot of weight, I wanted to learn how to be around people, I wanted to live not in depression so much anymore. So, I just said, "If I fail at these things, I've lost nothing, but I can't leave in the hopelessness anymore. So things didn't get better for me right away, I still lived in a pretty bad place for a good long while yet, but I started doing these things. So instead of just getting mad and frustrated, I'd be like, what am I doing? What action am I taking to improve this? So that was really the turning point for me.
- Bill Bernat: 32:45 I did do a lot of geeking out on things like Sanskrit scriptures and Eckhart Tolle books. The power of now was actually a huge game changer for me, that was a really powerful book for me. I also love, some of these scriptural things like the Bhagavad Gita or I would read some Buddhist things like the Dhammapada, and I still do, right now I'm doing the audio book of the Yoga Sutras. These to me are self help books, to some people they are just some esoteric weird stuff that was written down thousands of years ago, but life hasn't changed. For all our technology and all our amazing cities and civilization, the basic struggles of life have not changed a bit, and these are the things that have lasted thousands of years, so there's some pretty great stuff in there, but Eckhart Tolle phrases it in a much more modern and accessible way, but they're the exact same concepts.
- Bill Bernat: 33:45 So studying the nature of suffering and how can we alleviate it, and everybody will have their own path. They might not like Sanskrit scriptures or Eckhart Tolle, but they can find their own way, right? If they take it as an initiative to say, "Hey, I'm not really happy, I'm suffering, I wonder if there's a way to suffer less." It can't hurt to try and what would that be? It's a big problem to solve, it's not that easy to solve, it's not like a video game where you do this and you'll level up and there's no cheat code websites, right? It's possible if people take that on in their own life to improve those things.
- Jim Hills: 34:30 So I have a question that I've been wanting to ask and maybe this was the right time. Do you look at it as cure or management?

Bill Bernat: 34:39 Well, yeah, that's an interesting question. I don't know, I mean I don't really look at it either way. I mean, I look at it as this is my life and what am I doing to enjoy it more? Cure and management becomes sort of ... There's this whole western mental health doctrine, which is helpful and it helps a lot of us, but it's very rooted in what is happening in the mind and what is happening with behavior and it falls out of norms and therefore it is a malfunctioning thing that must be corrected. It's just life happening, this idea of cure versus management implies that there's something wrong with the universe in the first place. So sorry, I get really woo woo really fast.

Jim Hills: 35:38 Well, I have to tell you that I really like your answer. So I had this question that presumes edges to a box and your answer is there's no box.

Bill Bernat: 35:51 I literally just like two days ago, I got the twitter handle. Woo woo AF. Yeah. So I don't think you can ever count yourself safe though, in the 12 step programs, I have seen so many people just looking at this in a tangible recovery addiction perspective, have eight years, 10 years, 22 years, a lot of years clean, and then they're like, whatever happens they try this or do they that, and then several or a few years later they're back going, that was really, ouch, that really hurt.

Ken Harvey: 36:36 Yeah, what just happened?

Bill Bernat: 36:39 so I don't think you can, you always have the possibility of suffering in this world, but you also always have the possibility of letting go of that suffering and finding joy, it's a daily practice for me. I'll tell yah, I don't really get much time without working on it because if I do, then I will start to get frustrated or whatever's going on or hurting in this way or that way and then before long, I'm like, "Wait, why am I so unhappy right now?" Then I'll step back several levels and address that. So it's a constant practice for me.

Ken Harvey: 37:22 Well, the pursuit of joy is much better than the pursuit of pleasure.

Bill Bernat: 37:26 Yes, it's a much more lasting.

Ken Harvey: 37:28 And it's much more lasting. So Jim asked a question and followed it up with a box analogy. I wanted to maybe pivot, 'cause we've got about five minutes left on the podcast. I wanna talk a little bit about the work that you do, and he used the word term box, what's your actual work title, professional title?

Bill Bernat: 37:53 Oh, my actual day job?

Ken Harvey: 37:54 Yeah, day job.

Bill Bernat: 37:56 I am the director of product and content marketing for an enterprise software company.

Ken Harvey: 38:01 So these days, are there any boxes to the products or services that you all do?

Bill Bernat: 38:07 There are neither boxes to what we offer, nor on what I actually do. Right. I have been with the company since we were as little as I think six people and now we're up around 30 and so I've done-

Ken Harvey: 38:19 Well, congratulations.

Bill Bernat: 38:20 Thanks. I have done a lot of different roles there, and it's just been wonderful to learn. So the role I'm focusing most on right now is content marketing, which is a ... A good analogy is, in the 1800s John Deere started sending out a magazine called the furrow, which was just advice for farmers, wasn't selling tractors, just like, here's stuff you need to do well in your farming, and that became a way of marketing their products. That's really what we do on the Internet today, it's like who do I want to take a look at maybe purchasing our stuff and what value can I offer them? You're really like, you have to provide them real value in their jobs or their lives or they're not gonna come to you.

Bill Bernat: 39:02 So you provide real value for them and educational content, or things like that. Then the job can become quite creative in ways that you make that fun and interesting in all the different formats that media can manifest in. So it's a pretty creative job, but we're not a huge company so I will sometimes be like, "Well this person's gone for a while, I'm gonna go do this thing or that thing." So a lot of it is just keeping the engine turning to-

Ken Harvey: 39:33 What do you like about the work?

Bill Bernat: 39:36 I love the creative process, like sitting down and writing a thing or thinking of a new way to present something, that process is pleasing to my brain, because I worked in technology as a tech guy for so long and then pivoted to marketing, it's a really nice way to leverage those two skillsets.

Jim Hills: 39:54 You've got something else coming up too though, that's not exactly vocational, but before we started, you'd mentioned that there's an event coming up.

Bill Bernat: 40:03 There is an event coming up called the Brain Power Chronicles. This is the second year we're doing it, is something I organized, I pitched it to NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness where we get storytellers, ordinary people who live with mental health conditions or are impacted by friends and family who do. I run them through a series of workshops, and we work with them on their stories. These are really, we've got down a transformational story format, where we take them through a journey of essentially from suffering to living better, and there will be a pivot point where each person has their own personal transformation pivot point. Life isn't always a fairy tale, not all of these people have super happy endings, especially in the friends and family scenario, but they all see that there is beauty in life and there is joy in life and they're not letting go of that and they're fighting for that and finding it in different ways.

Bill Bernat: 41:04 So for me, it's really like I ran out of stories to tell or maybe I could find more, but I became really invested in helping other people tell their stories. I also teach public workshops now on that as well, transformational storytelling. So, that is definitely a thing that I'm excited about doing. We're getting some interest, KUOW's Bill Radke is gonna host with us on one of our two shows, and so it's the awareness and support for it, it seems to be growing.

Jim Hills: 41:36 It really sounds exciting, when is that coming up?

Bill Bernat: 41:38 That'll be November 10th and 11th [crosstalk 00:41:41] really soon. So yeah, by the time people hear the podcast it'll probably be over, but we're-

Jim Hills: 41:47 Yeah, we'd better hurry up and get you out of here.

Bill Bernat: 41:50 No, it's fine.

Ken Harvey: 41:51 So Bill, if listeners wanted to contact you or follow the stuff that you're doing, where would they do that?

Bill Bernat: 42:01 They can go to stayawesome.com. I now have a-

Ken Harvey: 42:06 Did you just make that up?

Bill Bernat: 42:08 No, I literally have created a stayawesome.com, a friend of mine bought it like 20 years ago. He's been offered a lot of money for it, but he held onto it and wanted to give it to somebody who would do something he thought was worthwhile with it. So I've branded myself as Stay Awesome Media as a public speaker and workshop leader, and I'm also a certified speaker coach now. So doing things like that and-

Ken Harvey: 42:33 Good for you.

Bill Bernat: 42:33 Thanks.

Ken Harvey: 42:34 Good for you, that's great.

Bill Bernat: 42:36 So they can go to stayawesome.com and join my mailing list. Next year my mission is gonna be largely about comedy, about depression, so I think that's what resonates with the most people, that's the easiest way to get it out.

Jim Hills: 42:47 I think if people go to your TEDx talk, they'll get a glimpse of that comedy about depression, 'cause there are some laughing points there, it's pretty funny stuff.

Bill Bernat: 42:56 Thanks. I did throw in some jokes here and there. I couldn't open up like these are the jokes folks. Life is funny, when we're making jokes about depression it's almost like you don't have to make them up, because life itself is its own amusement, it's just absurd and beautiful.

Ken Harvey: 43:18 So in the last minute or two that we've got, I'd love to just pivot this around to library experience or experiences that you've had and how do you feel about libraries these days, and were you an early library user or is this?

Bill Bernat: 43:35 I was an early library user. Yeah I love the library and I would ... I was interested in it anytime because back in the day, that was the way you got [inaudible 00:43:47], you didn't have a lot of other ways to get the information. These days I use libraries more for studying, like I will go to, recently a friend of mine kept saying come join me at the U-Dub library I'm studying. They have this big massive quiet room where you can just go in and nobody makes any noise, and I get so much done there. I really love libraries particularly because they are an equalizer in our society. We have so much that's available to people with means or privilege and libraries, they offer a lot more than books, they offer workshops, meetings, community spaces, services, they offer a place for people to come together to improve

themselves, to connect with other people regardless of what their means are, everybody is welcome.

- Bill Bernat: 44:39 I have a friend who's a librarian in Sno-Isle Libraries, in fact she tipped me off to when you guys were gonna be taking submissions and she has since retired, but in all the times I've talked to her about her work, she has never said, "Oh we got this new book, it's exciting." She's always talking about, "Oh, I'm working on this new workshop for this group of people now, or I was reading the kids and I did this and the kid said that." I mean, it's really people focused. So that's what libraries are to me, is a place for people to connect.
- Ken Harvey: 45:10 Well, your connection message I think rings loudly through your TEDx talk, and I'm hoping that our audience today has felt a sense of connection with you. Would like to encourage them to go to [stayawesome.com](http://stayawesome.com).
- Bill Bernat: 45:29 [Stayawesome.com](http://Stayawesome.com), yeah right.
- Ken Harvey: 45:30 And actually connect with you, if they have a mind to. There's also opportunity to leave comments I think with your talk on [ted.com](http://ted.com), and I'm sure you'd love to get additional feedback and just hear from people [crosstalk 00:45:48].
- Bill Bernat: 45:47 Absolutely. Yeah, please reach out. People do and I always get back to people, I really appreciate it and I take an interest in what draws you to the conversation with me.
- Ken Harvey: 45:57 Maybe just one last thought, I'd give you an opportunity to just put out there. You've mentioned NAMI, which is an acronym for-
- Bill Bernat: 46:08 It's the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which the vocabulary has changed, we don't say illness anymore. People say mental health conditions I think now, yeah.
- Ken Harvey: 46:18 You've mentioned them a few times. Would you like to just say anything to our listeners about this organization [crosstalk 00:46:25].
- Bill Bernat: 46:25 I would, actually let me mention two organizations. So NAMI is a great resource, especially for friends and family living with people who have mental health conditions, but as well as people with mental health conditions, they offer a lot of information, meetings and guidance. They are a great resource that is available to you. So, NAMI Washington, NAMI Seattle, it's

a very big organization and ... For example, one time I was with a friend whose son was having problems. We went to an event and I got there late and she said, "Oh no worries, I found a NAMI table and I talked to them and it was so comforting to find out about these things. So a lot of parents will support each other, people with conditions will support each other, it's a really great organization.

- Bill Bernat: 47:09 Also the Stability Network, if you're a working professional and you wanna connect with working professionals, look up the [stabilitynetwork.org](http://stabilitynetwork.org), it is a very, very high level people in this, I almost feel like an impostor being a part of it, but not really because they're happy to have everybody, and I've been there since the start and now I'm one of their trainers for their speakers, they have a speaker bureau. It is a great way to connect with professionals living with mental health conditions who are just saying, "Hey, we're just enjoying life, what are you up to?"
- Jim Hills: 47:42 That sounds awesome. That sounds awesome.com.
- Ken Harvey: 47:45 That's right. Bill, thank you so much for being with us.
- Bill Bernat: 47:48 Thank you so much Ken. Thank you so much Jim.
- Jim Hills: 47:50 Just beautiful, thanks.
- Ken Harvey: 48:00 Well, that was an interesting interview.
- Jim Hills: 48:02 I was so excited to talk to him. I had seen him at TEDx, I had a chance to photograph him, get close, see what he was about, but I never really got a chance to engage with him, I was so excited about this opportunity.
- Ken Harvey: 48:15 Yeah. What a neat guy. Really appreciated him taking the time to reveal parts of his life that normally people don't wanna talk about.
- Jim Hills: 48:27 What I love most about the TEDx talk and what Bill brings is this opportunity to better understand how to engage with others who are experiencing some mental health issue, either chronic depression or temporary something going on. And how engaging is part of the healing, is part of life, and not to run away from that. It's so empowering I think for people who are suffering from depression, people who want to help others with depression and other mental health issues, he mentioned social

anxiety is something that was debilitating for him for decades. I was very interested.

Ken Harvey: 49:06 well, that talk, well his interview with us just reminded me that I recall that when he was preparing his TEDxSnoIsleLibraries talk that one of the things that was really a question that he was trying to figure out in terms of his talk was whether or not he was really going to make it seem like he was just referring to depression or a wide range of mental health issues or conditions that individuals might be dealing with. The word depression rolls off the tongue, so it's easier to use that, but really just a tip of the iceberg or slice of the pie that could be any type of issue, condition or challenges [crosstalk 00:49:54] facing.

Jim Hills: 49:54 You're right, I think he did use that word a lot, but I don't think he tries to limit it to depression. In our conversation with him I was so anxious to ask that question about a cure versus management.

Ken Harvey: 50:09 I loved how he answered that though.

Jim Hills: 50:11 Yeah, and he goes, "No, I reject that paradigm, that is inside a box that I don't acknowledge." I just love that, right answer.

Ken Harvey: 50:22 Well, I also liked how he responded to the two quotes that I pulled from his talk. The one quote was, "I shifted from being miserable to being happy with life." and "We can be sad and okay at the same time." Those two quotes had really, they struck me when I listened to them, the several times I've listened to his talk. But then his answer I thought was pretty profound as well.

Jim Hills: 50:47 I remember that and thought about that quote when he said, "You can be sad and okay." Not it's okay to be sad, you can be sad and okay, and I remember that from the talk and I thought how profound that is.

Ken Harvey: 51:02 Well, a neat guy and I just wanna let our listeners know that Sno-Isle Libraries has a number of resources available, books, both fiction and nonfiction that you can read about these kinds of issues, and also research materials. So that you can pull from that and can help increase your awareness of the challenges that can come with these issues, in your own life or others. Also if you are looking for solutions yourself, that might provide some solutions.

Jim Hills: 51:40 Libraries are a great resource for that and so many other things.

Ken Harvey: 51:43 That's right.

Ken Harvey: 51:45 Coming up next, A library staff spotlight.

Lois Langer Thompson: 51:51 I am Lois Langer Thompson and I am the new executive director for Sno-Isle Libraries. I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, just so you know where I'm from, I got that nice long O, and I spent my whole life there except for graduate school when I went to the University of Denver for my library degree, but other than that, I've lived in Minnesota my whole life till my new life here in the Pacific northwest.

Lois Langer Thompson: 52:11 Very first job was with Minneapolis Public Library what We called them substitute librarians, and you were just on call and went in when someone was sick. So that was at the downtown library, and then I went and interviewed for a job in a small town and I didn't plan to take it 'cause I'm not much of a small town person, but they offered me the job and it was a great experience, I really, I got to do everything that you do in a small community. Then I was hired by Hennepin County, I started as a children's librarian and then worked in adult services and managed some libraries, and then continued to move up through the system and became director.

Lois Langer Thompson: 52:45 So I'm often asked about moving to the Pacific northwest and coming to Sno-Isle Libraries, and I love that question because Hennepin County library is considered one of the top library systems in the country and I loved working there. I worked there for 30 years and I was the director for 10. I loved it and it was a great system to work for, but I was ready for something new and a new challenge. When I saw the position at Sno-Isle opened up, I was so impressed with the innovation that I saw, the commitment to the community, the growth that is happening and the changes. It felt like a place that has been built into a really great library system and is ready to be even greater. How can you argue with the Pacific northwest, is a wonderful place to live, but that's not enough for me, I need a job that I love, that I'm challenged by and I have been so impressed with the people I've met, the commitment, the staff is dedicated, the board of trustees is fully invested in the success of this organization and the community as well.

Lois Langer Thompson: 53:44 One of my first goals is just to really listen and hear what's important to this community and honor the work that's been done, and then think about where we wanna go next. We have a great ask us tell us, many libraries just say ask us and I love

that Sno-Isle says, ask us tell us, just that sets a culture of we're interested in what you have to say.

Lois Langer Thompson: 54:05

We have lots of library patrons as you know, that are just, they love the library and they're good supporters and they're good users and they know the value, so we're serving them really well. Then I think there are opportunities that people that just for whatever reason, myself growing up, my mother didn't have a car, we didn't live within walking distance of a library, we weren't library users until later in life. How can we reach those communities that aren't aware of? Certainly a lot of immigrant families come and we did a lot of work with immigrant families in Minneapolis to introduce them to the library, even if they knew what the library could offer, they didn't always know the breadth of it, and understanding some of the resources and really becoming comfortable with it. So it's really understanding, again, saying to a community, "Tell us about your hopes and dreams, and we'll tell you about services that will help you reach that." That may need to happen outside the building until people become comfortable and wanna come in the building.

Lois Langer Thompson: 55:07

One thing I'm really excited about being at Sno-Isle is it's still in a growth phase, and the community is growing and that is both positive and hard. As a new person, I'm really glad to be welcomed into the community, but I also know having lived somewhere for a long time when lots of people move in, it changes. So I think there's an interesting time here in Sno-Isle to think about as we grow and get bigger, how do we not lose all that's so great? That there are lots of communities that have really unique identities that they not lose that and we all become the same, but how do we continue to welcome new people in and that will bring about change. So it feels like a pivotal time in Sno-Isle, to think about who we are and what we wanna become.

Lois Langer Thompson: 55:49

I think it's important when you think about future envision that it not be one person's vision. I think I see my role as making sure that all voices are heard as we built it together. That's what I wanna spend the next three to six months really listening and learning and building it together. Then I see my job is pulling all that together and bringing it to a clear vision that we can all join in, that we can all see, Yes, I see that I participated, whether I'm a community member, an organization, the board of trustees, staff, that we all see that we built this vision together and then my responsibility is to take that vision into the future and make sure we fulfill the vision that we set for ourselves.

- Speaker 4: 56:40 Hey, parents and grandparents, is there a child in the family who's latched onto a smart phone or tablet computer? Help them put that screen time to good use, by downloading fun and educational magazines from Sno-Isle Libraries, like Highlights, High Five, and American Girl. Every magazine packed with age appropriate content like crafts, quizzes, experiments, poems, and wholesome stories. Each issue is free to download with a library card from Sno-Isle Libraries.
- Ken Harvey: 57:11 If you have a great library experience you'd like to share with us, we would love to know about it. Drop us a line at [checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org](mailto:checkitoutpodcast@sno-isle.org), again that's [checkitoutpodcast](mailto:checkitoutpodcast), all one word, [@sno-isle.org](https://www.sno-isle.org). Who knows, we might even invite you to share your story on a future podcast.