

Podcast has been edited for clarity and understanding.

Chaz ([00:00](#)):

Do better. Be better. Welcome to Spitfire's podcast, Take Flight. We are your hosts Chaz and Motso, inbound marketing specialists at Spitfire Inbound.

Kgomotso ([00:10](#)):

Marketing in today's economy: it's tough and it's even tougher to generate high quality leads that convert into customers.

Chaz ([00:17](#)):

Join us bi-weekly as we chat with Spitfire's CEO, Darren Leishman, as well as industry expert guests, our Spitfire team members and each other about the latest inbound marketing topics and trends, what it's like to work at a marketing agency, and about how the Hubspot Inbound marketing methodology really works.

Kgomotso ([00:34](#)):

If you're a marketing junkie, HubSpot-curious, a business owner, or just want to know more about the inbound marketing methodology, then this is the podcast for you.

Chaz ([00:42](#)):

Today's episode: how to create a winning company culture.

Kgomotso ([00:46](#)):

We live in a society where we want to be part of something bigger. You want to feel like you're part of a team. Having a defined company culture keeps the team inspired and motivated to work towards the overall organizational goals.

Chaz ([00:58](#)):

Our guest today, has been able to build a successful organizational culture and he will be sharing some insights that you could apply whether you are a CEO, manager or just part of a team. Before we get ahead of ourselves we want to share our vision for the next few episodes.

Kgomotso ([01:12](#)):

Inbound 21 is coming up...

Chaz ([01:15](#)):

And it's going to be our fifth Inbound.

Kgomotso ([01:17](#)):

For those that don't know, Inbound is an annual event hosted by HubSpot. It's a place where industry experts, leaders, marketers, and HubSpot community members come together to share ideas, learn and expand their knowledge.

Chaz ([01:32](#)):

How long does Inbound run for?

Kgomotso ([01:33](#)):

It's an immersive three day experience that will fundamentally shift the way you network and do business. So we thought that we would give our opinions on what to expect from Inbound 21 and have guests share their experiences with us.

Chaz ([01:46](#)):

We'll do an episode after Inbound to see how right we were on those expectations and share our thoughts. We'll also be speaking to women in marketing and tech, which I'm really excited about. We have some amazing guests in mind and it's something that you don't want to miss out on. With that being said, shall we get started?

Kgomotso ([02:10](#)):

Stay curious. This is a statement that today's guest, Darren Leishman, lives by. Over the past 26 years, Darren has cultivated his skills within the advertising digital and design industry, to question, to keep him moving forward, constantly looking for answers and growing a culture of innovation in his business.

Chaz ([02:30](#)):

And for sure, you can count on us to have all the questions for you today, Darren. So hello.

Darren:

Hello

Chaz :

Hi, that was an impressive introduction from Kgomotso, but can you tell us a bit about yourself?

Darren ([02:44](#)):

Sure, how far back do you want me to go? I've been around for a long time. So in advertising terms I'm like one of the last men standing. I think every year that you work in advertising and marketing is kind of like 10 years in any other industry, so I'm about a thousand years old.

Chaz: (laughs)

Oh my word, you would never say!

Kgomotso:

It's just 26 years here Darren, come on!

Darren: Yes, so I've been in my own business, so, um, started the business 21 years ago with four partners and the business has grown or grew from there. And we've taken multiple different journeys. You know, I come originally from a design background and worked my way into the advertising world, not by design, but almost by accident. So...

Chaz:

I see what you did there! (laughs)

Darren:

...verbal puns are something I do enjoy! We built our original business and the original agency, Penguin, off the back of customer needs.

Darren ([03:57](#)):

So we're always very customer centric. If people asked us if we could do stuff, being entrepreneurs, we were like, "Absolutely!" and we'd figure it out. So we would start with "Yes, absolutely!" and end with, "Okay, we did it!" And there was a very turbulent process in between those two. That business has matured significantly. As we grew and added services and added skill sets we increased the level of professionalism in the business and ultimately, I worked myself out of pretty much every role that I filled that business. And my two IC, Veronica, who helped me launch Suzuki back into the country in 2008, was ready to take over as MD. And I was literally the last man standing. I was the blocker. I was the person that would potentially stand in her way of her future growth. And I don't want to be that guy.

Darren ([05:00](#)):

You don't want to be the roadblock.

Chaz:

Nobody wants to be that guy.

Darren:

So we promoted V to MD of Penquin and that meant that I spent quite a lot of time getting in the way.

Chaz: (laughs)

Not on purpose, I swear!

Darren: (laughs) No, but I like to be busy and I like to be involved and I needed to find something that gave me purpose. I couldn't just be sitting in the corner office waiting for interviews or waiting to be asked to do something. So I started a little side project, going, "How do we more effectively measure the digital marketing that we've been doing?" Penguin was always built around measurement and results and doing what was best for the customer, but a lot of the measurement at that time was, you know, it would take a long time to gather it. Three months down the line, you would look at your viewership, you would look at your measurements and then you'd look at your sales and attribute results.

Darren ([06:10](#)):

And with digital becoming more and more prevalent, it's going, "How do we really dig into measuring what we're doing on social?" Yeah, everybody was a Facebook cowboy. Like people were just like, it was like a gold rush. Everybody was diving in like, "Oh, I'm a Facebook expert". It's like, you've been doing it for 12 minutes. It doesn't make you an expert. So there were lots of moving parts and I started doing some research, but I'm not the best researcher. I do a lot of what I do based on the gut. And I asked Alison, who is my wife and co-founder of Spitfire, to do some research because she comes from an academic background: very, very analytical, very good at research and she sort of took on the research project and we ended up, through my gut feel and her analytical feel...

Darren ([07:06](#)):

I was looking for a way to measure social media. We ended up reading a lot of articles on and looking at a lot of software technologies and Ali took a very analytical approach and we started looking at the broader digital measurement environment and what we could be doing digitally. And we kept on running into like, really useful and really helpful information that was published by this company called HubSpot. Cool. I just, I was like, "Oh, I wonder if you did this...?" and I would search the term like what's the benefits of blogging, boom, HubSpot article...

Chaz

The 5 benefits of blogging.

Darren

Yeah. And it wasn't that mature at that stage, right? So like,

Kgomoto

This is when?

Darren: This is 2015. Cool. So 2015, at that stage there was one HubSpot agency in South Africa and it was a marketing automation tool, but it had this really clever CRM integration. And what we found is we kept on running into this really helpful, they were just helping us along our journey.

Darren ([08:15](#)):

We found this and then Ali came to me and said, "I think we should be looking at HubSpot". And I was like, "I looked at HubSpot — it's crazy expensive — find me a cheaper way". So she went away and came back and she was like, "Well, there's this and this, this..." and we could kind of cobble it together. Funnily enough, HubSpot had a blog post on how to do everything we do without using HubSpot.

Chaz:

Amazing.

Darren:

Okay, so they showed us what we needed to do (Kgomotso: without them), without them. But they were so confident. HubSpot had, like tips and tricks on how to do what they do with... everything that HubSpot does intuitively and integrates it into one systemow, how do you do it with free tools? Cool. How helpful is that?

Darren ([09:07](#)):

It was so helpful that it pointed out to us that actually what we need to be doing is focusing on marketing and messaging and not trying to cobble together technology that is going to partially do what HubSpot could do. And so, at that time we got a, Alison got a call from a guy at HubSpot called Steen and he went, "We think you're ready to be a partner". And we're like, "But we just want to buy this for ourselves. What do you mean by partner?" And they were like, "Well, we're looking for agencies that can represent HubSpot and sell our services and our software to their customers".

Chaz ([09:47](#)):

And at this stage Spitfire had been running for?

Darren ([09:49](#)):

Spitfire didn't exist. This was Penguin, right?

Kgomotos:

So it started with Penguin?

Darren: Yeah. so think of sitcoms, right? So you get like, what was that? Cheers. Okay. And then Frasier was like a really important character in Cheers. And then, then Frasier started, right? So we're kind of like, Spitfire is the sitcom spinoff of Penquin.

Chaz (10:14):

Yeah. For me, it's like 90210 into Gossip Girl.

Darren (10:21):

Yeah see I told you I'm old. (laughs)

So, what we did is we were looking at going "Ok, well, is this something that we want to do? Do we want to be an inbound agency?" And it was definitely something we wanted to do and we were going to do it as a division of Penquin.

Kgomotos:

Okay. Okay.

Darren:

So Penquin's my original business, it makes sense to keep it in there and we've got all the infrastructure. And we signed up as a HubSpot partner under Penquin.

Chaz (10:49):

Okay. I didn't know this part of the story, by the way,

Darren (10:53):

You don't know if I'm making it up

Chaz (10:56):

Fact-checks everywhere.

Darren (10:58):

No, this is all factual. We signed up on, I think it was on like the Wednesday, and on the Monday we were pitching a creative concept to an existing client. Cool. And we were two thirds of the way into the pitch and I could see that the CEO was just not sold. He was getting "Yeah, we've done that. And we've done that. And how do we know that that's going to be.. Can't we... What else can we be doing? How can we do this differently?" And, I sort of stopped the pitch and went, "Well, you want to know what you could be doing differently? I think you could be doing this". And I pitched him inbound marketing and he went, "Does it work?" And I said, "I don't know, but we've just signed up for it. But if you're prepared to come along this journey with us, we'll do it with you and figure it out." And he went, "Done! Let's do it". He really took a leap of faith in us. And we took a leap of faith in HubSpot.

Chaz:

He took flight.

Darren ([12:07](#)):

He did, and that was our first client, literally a week after we bought HubSpot for ourselves, we were implementing.... So Ali was then figuring out HubSpot and onboarding a client at the same time.

Kgomotso:

Wow.

Darren: With nobody else having any knowledge of how it worked so it was Ali and I, and at that stage she was a part-time employee of Penguin, she wasn't even full-time.

Chaz:

That's so cool.

Darren: And yeah, it was again, customer-centric, right, it was do something for the customer. But as we... so now we're like, "Okay, this is working. This is like, cool, we're getting good results". So fast forward, three months, we're going, "This is the future. We need to be doing this more". I'd found a place. So I was running inbound for Penguin and V was running Penguin, as a full service agency. And I was building this division.

Darren ([13:09](#)): d

So we hired a couple of people. So, by that, like we're now four people, (massive, massive organization), as Inbound as a division of Penguin. And we started going to see clients and they go, "But Penguin's a full service agency and we've got a, we're with Joe Public, or we're with Ogilvy.

Chaz:

This doesn't make sense for us.

Darren: "Like we don't need another agency". So I spent a huge amount of time explaining that we don't want to do all their work. We want to use inbound to amplify what they're doing elsewhere, but it was a massive effort to overcome the "We're not a full service agency".

Chaz:

45 minutes of your hour meeting.

Darren: Correct. So we made the decision to create a separate brand and to create a separate business. And that's when we were... we had taken over the running of the Joburg HubSpot user group.

Darren ([14:15](#)):

Darren Smith from MPL had been running the Cape Town HUG and the Joburg HUG and we had connected: we had been to attend their HUGS. Ali had met him and he was like, "Would you guys be prepared to take over the Joburg HUG so I don't have to commute up to come and run it?" Which was very generous of him. And it's very much around the inbound community, is that we can all rise together. And Darren and I did our first joint HUG and then I took over the HUG. I went and spoke in Cape town. And after the first one that I ran in Joburg, (this is still under Penguin) Lucille, Sam, Ali and I went for dinner afterwards and we're like, "We're thinking of creating a separate brand". And they went, "Okay. Why?" I explained the reasons why it made logical sense and they went, "What are we going to call it?" And I went, "Spitfire Inbound and they were like, "Why?" And I explained my reason for the name and I drew the logo on a serviette...

Chaz ([15:14](#)):

Which will be coming in another episode

Darren ([15:17](#)):

And we'll cover that off as like you say, in another episode, but that was where Spitfire started. And we've, from there, evolved and grown, but very much more in a considered way than Penguin grew when I was 27 and figuring this all out. So Spitfire is much more by design than Penguin ever was under my guidance. So Penguin is a very mature, very established business now with professional managers and people that have got lots of experience, but we started up as like four guys who really didn't have a clue. We were children and we figured it out as we went. And Spitfire is the complete opposite of that. It is really built with a clear focus and a clear purpose. And it's been really exciting to see the difference between the two journeys.

Kgomotso ([16:17](#)):

Wow. So I think what you've just explained to us here is really interesting, like to understand the process of where Spitfire is today. Yes Spitfire, it's still a growing company and I think obviously, from its growth I want to understand basically how could you define Spitfire culture and, why is it important basically for companies to have an organizational culture?

Darren ([16:43](#)):

So culture for me, is like something that is absolutely essential because we now employ a whole lot of millennials.

Chaz ([16:56](#)):

Present!

Kgomotso: and Gen Zs by the way.

Darren ([16:57](#)): d

And Gen Zs

Chaz: I'm like on the cusp!

Darren:

So I'm like the three gen... So when I was starting up my career, you kind of got a boss and they told you what to do, and you did it and you were grateful to have a job and you know,, they treated you like you were subservient and it's not cool. And it's also not sustainable. So I think for me, culture is critical for sustainability in an organization. So in five years, we've gone from no employees, being founded to 234 employees today with a host of external providers. And we've had lots of people that have been through the business. A lot of people work in a business for a year and a half, two years and they're looking to gain experience. They're moving on, they're going on to bigger, better things and they're building their careers. And I think that each of those person (sic) contributes to culture, but also takes a bit of culture with them. And I think that we have the opportunity to leave a mark on people that we engage with. And if we have a great culture, then that is a positive mark. And if we have a negative culture and, or poor culture, that becomes a scar and I think, Spitfire to leave positive marks or beautiful tattoos, not scars

Chaz ([18:27](#)):

Yeah. I come from a scarred background when it comes to work. And, you know, you obviously look back and I mean, I've been working now for three years: this will be my fourth, so still very baby, still very new and it would just be like, "But surely it can be better? Surely I can go to bed and wake up with no anxiety and surely I can do a job and, you know, do something wrong and not get screamed and shouted at when nobody gave me a brief, nobody, you know, and it's not about being spoonfed or anything like that, it's just, "I'm a human and I'm a human that's working for you. And if you make me happy, I'll do a good job". And it seems simple, but I feel like not everyone's doing it right.

Darren ([19:20](#)):

So Chaz, I think that that's true, but what you can't ignore is that culture is not a one-way street and culture is also not a cotton wool environment. Having a good culture doesn't mean that we all sing Kumbaya and drink hot chocolate with marshmallows every day. Like, we work really hard. We expect a lot from our people, but we give a lot in return. Yeah. And I think that it's like culture is about mutually beneficial relationships. So when I'm getting satisfaction from the people that are in

the business, and I feel inspired by the work that's going on and people are inspired to do the work and don't feel like it's a chore... and it's work, right?. So, sometimes it will feel like a chore: doing time sheets is crap.

Chaz ([20:23](#)):

I mean, to me it's a save. I think it's really cool because I can see how productive I was.

Darren ([20:28](#)):

But time sheets are essential for us to understand how much pressure our team are under so that we can alleviate pressure. If we don't have an understanding of how people are working, what they're working on, you can end up with pockets of, um, poor culture where, and one of the things that undermine good culture is tolerating poor employees, so one of the key things for me in culture, is where you transfer the responsibility of holding people accountable to what they need to do from the founders or owners and managers into the team. And if I look at a microcosm environment and I look at my son's school, which is the oldest boys school in Joburg, it has a phenomenal culture and the culture is not driven by the headmaster. Sure, he guides it. It's not driven by the teachers: they influence it. It's driven by the boys. It's driven by the boys everyday who go, "That's not acceptable. When you put this blazer on, when you wear this badge, you behave in a certain way" And that is... that's culture. It's heritage.

Kgomotso: The behaviour.

Darren: Yeah. But it's not... it's instilled; it becomes part of the fabric or the DNA rather than a set of rules that you print up and put on the wall. And so there's a difference between rules and culture. And I think that's really important to remember.

Chaz ([22:00](#)):

It goes for me back to, you know, not everything about work is fun. Yeah. I mean, as much as we have fun and we enjoy it, there's some mornings where you wake up and you're just like, "Ugh, like I would much rather be on a beach right now, you know, sipping a pina colada". But it's the culture and I can't let my team down and can't let my clients down. And that's what gets you out of bed and then you're up for half an hour and you're in the game.

Darren ([22:28](#)):

Yeah. So when we were looking at culture and trying to understand it more, we came across Patagonia, an outdoor clothing brand. And the one thing that resonated with me in the story of their culture, which is renowned as having like an amazing way of culture, is their philosophy of do the least possible harm. So they do that in terms of their production of their clothing. They go, "We want to be a green producer". But they make stuff out of plastic. They use dyes, they use water, right? So they can't be completely green, but they go, "We will invest in making it as

eco-friendly as possible”. And they have the same philosophy with their people. So the question that people ask themselves, what they build into their culture is, “Will this negatively impact a colleague?”

Darren ([23:31](#)):

So, if I don't pitch for this meeting, will it harm someone else? If I don't complete my task, will it negatively impact on somebody else? Not the business, not the bottom line, somebody else, one of my teammates, will they be harmed by this? And if the answer is yes, then don't do it or do it. So if not completing a task or not coming to the others is going to negatively impact on other people, then come to the office. But if you're sick and you come to the office and you make five other people sick like that, you know, so there's two different... it's not come to the office at all costs, it's going “What will do the least possible harm?”. So, yeah. And that's especially true now with COVID to expose your teammates to risk unnecessarily.

Chaz ([24:19](#)):

So with their mission or vision being that ours is “Do better. Be better” as you heard in the beginning of our intro. And, with that, we've got a little acronym of TAWC, talk the talk, and it stands for trust, authenticity, willing and confidence as our main values. So with everything that you've just said, how did you end up with that as the four main pillars?

Darren ([24:55](#)):

Okay. So the most important part of that is that it was a team effort to put it together. Right. So, I didn't make it up. You know, so collaboration is critical to culture. If I say, “This is our culture” you get to choose whether or not you want to be part of it. If we build a culture together and you have a part of the building and the architecture of that culture, you will be way more invested. Yeah. You will, you will embody it. And that in turn, means that the people you engage with... So as you grow in your career, as Kgomoitso grows in his career, he's going to engage with other people in the business and he'll go “That's not how we do it at Spitfire. At Spitfire we do TAWC. Yeah. Okay, so it's trust; What builds trust? Consistency, honesty, reliability. So if you want to be trusted, you have to deliver those.

Darren ([25:59](#)):

So people go, “Oh, but you didn't trust me with the task”. Well, trust is deserved, right? It's not mandated. It's not given. I will give you the benefit of the doubt, but prove to me that you will, that you're going to do it. So, “Oh, well, why do you doubt that I would have done it?” Well, give me the proof. Don't let me have to question it. If you tell me you've done it and I've got the information ahead of needing it, I immediately trust that everything else you do is going to be right. Sure. So trust is earned and it's critical to autonomy. If you want to be autonomous in your role and in your job, you have to have trust of your team, trust of your clients and the trust of yourself. Yeah. So do you trust your own decision?

Darren ([26:49](#)):

Am I, are you prepared to commit to this and are you prepared to be accountable to the decision that you've made? So blame completely undermines trust. So a manager that blames their team loses my trust and trust is critical in our business. So recently, and like all of our clients, like our clients trust us. And when we undermine that trust, by not delivering and we do, right? everybody fails. At some point we drop the ball. So we had a staff member leave and move on and we had a new staff member start, but the handover process was flawed and we missed a chunk of work that needed to be done, that was not done for about four weeks. Really not cool, not cool at all, but I held the team accountable to it, but I held myself accountable to it, with the client.

Darren ([27:46](#)):

I did not throw anybody from the team under the bus. I met with the client. I went, "As Spitfire we've dropped the ball, this is the plan to rectify it. This is what we're going to do to make it right. Are you okay with that? Yes. Okay. Now we've got to get it right and we did. We fixed it. So it's not so much about getting everything right the first time, which ideally we would like to, but often we're doing stuff that is completely new and never been done before. So sometimes it may go wrong. It's how you handle that. But by me taking that accountability with the client, I believe that I built more trust with my team and that they will in turn, do that for their team. And if they don't, they won't be a trusted leader and therefore won't be successful in their career at Spitfire.

Chaz:

I love that. I really do.

Darren ([28:36](#)):

And that leads straight into authenticity. So be what you are. We don't expect people to pretend to be anything other than who they are. We're very careful about screening for culture when we hire. Our hiring process is very robust, you guys will both know.

Chaz:

That's why we're friends!

Darren:

Yeah, but we don't take it lightly. Even at the most junior level in the business. You know, we have a very robust recruitment process and we're testing for culture over skill because skill can be learned and like being, learning how to be yourself and knowing who you are, is much harder to learn than learning how to build a landing page. Right? So, being your authentic self and being able to express your own authentic self at work is critical, particularly in our society. We live in a diverse society where people come from all different backgrounds and they shouldn't have to

change who they are to be able to be successful in their career and to be successful at Spitfire.

Kgomotso ([29:59](#)):

And I think that's so true because if you work for an organization, you want to be yourself, you don't want to wake up every morning and say, "Eish, I have to now put on this mask to become someone else that I'm not". So I think having authenticity as one of the main values, it's something that is so important.

Darren ([30:17](#)):

But I also think it's authenticity not just in yourself, it's in your work. Yeah. So,

Chaz ([30:23](#)):

Like, "Oh my gosh, I've messed up. Like, I've done this."

Darren ([30:28](#)):

But also, just trusting that you're going, "I'm going to try this, I'm going to figure this out. I'm going to work on this and I'm going to go a little deeper". So Brandon, the other day books, a meeting with me. So Brandon's worked with us for a year, he's a developer.

Chaz ([30:48](#)):

I was going to say, "Sorry, Brandon, but I don't know who you are yet. Who's Brandon?"

Darren ([30:53](#)):

Okay, you'll meet Brandon; really, really smart guy. Over the weekend he was like we're really struggling with it. So Brandon builds websites, and he's going, "I'm getting communication via email, via slack, via Teamwork, via phone sometimes. and we're really busy and sometimes that falls off my radar". So what he did on the weekend was build an interface that allows us to bring all of those tasks automatically into Teamwork and have a dashboard for the client to be able to see it.

Chaz:

Casual,

Darren:

He went, "This is a problem". He didn't go, "Oh, we have crap systems. No one gives us the technology we need to be able to run our business". He went, "I have the skills. I'll build it". So he just did it and then went, "What do you think?" And I'm like, "Holy crap. That's amazing. Like you just did this this weekend?" And I'm like, "Do you not have a life?" and he said, "I'm a little bit geeky. Not many friends. I love making stuff". You know, but to me that's authenticity of work, but it also speaks to

willingness. And that for me is an absolutely critical thing in work. True. Putting your hand up and going, "I'll do that". Yeah. So Chaz, we had a meeting the other day. What did I ask you?

Chaz ([32:26](#)):

I don't remember. Oh ja, he asked me where I see myself or what is my plan? Like but a hardcore question on my future, but I just sat there and I was like, "Um, well, I really want to be in the social media department and I really, really want to be there. And that's kind of where I'm just going towards", and he then said. And what, how did you phrase it? In terms of taking with people, what did you say exactly? I don't want to, I don't want to say it the wrong way...

Darren ([33:04](#)):

I'm really glad that my mentoring of you has made such a massive impact.

Chaz ([33:09](#)):

(laughs) It's because you shock me when you ask questions.

Darren ([33:12](#)):

But it's not waiting for permission.

Chaz ([33:15](#)):

Yes, it's just doing.

Darren ([33:16](#)):

If you wait for permission and go, "Ah..." You know, for many years in my career, I've had people like, "Oh, I wasn't... like I was overlooked for promotion".

Chaz ([33:26](#)):

Like go ask for it or go for it.

Darren ([33:28](#)):

But not everybody's an extrovert.

Chaz ([33:31](#)):

Oh ja, I forget, sorry.

Darren ([33:36](#)):

So clearly, you're not that one, right? So not everybody's comfortable just asking for it, but everybody has a way to be able to show their value. And for me, willingness is what will always elevate you, okay. So being present, being involved, what if, or maybe I could... So Brandon's an introvert, but he went and built a bang up piece of technology in eight hours. Yesterday, Lauren, like I was caught up in a meeting so she pitched a whole retainer to a client. I just couldn't get out of the other meeting.

And I logged in 20 minutes later and she's like, "Oh, we're done. It's fine. They're really happy. And we had a nice five minute chat to wrap up a meeting and it's not her job.; it's my job.

Darren ([34:32](#)):

She didn't go, "Darren didn't pitch for the meeting. We're going to cancel it, move it out. She whatsapped me. I'm like, "I'm stuck". And she was like, "I got this". And she did it. She didn't just do it. She hit it out the park and she's like, "I'm not a salesperson".

Darren ([34:52](#)):

That gave me an idea last night. And I started writing a book last night. Cool. Which is not something that I've ever aspired to do. But based on that conversation with Lauren and how animated she was after the meeting, she's inspired a book idea for me. Um, and, um, I'm going to write it. I don't know how long it's going to take but I'm going to do it. But I'm willing to try.

Chaz ([35:14](#)):

Yes, and also Darren, like that willingness and being able, being willing, and putting your hand up is because we feel comfortable too. Lauren knew that "What would Darren do?" Because you're our leader in that situation, she's got all the information. She knows that you're not going to come into the meeting afterwards and be like, "How dare you do that?" And that's also important in terms of you see, they're creating this around us; what a concept!

Darren ([35:51](#)):

And you know, I think that builds confidence, right? So you can undermine confidence massively by not giving people the opportunity to fail. So, failure can cause a lack of confidence if it's handled badly.

Chaz ([36:06](#)):

Um, if it;s not shown later as a lesson...

Darren ([36:10](#)):

Oh yeah, that's okay. If someone does try something innovative and it fails there's a learning opportunity. If someone repeatedly gets stuff wrong because they're just being lazy, that's not failure.

Chaz ([36:28](#)):

I think it's someone who's not willing to learn.

Darren ([36:28](#)):

It's someone who's just being ineffective, right? So that's a lack of willingness. Maybe it's a lack of aptitude or just a lack of application, but you know, so you know,

someone not doing their time sheets every week or not corresponding with their clients or responding to emails or like not communicating that they're going to be on leave; they just don't arrive at work. Those are, you know, that's hygiene stuff. There are rules in business.

Chaz ([36:59](#)):

Doing your job.

Darren ([37:02](#)):

You can't just not pitch, you must show up. But there's always a circumstance around... But if you go... So if Brandon had gone and built this really cool piece of technology that served no purpose I could go, "That's a real, that's a massive waste of your time". And he would never do it again, right? So there's enhancements, but he's got it 80% of the way there and I can go, "What could be really cool for me is if I could see that", and he was like, "Ja,, I can do that". Wow. Yeah. So it went from like incubator idea to the point that this is actually a product that we could sell six months from now.

Chaz:

Watch this space!

Darren ([37:42](#)):

So I think that that will build his confidence, right? And you know, Tumi is not an extrovert; exceptional commitment, exceptional willingness, absolutely lives and breathes the Spitfire brand, but can be overlooked in meetings if we don't give her the opportunity to talk. So by understanding the people in the business, and if everybody is going "How do I make somebody else's day better? How do I help them get their job done?" we build a robust culture that allows everybody to rise. And I think that happens daily. The number of times on the WhatsApp group, people are going, thank you for everybody that jumped in and helped me solve that problem because that's what we do for our clients, solve problems and sometimes it's time sensitive and it needs more hands or more brains. And there's always someone ready to just step up and do something that is not their job.

Chaz ([38:52](#)):

And it's not even just from a job point of view, you might mentioned or be a little bit off beat that one day and somebody will message you the next day and ask, "Are you okay? Are you feeling, are you feeling okay?" And I'm just like, "Ah, you saw that little worry in my eye and you, they don't need to do that. There's no reason why they need to do that but just because we're like solid humans here. Which you've said is part of the screening process. It's integral to productivity and progress,

Darren ([39:28](#)):

And we don't always get it right. So not everybody is successful at Spitfire and that's okay because they can go be successful somewhere else. And some people will be successful at Spitfire and then move on to be successful somewhere else. We've had several people that have got... people that have gone, "Well, I'd like to try a corporate. I'm going from agency to corporate or I'm emigrating or, you know, which is no longer an excuse because we can work from anywhere. World domination is on the cards. So, but sometimes it's not good for people to stay forever. And I think what shows, like something that really stands out to me, is that Lauren has..

Kgomotso:

Lauren L right?

Darren:

Lauren Lokker, name and shame...

Chaz ([40:21](#)):

She started the same day as me. I started just like under three months ago, but

Darren:

This is her third inning.

Chaz:

Hit for six. (laughs)

Darren ([40:33](#)):

So we call her a boomerang, but Lauren had got to a point in her Spitfire career where she needed to go and try something else. And she left and she learnt a hell of a lot in her new role at the new business. And when we advertised for a job, she applied and people were like, "Oh, well, yeah, she left one time." And I'm like, "Well, no, it's a year and a half ago. Why would we not?" Like we didn't hate her and she didn't hate us. She went for an opportunity and I respect that. She wants to come back. I respect that. And she then left again.

Chaz ([41:15](#)):

Yeah. That was the second time.

Darren ([41:17](#)):

But didn't leave badly

Chaz ([41:20](#)):

Because the relationship was still intact.

Darren ([41:23](#)):

But also her authenticity

Chaz ([41:27](#)):

Was

Darren ([41:30](#)):

Unquestionable, right? She just went, "This is my life situation, this is what I need to do".

Chaz:

Respect.

Darren:

And three weeks later she phoned Ali and went, "Everything you said would happen, has happened. And I realize now that I made a mistake and Ali went, "You need to see out the month. And if you're not happy, if you're still not happy, let's talk". And six weeks later she was back. But back in a different role, even though it was such a short period that she was away, she came with new energy, new experiences that contribute to the culture of Spitfire, right? So she's adding to the culture even though she left. So the people that leave are not the enemy. People that stay are not necessarily the asset, you know, so we've got to be always going, "How does this person's being here contribute to the overall good of everybody?" Not just the bottom line, not just, what can I extract from them? It's is it mutually beneficial? And if it's mutually beneficial, then we are living our purpose, which is to do better and be better.

Chaz:

Brings it all back.

Kgomotso ([42:48](#)):

So I guess then Darren, how would you say that good company culture contributes to the overall success and productivity of the Spitfire team?

Darren ([42:58](#)):

So I think culture is absolutely essential and been overlooked for many years in smaller businesses. So we took the lead on our culture from Dharmesh Shah, who's the founder of HubSpot. And he published the HubSpot culture code. So we have a culture code team and a part of that, and it's own, we didn't copy the HubSpot culture code, but it inspired us to document. We don't plagiarize ever. We often use other people's genius to inspire. Uh, okay. So if you... I'm a big fan of history and art and people are often like, "Oh, but you know, you've got to create unique ideas". Da Vinci didn't create unique ideas. Da Vinci was inspired by Galileo. Galileo was inspired

by somebody else and Michelangelo's inspired by his peers, right. So we need to look to our peers to inspire us to do better and be better. So I have to give a disclaimer here that HubSpot's brand purpose is grow better. We were do better be better before there's was Grow better (laughs) so I'm just owning that.

Darren ([44:20](#)):

But it just shows how aligned our thinking is. So Darmesh, who is a genius and an introvert is head of culture at HubSpot, which is a billion dollar a year recurring revenue business, hundreds of thousands of customers, and really growing at an exponential rate ahead of their competitors and their peers, but they're really championing a cause. And I think that's what's really important in culture is that there's a cause bigger than yourself. Not that you will sacrifice yourself for that cause necessarily, but it's a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose. And I think that that's what contributes to the overall success of the business. Because when you have a sense of purpose and a cause bigger than yourself, you tend to do it with a different intention and you do it with a greater meaning. And you can see that in small businesses, right?

Darren ([45:24](#)):

When you go to an owner-managed restaurant there is a level of passion and care that comes through that you don't necessarily find in a franchised business. Not to say that all... so these franchise businesses have their place. And some people want to work an eight to five job and not be fully invested and not let it drive who they are. But that's not me. Like I'm all in. In everything I do. As a father, I'm all in. As a husband, I'm all in. As a business owner, I'm all in and people that are all in inspire me, you know So that doesn't mean that I compromise business for family or vice versa. It's a balancing act. But if we come with the right intention and a defined purpose, and we understand the people around us and we use that as commonality, then I think we will all be successful together.

Darren ([46:23](#)):

You know and Spitfire's a baby company right? We're only have five years old. But I think we've accomplished a lot in five years. And I think there's a lot more that we can do. And what we do today is not what we did five years ago. So this continuous learning, which is at the core of what we do, right? So it's not even in our values, but it is woven into the fabric of our culture, you know? So my shareholding company's called Stay Curious, and for me, the people that are most alive: four year olds.

Kgomotso: Curiosity

Chaz: Wooooww

Darren: And that can be, you know, so we would walk down the beach with Matthew and Thomas and a 500 meter walk could take you three hours; poke this, turn it over.

Yeah. And you can overlook those moments in your everyday so like, I would encourage people, and I always encourage people, and I have to remind myself, and I'd like you guys to remind me of that. Like, don't just accept: question and challenge your thinking and always look under the rock to see what's there because you never know what you'll find, and it might be delightful.

Chaz ([47:36](#)):

Well, I love that. I feel like we have a closing off question and I can ask you, but I do feel like if you were listening to all of this, you would definitely be able to draw your own answers from this, but to close off, what is your key tip to other organizations when it comes to culture? Should they make it their core focus and why?

Darren ([48:01](#)):

So I think core focus is interesting concept and like, so yeah, the core focus of a business, I think businesses have multiple focuses at different times. I think culture is central to what will make a business sustainable over an extended period of time, right? Because at some point I won't be here anymore.

Chaz:

It's the people.

Darren:

So I no longer am an employee of Penquin. The business continues to be successful, and I have left a legacy there, but the culture of the business has evolved. It's changed, but at its core, it's still customer-centric and it still delivers phenomenal work. And I mean, yeah, I'm still a shareholder in the business and I've been involved with it for 21 years, but there's only one other person in the organization that's been there as long as me; everybody else is new. And the whole management team have only been there for less than five years.

Darren ([49:00](#)):

They're putting their own mark on it. They're evolving that culture and they get to do that so that they have a fulfilling work experience. We spend a lot of time working, and if it's not fulfilling, why are you doing it? Really, there's like, money's not everything; it's important, but if your organization doesn't have a clear purpose, it doesn't have a clear culture I don't think that your staff can have a fulfilling experience at work. And that for me, means that your business is limited. And if you look at the statistics, right, many businesses never make it through the first year. Exponentially more, never make it through three years. And I think if, I mean, you guys can go do the research, go have a look at how many businesses make it through 10 years.

Chaz ([49:49](#)):

And what do they make important?

Darren ([49:51](#)):

And the guys that last have culture. Some may not have great culture, but they have culture. So there's really big businesses that have lasted many years, hundreds of years. I don't know what the culture at Ford's like, but it's been around a long time. I'm hazarding a guess that they've got a pretty good culture. It may be a culture of high performance and stringent demand and rigorous work ethic, which would be... there's people that fit that. And my guidance to people is find a company that fits your culture. Like there's some people that just couldn't work in our business because we're crazy. We do crazy stuff like, and if you compare that to what you would get at a high-end consultancy, you know, so a Deloitte, it will be very different. I couldn't work there. I could never work in a corporate environment. And I work with many corporate clients, but I feel that I have this desire for self-determination, which means I'm an entrepreneur and a business owner. So I work twice as hard for half as much, but I kind of believe that I'm free.

Kgomotos:

You're more happy..

Darren: Well, I don't know. I've never tried it the other way around. Maybe I need to go and do a sabbatical at a bank, but no, I don't think I could. I don't think it would feed my soul. I like to work closely with the people in my business and help them achieve their full potential, and to me, that's what our culture is about. So one tip is don't try copy someone else's culture. Be inspired by it, but make it your own.

Darren ([51:44](#)):

But also don't do it in isolation. Okay, so one person can't define a culture...

Chaz:

because then it's theirs.

Darren ([51:53](#)):

Well,

Kgomotso:

The input of other people...

Darren ([51:54](#)):

Collaboration is what builds culture, right? So if you take one person's perspective, so if I sat down and wrote the culture code, and then said this is the culture it's compliance, not culture. Culture is what is built in a community. And I think that that's really, really critical... is go find people in the organization that can champion the cause and don't let them hang onto it for too long, rotate them through it so that they don't, it doesn't become one dimensional or group think, you know, get new

input into that all the time, because I think culture is always changing and should always change. Because business is always changing.

Chaz ([52:41](#)):

Well, that was a nugget of knowledge. Thank you so much.

Kgomotso:

That was so inspiring, as always.

Darren:

Thank guys, appreciate it.

Chaz ([52:53](#)):

We all know that the digital landscape is constantly changing and that HubSpot is a pioneer of these changes.. That's why we have this segment to share the latest HubSpot updates we think you should know about. At the beginning of August, HubSpot launched CMS Hubstarter, which is a new tier of their existing web content management system. CMS Hubstarter gives marketers and developers the tools they need to generate business through their website. They've seen how important it is for companies to be able to create reliable and effective digital experiences. Angela de Franco, VP of product management at HubSpot, said that, in addition to providing the tools customers need to get their website up and running CMS Hubstarter is also built on top of HubSpot CRM platform to help companies leverage their own data, to create a better end to end customer experience. CMS Hubstarter is built with the needs of marketers in mind, security and ease of use has been prioritized and it's able to tap into customer data.

Chaz ([53:55](#)):

So Chaz, what does this all mean? It means that companies can now easily build remarkable websites. No more CMSs forcing companies to make trade-offs like adopting simple web page builders that allows marketers to create content quickly, but has no tools for developers. CMS Hubstarter lets developers use the tools, technologies, and workflows that they prefer to create flexible themes for marketers to work with them, which means that marketers can then take ownership of their sites, updating the look and feel of their website whenever their heart desires without being restricted by a development team. Basically, CMS Hubstarter is going to be a game changer for scaling companies looking to take their digital experiences to the next level. CMS Hubstarter is available now for \$25 per month. And it's also available as part of the Starter CRM suite bundle, which gives customers access to all five of HubSpot's starter tier products for a discounted rate of \$50 per month or \$45 per month that they pay up front. This really is a massive web win for all.

We hope you enjoyed our first episode. We'd like to thank our guest, Darren, for joining us today.

Kgomotso ([55:07](#)):

Be sure to check out the blog post connected to this episode at spitfireinbound.com and subscribe to the podcast, wherever you listen to your podcasts.

Chaz ([55:20](#)):

We'd love for you to like, follow and subscribe to our podcast and for you to leave us a review and share this episode.

Kgomotso ([55:21](#)):

Remember, we'll be chatting about inbound 21 and our next episode.

Chaz ([55:25](#)):

Remember all the links are in the description below.

Chaz ([55:34](#)):

Thanks again, and we'll see you soon. Bye!