

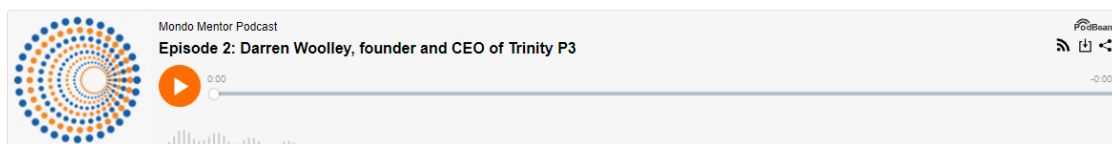
PODCAST

Podcast Episode 2: Darren Woolley

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Darren Woolley, Founder and CEO of global marketing management agency Trinity P3, talks to us about working at the Royal Children's Hospital to becoming as he states, an "Ad Man". With offices in Europe, New York, Sydney, and Singapore, he's even managed to squeeze in authoring two insightful book series and claim Chair of the Australian Marketing Institute Board in 2014. There's a lot to talk about so you better get listening!



Transcript:

Charlie Ellis 0:00

Hello, and welcome to The Mentor Evolution podcast. I'm Charlie Ellis, your host, and I'm here to uncover the stories behind Australia's great industry minds. So you the listener can know their story.

Welcome to The Mentor Evolution podcast, Episode Three. I'm here with Darren Woolley, founder and CEO of the global marketing company, Trinity P3. He has also authored and published more than 1000 posts on the Trinity P3 blog and published the business book top 50 Marketing Management posts of the year, annually from 2013 to 2019. How are you going Darren?

Darren Woolley 1:01

Very well, Charlie, thanks for having me on your podcast,

Charlie Ellis 1:04

Don't be daft its an absolute pleasure. Thank you for giving us the inspiration for this. It's a fantastic thing to do. And I just wanted to start with a small, small concept we do at the start of every podcast is inside The Mentor's Studio. So if you're familiar with the common interview show, hosted by James Lipton inside the Actor's Studio, we asked a few questions, just to get the juices flowing, and try and understand you a little bit. So what we'll start with Darren is what is your favourite word?

Darren Woolley 1:37

Yes.

Charlie Ellis 1:39

Fantastic. And what is your least favourite word? I wonder?

Darren Woolley 1:45

Of course, no.

Charlie Ellis 1:47

Fantastic. And what sound or noise, do you love?

Darren Woolley 1:53

Children laughing.

Charlie Ellis 1:56

And you have children?

Darren Woolley 1:57

I have two four year old twin boys.

Charlie Ellis 2:00

Fantastic. always laughing I assume. And what sound or noise? Do you hate?

Darren Woolley 2:09

Children crying goes to the very heart of me.

Charlie Ellis 2:18

What profession other than your own that you're doing now? Or also the professional job of being a father? What would you like to attempt?

Darren Woolley 2:27

If I if I had it all over again, I'd probably have become a journalist. I love the idea of being an observer looking for what is the kernel of truth of what's happening.

Charlie Ellis 2:43

And you can see that through the books that you've written, the top 50 posts in marketing management, you can see the last evident, and you've obviously got a passion for writing and trying to find truth in the marketing industry. And through that, through the professional memories that you have, what's your most fond, professional memory?

Darren Woolley 3:05

the day that I made the decision to leave employment as a creative director at J. Walter Thompson in Melbourne. And I remember thinking in the year 2000, I'd be turning 39. And it seemed like as a child that was such an old age, and I made a decision that I was going to not be an employee when I was 40. And I'd start my own business. And it's the fondest memory because looking back on it, it seemed like a huge decision. But now it seems like it was just meant to be, you know, for all the struggles and the ups and downs and all those things. At the time it I you could have been asking me to jump off a cliff. And looking back on it, I have nothing but fondness because it was nothing like jumping off a cliff.

Charlie Ellis 4:01

And you feel a real sense of accomplishment based on that decision?

Darren Woolley 4:06

Absolutely. And look every day. There's never a sense of I've achieved there's a sense of I'm continuing to achieve every day there's something new to explore, to assess to consider and share those insights with others.

Charlie Ellis 4:26

And would you say that during that time, when you made the decision to leave professional employment? Was there someone that pushed you or helped you as you as you were making that decision?

Darren Woolley 4:38

Not at all. There was no one that pushed me. It was definitely the time had come. It was something that I'd considered, you know, all the way through my 30s but there was something about the timing of it, leaving in December 1999 and starting the business on January 14th 2000 it was this sense of new millennium, new start new future.

Charlie Ellis 5:07

When you started working your working life as a scientist at the Royal Children's Hospital, is that right?

Darren Woolley 5:13

That's right under Dr. Xenia Dennett, who was a fabulous woman.

Charlie Ellis 5:19

Wow. And how many years were you scientist in? in the in the field? Forgive me if I'm pronouncing it wrong,

Darren Woolley 5:26

Neuromuscular diseases. So yes, the muscles? Yeah. Look, it's a tough one, it was called the muscle unit. And I was there for five years.

Charlie Ellis 5:36

Wow. And was there a similar choice? Similar emotion? Did you did you feel similar emotions when you were leaving that line of work and change to the marketing industry?

Darren Woolley 5:47

Well, look, and as I mentioned, Zinnia, singer was a fabulous person, she was a doctor, PhD. And she was encouraging me to also pursue doing a PhD. Except that I quickly realized that, in choosing a particular topic, what I was doing was began. End up an expert, and very deep in quite a narrow field. And the reason I left medical research was the opportunity to become a creative in an advertising agency copywriter. And that was totally different in that you become a very shallow expert in a very broad field. So to use the metaphor, do I create the well that I dive to the bottom of which is a PhD? Or do I create an ocean that's only an inch deep, that I pursue as a copywriter?

Charlie Ellis 6:45

Yeah, that is a fantastic way to look at something like that. And I know that being a student myself at the moment, I've been thinking a lot about the different avenues you can go down. And particularly if you focus on one industry or one, like you say, a PhD, that you can focus all your energy or your intellect and all your time to, you know, if that is a really tough decision to go through at such a young age as well, really, I mean, you will you will you in your 20s when you were working at the Children's Hospital,

Darren Woolley 7:24

Yeah, I left, left med, medical research when I was 26 and started in advertising. The biggest cultural change was actually from my parents, you know, I remember at the time they went from, oh our son is going to cure cancer to Oh my God, he's an ad man. You know, there's an old advertising joke that you'd rather tell your parents that you played a piano in a warehouse than admit that you worked in advertising? And, and they were certainly of that ilk that they thought that advertising was not a real career.

Charlie Ellis 8:02

Was Funny, isn't it? Was there a moment when you were working at the Royal to children's hospital that you realized you wanted to pursue marketing as a career with a one single memory is your thought, is it okay to go and do this?

Darren Woolley 8:17

Well, it's actually not a memory, but an action. In that, while I was there, I started a business with one of my colleagues, Craig Jackson, we came up with this idea of recycling organic solvents, because we saw huge amounts of from going from the hospital, into our waste areas. And we thought that we could recycle those using what's called spinning band distillation. It was a technique for purifying organic solvents. And we started this business and it was fascinating. Yeah, my curiosity was piqued with this idea of not just the operational side, but how do you promote and market a service, that's such a niche, and I think that's where I got my commercial awakening, was running that business. Now, ultimately, the business failed. But it was certainly something that made me more acutely aware of a commercial career or a career that had a more commercial focus than I had to that stage of my life. And that was my mid 20s.

Charlie Ellis 9:23

And that would have been quite enlightening and quite eye opening in your mid 20s. To feel that, you know, you you've been so driven for such a long time going through your whole education, and then you get to a stage where you've probably had your first experience of entrepreneurial what's the word,

Darren Woolley 9:43

Spirit?

Charlie Ellis 9:44

Yeah, that's right, right. Yeah. And something's come from when, you know, inside you to say, I can do something different here and I can I can make, make my own reality really my own lifestyle and really take on a challenge and Through these times when you were changing careers so drastically really, and, you know, taking life into your own hands, what what sort of worker? And what sort of person were you when you're going through that? Were you like, had the having the attitudes of working to live? Or would you live to work? What was the way that you looked at life at those times?

Darren Woolley 10:22

Okay, that's a great question, Charlie. Because I would say, depending on the job, I would have different attitudes. You know, there were times with medical research that I was very competent in my skill set. But the work itself was quite repetitive, you know, you can imagine research projects need to be replicated over and over and over again, and to get the results. So that would be, there were times that my personal and private life was really being supported by working, running resolve that business, it was definitely a passion that was fired up. And so the work because I was doing it while I was working at the hospital, it became my reason for being. And then when I got into advertising, the whole culture, and that was the biggest thing, the difference in culture, between working in medical research inside a large teaching hospital, and going to an advertising agency is as different as chalk and cheese. I used to, I used to joke that the saving grace of advertising was that no one's life was going to end if something went wrong. Whereas working in a hospital, you could always say, you know, it's life and death. You could always give yourself a option out in advertising as intense as it got, I was able to say, Well, at least No one's going to die today, if I make the wrong decision.

Charlie Ellis 11:54

So true. And I'm guessing you prefer the culture that is in advertising, the way you work in that world?

Darren Woolley 12:02

Yeah, look, you trigger that by asking you a question about my favourite word. And it's Yes, because I love possibility. I love exploring possibility. I like creating possibility. A world where people are saying no, and there's lots of people in the world that are there to say No, in fact, you almost feel like it's their job. But just as it's someone's job to say, no, it has to be other people's jobs to say yes, yes, yes. And why not?

Charlie Ellis 12:31

That's right. And is there anyone in your life as you've gone through? That has been saying yes to you and support you and being your block as you've been? going on and taking on new problems and new projects?

Darren Woolley 12:45

I get from the way you phrase that is, is there been a cheerleader or a cheer squad? cheering me along? No. It's the short answer. Because I know, I'm inclined not to surround myself and I don't like surrounding myself with Yes, people. Likewise, I don't want to surround myself with people that say no all the time. But I certainly really love and appreciate surrounding myself, friends, colleagues, or even loved ones that have opinions and are willing to voice them and say, you know, perhaps, Darren, you need to consider this. Or perhaps we should consider that or here's something we could add to this to make it bigger I think that's a much more nurturing world than someone that's just always cheering you on. I worry sometimes that people interpret optimism as saying yes, all the time, optimism just says no matter how tough, it's, you know that there's going to be a way out, you've just got to find it.

Charlie Ellis 13:51

A hundred percent. And I can, I can remember even being like a little lad at school, and we did these music performances, there might have been a second one my dad's ever seen or something just played in front of the whole school, and I go off and dad was like, No, good that son, I'm sorry. I'll tell you when it's good. But I'll tell you when it's bad as well. So that was no good. And I think I remember being so hurt at the time when that when he said that to me. But as you get older, you realize how important those people are, who keep you grounded, who tell you when something's wrong, and tell you when something's right. And I just think that, like he said that it is important to surround yourself with people who have opinions and who are honest. And would you say being part of a community because you were in the Australian Marketing Institute. You were on the board of that. And you were at the chair in 2015 2016. Is that right?

Darren Woolley 14:45

Yeah. And on the board at a time where it was particularly challenging for many reasons that I can't go into. And it was interesting, interesting to see the people that were wanting to maintain the status quo, those that were willing to contemplate and support making significant changes, and those that just went into complete hiding in the face of such big challenges. And I think you get the measure of the people around you, when you're under pressure, when the organization or the group is under pressure when you're facing, you know, what will often seem like huge challenges. The, the really you will see the reality of the those people around you.

Charlie Ellis 15:34

And is that something that you've found important as to why to why you surround yourself with people that do have opinions and are honest, you know, when tough times hit, you can get the measure of how people actually do operate and their attitudes towards work and how they're going to get out of a situation. Like you were saying, you don't want Yes, men around you all the time. Because once you know things, bad things start to happen. And maybe, you know, a company's sales aren't working out. Or maybe there's a culture in the company that just isn't gelling with everyone, like you're saying, it is important to have a community that is honest and has opinions, but also show respect to each other and know that you're just providing opinions and know that you're just being a professional to wanting one another, not just a friend. And I also asked how was it being involved in a community such as the Australian Marketing Institute? was it? Was it rewarding? And was it was it interesting to learn from different people?

Darren Woolley 16:41

So let me address that in a broader sense. And that is, I love to advertising right up to the point that I got a management role. And I loved advertising, because it was full of possibility. But as you become more and more senior and get involved, more and more in management, the politics starts becoming a big game. And the more and the needing to consider an end do not just consider deal with huge amounts of negativity. The same with the Australian Marketing Institute, is that I made a commitment when I was elected as chair and I did it I paid my own way and went to every single state, and met with the members. And that's incredibly powerful, incredibly rewarding, and also incredibly humbling. But then you have to sit down with the board, and then deal with the agendas that come with all the people on the board. Yeah, this is what this is why, you know, far better to have robust, honest, open but respectful discussions, rather than people pushing agendas without being honest about that. That's why I would much prefer a community that is willing to voice their opinion, and have the have the open discussion. Rather than people that are inclined to not have their say, or, or go around and have their say, you know, secretly or, or not be willing to say to your face, what they willing to say behind your back? And I think that's why, you know, some, some people will listen to this and go or I'm not sure that's the Darren Woolley I know. But that's because they're often the same people that feel either intimidated or are not

because that's the Darren Woolley, I know but there's because they're often the same people that feel either intimidated or are not willing to have that conversation to my face. In in my role with trendy p3. Over the years, many people have said, oh, there must be a lot of people that are unhappy with you, because of what we do as benchmarking and advising marketers around their agencies and suppliers. Well, I can honestly say that there's probably less than a handful of people. Now there may be a lot more having a say behind my back, but I really don't care. Because if you're not willing to have that conversation to my face, and you're not willing to stand up and say whatever you feel needs to be said, then there's really not a lot I can do about it.

Charlie Ellis 19:20

Absolutely correct. And do you feel that as you're going through that, like you were talking about before the change of culture, from working in the science industry in the world Children's Hospital, and then move into the marketing field? Do you feel like you had to gain quite a mental resilience?

Darren Woolley 19:39

I think it's resilience gets used a lot. I think it's taken a long time for me to develop mental resilience, because I'm so passionate about the things that I believe in that and I like working with people that have a similar belief that I do, you also learn through life, that there are people that are not going to embrace that. And the you can either let them get you down, or you get work around it. And so it's taken probably took me, you know, up until, let's say the past 10 years to really work that through, because there are still so many things. One of my parents, one of the things my parents both gave me was a incredible sense of social justice and speaking out for what's right. And so, you know, it often puts people off side, but I'd rather die with no one having mixed thoughts about what I believed, then dying with people going now, what did you really think that's never gonna happen?

Charlie Ellis 20:56

Would you say that one of the most important life lessons that you've taken through and learn all that from your parents is that you will always say what's true and honest and make sure that people know your truth, rather than just being yes man yourself.

Darren Woolley 21:14

That's, that's the lesson I learned from my parents, and particularly my father, the biggest life lesson I've learned is actually again, from Dr. Zeaner Dina, who we who taught me that no matter how much you think, you know, there is always room to learn more. And that life is one long learning lesson. And that's the other thing is that, yeah, there's not a day goes past where, by listening to people and understanding as asking questions and understanding their perspective, you learn so much. And that actually makes you more informed and more effective at doing what you do.

Charlie Ellis 22:01

Would you say like you take on more of a speaking from a mentoring point of view, would you take on more of a mentor role? Or obviously, in your line of work? mentoring, it would be quite a big deal, because you're trying to help people strategize and make their business more efficient in their marketing operations? Or do you take on other moments, as you go through professional career, you're taken on by a mentee role? Well, and you sort of, like you talked about the doctor, you worked under the Children's Hospital, you've really learned from a person and kind of, you know, you aspire to be the way that they operate in we now would you say that you go through many mentee roles, you learn a lot from people that you work with all,

Darren Woolley 22:50

Charlie, I absolutely get what you're saying. I think there are times in your life in my life where I've definitely been more a mentee than a mentor. And then there are other times where are much more a mentor than a mentee. And it will really come down to what I need, or what I can provide. So it was interesting when we started the mentor program with Mentor Evolution. I thought, naturally, at this stage in my career, I'd be a mentor, but I thought, Oh, I'm gonna put my hand up and also find myself a mentor. And it was incredibly rewarding. I think we need to remind ourselves that, you know, being a mentor or a mentee has nothing to do with age and experience, and more about need and desire. What do I need? And what do I desire to give? And they're the two things that will help you decide whether you need to mentor or be a mentee and find a mentor. And I think that's really powerful. Because this idea that mentoring is just for junior people to, to connect with senior people is just crazy. It's so limiting in their perspective.

Charlie Ellis 24:13

Yeah, that's such an important reality to face for people, I think, from joining, joining the ranks of the mental evolution. You know, I've heard, I've heard people speak and I heard you speak about this before as well. Like people don't understand that. No matter what position you're in, you can learn something I can imagine that. Maybe do you learn anything from your two little lads, from time to time? Something they come out with? something that happens and you go, Oh, yeah, I never really thought of that or something like that. And, you know, I know sometimes happens to me when I see younger family or something like that, but I do think that what you've said there really highlights the importance of just using a situation to meet your best needs and adapt to any situation you've got, whether it's in work in your professional life, and in your family instance as well.

Darren Woolley 25:14

I was just going to say, Charlie, that I'll give you a great example, in that I was mentoring someone that ran their own agency. And they said to me in complete candour, Darren, I really love the way that every self and your give the industry a good whack. Because it deserves it. And I said, Well, you do get that I do that because I'm so passionate about marketing and advertising. And they went oh really? and I said, yeah, yeah, it's like when something that you love, does something that you feel let you down, you need to step up and say, Hey, this isn't right. There's a better way of doing this. And I said, I'd never actually considered that that was the motivation. I don't know whether they thought I was just some sort of sadist that liked lashing out when people did something silly. But I got so much out of that, because that was a conversation to a point before that was a very open and honest conversation. from a perspective. I had to respect and I did respect the person's honesty. but also their perspective challenged my view of who I was being in the industry, and in fact, caused a huge realignment for me to make sure that for every time I was offering criticism, I also balance that with praise. And so that was a reward as a mentor from a mentee. Likewise, the I've had many rewards from being mentored by people as well.

Charlie Ellis 26:49

So that was a real suppose real behaviour, challenging professional life, would you say?

Darren Woolley 26:54

Exactly

Charlie Ellis 26:56

Yeah, well, I just wanted to move on to ask you, what is your favourite failure in your professional life?

Darren Woolley 27:09

I have had many failures, because I've tried many things. And I wonder what would be my favourite one, my favourite one would have to be one that I learned the most from. And I think the one that I've learned the most from, is in recruiting people, as partners, when I've expanded the business, because people can be very quick to want to be part of something that it's very difficult, you know, and so, you know, the biggest failure was, on a number of occasions, going into partnerships with people in the business, only there have the person going missing at some point along the track and, and ultimately leaving at least sitting in my hands to deal with. And the lesson I've learned is that it's fine for people yet to take people on face value, if you're willing to allow yourself the inner munity of seeing their arse as well as they walk out of the room.

Charlie Ellis 28:18

Would you say that's based on the people you've chosen, or the time at which you constructed that relationship?

Darren Woolley 28:24

Look, it's more about the fact that I've probably been too quick to go into business with people, some people, and that there should be no speedy agenda on this, that you should always take the time. But no matter what, be willing, always be willing to consider the worst case scenario.

Charlie Ellis 28:43

Fantastic answer, and this can be our final question of the podcast, it's a bit of a philosophical question, Where does your self worth come from?

Darren Woolley 28:54

My sense of self or my sense of worth?

Charlie Ellis 28:58

Your sense of worth, the fact that you value, what you do and who you are.

Darren Woolley 29:04

Because I touched on this earlier, my incredible sense of self comes from my parents, being loved and accepted. And having a very strong, emotional feeling about my child of security and, and belonging. My sense of worth and self-worth comes from being able to create communities and followings and champions and some people call them ambassadors today, but people that believe in the work that I do, and it's incredibly humbling, and I don't use that flippantly, but humbling. When I do travel, to have people come up to me who I've never met, but they will say, I love what you've written about this, or I really loved your perspective on this. And I follow you on Twitter, I follow you on LinkedIn or whatever. Because what it makes you realize is that, beyond your immediate circle of friends and colleagues, we have this ability these days to influence and connect with people through social media and the internet, that we've never had previously. And I'm a big believer in the Peter Principle from Spider Man, Peter Parker principle, which is, with great power comes great responsibility. And that when you realize the influence you can have, you need to also respect that, you know, my mother always said, Our role is to leave the place better than we found. And she meant, you know, she was very active in girl guides, she meant whether it's, you go camping, and after you leave, the place should be better than you found it, you stay at someone's house, when you leave, it should be better than you found. Now, if you extrapolate that, to, you know, in your professional life, you should leave the industry or the company you work for better than the way you found it. But then in life, generally, you should leave the world hopefully, in a better shape than you found it. And imagine if the billions of people around the world all work to that philosophy. Where would the world be today, if we all wanted to just leave it better than the way we found it, then we would truly live in a utopia.

Charlie Ellis 31:56

That is a fantastic line to end the podcast on. So, thank you very much for your thoughts and insights and telling us your story about how you become the man you are today, Darren, I really appreciate you coming on to the podcast. Fantastic speaking to you. And I'd just like to thank the listeners at home for listening to our conversation as they're going about their day and here's to the mental evolution episode 3!

Darren Woolley 32:23

Thank you very much.

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