

Nate: Today I'm excited to be joined by Ryan Miller. Ryan is a coach to high performers and a consultant to industry leaders. He's an official member of the Forbes coaches council as well as a pastor. He also hosts a great podcast excellence mindset. Ryan, thank you for joining me today.

Ryan: Thanks, Nate. I really appreciate it. It it always makes me feel really important when people start throwing out a bunch of titles and descriptors about who I am. So I'm already feeling really good.

Nate: Yeah, that's part of the goal, right? So I, you know, I've been looking forward to this conversation and chiefly learning more about you for quite a while. Now. You know, I know a little pieces of your story and we've, we've spoken a few times, but if you would, I wonder if you wouldn't share the full story on how you came to be doing the important work that you're doing today?

Ryan: Yeah, so that's a big loaded question. So we'll try and cut it down to something reasonably concise and relevant. So back in 2006, I went to work for a large publicly traded company at the time they weren't but became publicly traded during the time that I was there in the housing industry, construction industry. And fast forward five years as one of their top sales guys, I was laid off as the result of just a destruction of the housing and construction industry and had to figure out what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. And after a couple of interviews, just realized that I didn't want to go work for anybody and it wasn't because everybody was evil and I wasn't or I was right and nobody else was. But it was really just more of a personal conviction to want to direct my business and how I was going to serve clients and where my heart was at that time.

Ryan: And so at the end of 2011, turning to 2012 with the blessing of my wife we decided to give ago and I had always had the heart to want to teach and had become a really attached to sales and business development. And so I started offering a services around coaching and consulting and some front of room sales training to frankly at that time, whoever would take me. And I had built a decent network of people. And so it was a bumpy start. It took me about 18 months to figure out even really what I was doing and how to craft, you know services and pricing and they're just picking up odd jobs here and there because I have a stay at home wife and a young daughter at the time. Actually I had both of them at the time. And so, you know, I was just trying to fight for what I could.

Ryan: And then in 2015, I was introduced to an organization here locally. They were a regional health insurance broker and after consulting with them for about four and a half, five months on a product they wanted to bring to market they offered me a full time job and that wasn't something I was really interested in at the time because business was going really well. Then I was also pastoring a church, so I was thinking about three days a week for my business, two days a week for our church. And it was pretty good. It was flexible, but the more they pushed and finally considering it with my wife, we just really felt like that was a really wise opportunity for us to step into. So in the middle of 2015, I went to work for them full time leading their sales team and a lot of wonderful things.

Ryan: And yet very challenging things happened while I was there. They actually join together with quite a few other firms across the country to form a national insurance broker in employee benefits from a pretty heavily private equity backed. And so that brought a lot of exciting opportunity, but obviously there were some growing pain and challenge. And as that was all happening, just actually just before that happened, I had a coworker who was my counterpart on our client service side commit suicide. And so there was just a lot going on. And so it was definitely, you know, rattling me you know, just, you know, was I living out my kind of own vision for life and was this everything that I wanted it to be, but it was stable enough that I kept going at it. And stability is a pretty big factor, especially when you've been through a couple of years of trying to run your own solo consulting business.

Ryan: I can completely relate to that. Yeah. You know, it's, it's interesting because you know, I think that, you know, I've always been a person that's just willing to just take the risk and go for it. But when I have a family at home, you know, it, there is just so much physical language that gets put on them, right when you're not, you know, consistently bringing in revenue, but then it's not just that, it's also just a mental anguish of, you know, where is our your next paycheck coming from, you know, even when things are going good. I mean, I live in southern California and Orange County particularly, and it's expensive to live here, so you've got to generate a lot of revenue and when you're self employed, you know that that can be a big challenge. So yes, stability was big. Yeah, absolutely. So that brings us up to around 2015 I think for you.

Ryan: Yeah, so that was when I got hired, you know, 2015 and you know, so, you know, things were you know, reasonably well and I enjoyed what, you know, what I was doing. And so I figured that I had about a seven to 10 year lifespan there. Not for anything other than the fact that I felt like I'd go in, I could contribute to the organization, things would be good. And and then I could go back into business for myself. And then life has a way of throwing curve balls. And that for me was and October of 2017 my wife and I and five of our friends were in Las Vegas at that route, 91 concert when the mass shooting took place. And in addition to the experience of just being there one of our best friends who was one of the seven with us in our group, I was one of the 58 that was killed.

Ryan: And you know, so it's obviously, you know, been been enough time that it's a little bit easier for me to talk about now, but you can just imagine, you know, as people listen, that is a lot to a person. And amongst many things that it did was, it really just was a huge, like punch to the gut. Like, am I really doing everything that I want to do? And I'm called to do. And gifted to do in life. If I have now realized for the first time ever this cliché that became reality, which is life is so short and so fragile, and in the snap of a finger it can be over. So that took me on quite a journey with my wife she and I talking about it, praying about what was next. I had a coach at the time who was a very wise, older man and of sharing a lot of what was going on with him in my head and my heart and all the while as I'm kind of like on my own personal discovery at that time.

Ryan: Things are getting a little bit more challenging internally in our organization. Not, not in any terrible way, just w there was misalignment between how I kinda felt I wanted to lead and how they wanted to lead. And so finally, in October or in May of 2018 I walked

into my boss's office one day and I resigned. And that was crazy for me to do because it was a reasonably stable job talking about stability. And I had a great paycheck. I had benefits I had at the opportunity for a significant payout down the line as the result of some stock in the organization. And I knew that I was going to have to walk away from every single one of those things in order to go back out business for myself. And yet, as many times as I came back to the stability, the money, the whatever, it just wasn't enough to keep me there.

Ryan: So, you know, again, through the support of my wife who was just so amazing in, in the journey, you know, she was the one that was really like, you need to do this. You just absolutely need to do it. And so I you know, I just went back at it and thankfully and we can talk about it, you know, more as we pick up. But, you know, thankfully within one week, maybe two weeks of me going back out into business for myself with no leads, no opportunities, no nothing, but simply by the relationships that I had had and the brand I had built for myself in the marketplace, I had replaced every dollar of income that I lost in the process of quitting my job.

Nate: Wow, that's great. That's a, it's an impactful story. And I think first of all, I want to thank you for telling it because I think obviously the event that you were involved in brought it close to home, you know, extremely close to home, these things that are going on in our country right now. But by telling your story, it also brings it close to home for many of us who get to hear it. So I wanna I want to thank you for that. I think that's a service to society.

Ryan: Yeah. You know, I you know, had an opportunity, you know, a couple of times over the last few months actually to, to share versions of that story publicly, you know, in the business environment and, you know, based upon the response I get, like, trust me when I say, and I think that everyone would agree. Like if I had to do it all over again, I would have never been there in the first place and neither would any of my friends. And yet, you know, I believe in my whole heart that there was not only purpose for me being there, but there was a deep purpose in me coming home. And because of that, like I just, I cannot waste an opportunity to serve others and give of everything that I am to other people because that's what I'm here for. So that has just been a deep conviction of mine. As you know, I've gone back out serving you know, the, the community of people that I do in coaching and consulting.

Nate: So, yeah, I want to dig into that a little bit because I think that that's a great model that everybody should try to sort of harness some of what you're talking about. And, and you know, you talk about a lot of change there. It's a big kind of scary change to go out on your own to do you know, coaching or whatever it is you, you feel you're called to do. Yeah. You know, it's, I think fairly common when somebody goes through something that impacts them deeply, whether that's [inaudible] you know, the tragedy you experienced, or for me losing and caring for my father or a divorce

Ryan: Or any numbers, impactful events, you still have to kind of get on, right? You still have to make a living, you still got to pull your boots on. So sometimes it's easier to Kinda bury those personal visions that you have for yourself. But, you know, you didn't do

that. I didn't do that. There are many, many people who can, who can harness those events and turn towards something that's a little more fulfilling for themselves and others around them. So talk to me a little bit about how you dealt with taking that leap of faith to make a big change. I know you're [inaudible] support structure around you was, was huge, it sounds like, but what else is in there? Yeah, Gosh. So first of all, I didn't do it well all the time. And honestly, I mean, up until this last weekend after news of two shootings broke out in Dayton and El Paso within a 12 hour period that would have been followed within about, you know, 36 hours of a one, the one up in Gilroy like, that brings right back to like light this idea and you know of what's going on and this like, what the hell do I do here?

Ryan: Right. And even internally and so it's, it can be very defeating. It's hard. Like this is not an easy process. So I do not try and trick anybody into thinking that, you know, I'm just like plowing through it. And, and yet, like, you know, as you ask, like, what did I do? You know, as I talked to people about this and some of what I'm speaking to a larger context about is, is this opportunity that we have. Like I thought I had it and I did. Like I had it pretty together. Like I'm a disciplined and habitual person by nature and I'm very driven and motivated and I was clear on my purpose. I have a deep faith and relationship with God. My marriage was good so it wasn't like I went from like, you know, this disaster to all of a sudden it was like this awakening.

Ryan: But, but through this, it allowed me to reflect on everything that I thought I was to determine whether or not that was reality. And then where I, where I was off or where I could add to or take away from. I started to reflect on just my own gifts, my own talents, the, the response from, you know, people like my wife from business relationships I had that were telling me who I was or who they perceived me to be. And trying then to line those things up with what I was doing. And, and, and what became clear was was the majority of the things that I had done before were in fact what I needed to be doing. But I just needed to, what I say is like just double down on some areas. There were some things that I needed to be more committed to.

Ryan: And for me, and again this, this sounds so cheap and it takes like really getting to know somebody in order to truly believe them. But one of, one of my like mantras is I am really [inaudible] in the pursuit of other people's success. And so when I'm able to help somebody become successful, it charges me up like nothing else. And so I needed to channel that into then the services that I was providing to other people because if I could not have an effect like that on people that I'm serving, I wasn't going to be fulfilled. So it was things like that of reflection then, you know, kind of like a reframing and then intention and execution on going out and getting it.

Nate: Hi guys, this is Nate. Some of our guests and I have put together a list of our favorite books, head over to our website at [illuminate HR, podcast.com](http://illuminateHR.com) to see what top thought leaders have on their nightstands as an added bonus. Each purchase helps to support the show. So I can continue putting out this content now. The rest of my discussion with Ryan. Yeah. And when you do turn that page and open up to doing what you feel that calling to do or what you feel your skills are set up to do or what you're passionate

about and you, you turn the page finally and make that step. Alright. That leap. It's a big relief, isn't it?

Ryan: Oh yeah. I mean, I think every single time that I've ever made any sort of, you know, measurable progress in my life. I mean it is just mind blowing. And I think about like all the way back to like my I had a challenging upbringing. Single mom, my parents divorced when I was six. And so I had a, you know, a weekend relationship with my dad, but in high school shortly after high school and my dad and I actually in high school, my dad and I had a significant relationship challenge, caused us to not talk for about 18 months. Again, when I was about 22 I had my relationship with my dad, absolutely fractured and it took 10 years for us to, to get back together. And now our relationship is better than ever. I was financially very successful early on in my career and, and my marriage and my marriage almost turned to divorce.

Ryan: And through that, those victories just did so much and we lost a house to short sale and the housing burst. And so learning through that. So there's just been so many times in my life that I've experienced just, you know, significant challenge, some deep, deep hurt and, and, and other people have, you know, probably experienced so much worse. And yet for me, it's, it's not, it's not those things happening because they happen to everybody. It's what we do with them. Like are we willing to put it all on the line to put ourselves out there, to be humble enough to take the, for whatever, put us in that situation to shake off whatever we didn't have control over and then push forward to make something of it right. Don't waste even the worst of opportunities to make something greater of yourself and the people around you.

Nate: So for many years I've been a big fan of storytellers and the craft involved and motivating people through our stories. It starts with my mother-in-law, windy Bolio who's an Olympian and one of the most impactful motivational speakers I have ever seen. I mean, she, she gets up there and talks about her experience and seeing the, the flag under the gold medal and the, the national anthem and crying and, and nobody leaves the room without some tears in their eyes or, or more. And it's just, I love the craft. I love watching people tell their stories in an impactful way. And then to your point, these people walk away and they do something or their lives are bettered in some way. So when you're coaching folks in, in your sort of coaching business and, and having these conversations about what impact they might have on the world, what advice do you give people around storytelling? I mean, everyone has a valuable story to tell.

Ryan: Yeah, that's a great question. So shortly after that route 91 tragedy and you know, once I kind of finally got my bearings together, actually it's probably about nine months I decided that I wanted to pursue, I had previously wanted to pursue a tedx opportunity or a tet opportunity. And so I thought this was a great way to do that kind of my experience. And long story short, after applying, which I had a good into to get a slot, the organizer responded back to me and he re very respectfully, very kindly, basically told me my words, not his inspiration by tragedy on the speaking circuit is dead. And that was hard for me to hear, right? Like, what do you mean? Like, this is important and this means a lot. And yet what I took from that, and so this is really answering your question, is you know, all of these external motivators that we're given, right?

Ryan: The, the, the, the speeches, the the books, the videos, me talking about my story right now. Like they have to insight action inside of the person that we're speaking to and it has to be done not in a way that emotionally charges them up but allows them to uncover the things inside of them that they have not yet been able to see. And so when I'm telling a story, when I'm telling my story and trying to relate that to other people, that is my entire goal. My entire goal is to allow people to uncover those things inside of themselves. When I coach people, no matter what people come to me with, they want to make millions of dollars. They want to be successful in starting a business. They want to prevent themselves from getting fired. They want a new job, whatever that may be. It's the same principle. I go right back to, we are going to dig so deep into who you are to get you not meet you. To understand that and through that you will be able to tell your own story in such a compelling way that the people that it's meant for will have no choice but to listen and love it.

Nate: Yeah, that's interesting. And you know, I think if I step back, some of the folks who listened to the podcast here might go like, Nate, what this, this whole conversation is really interesting. It's really impactful. What Ryan is doing is amazing. You know, I've seen keynotes and it's motivational, but what does this have to do with HR? And I would go back to an experience I had with Sean Levitt, who's now a head of total rewards for Comcast at the time. He was a head of benefits for Safeway where I worked and he brought in over a period of time some coaches for the entire employee benefits team on confidence, on public speaking, on presentation making. Like all of these things. It ties in and it's, it's, you may not be or have a desire as an HR person to give a keynote or to tell an intensely personal story, but what you're talking about is, is really, you know, it transcends any role in that you need to be able to tell stories in order to get people to take action. And even if it's simply, you know, we want to make a change to the health plan, you need to be able to tell a compelling story.

Ryan: Yeah. I mean, you know, like I've had a lot of interaction with HR folks from my time, you know, working for a benefits from to now. I spend probably 50% of my time in the healthcare space talking to HR folks about health insurance and effectiveness of their benefits and how to develop their employees. And the thing that I try and convey the most through all of those things which are so different, right? Health insurance versus like leadership development. And yet I tell them the same thing. You have got to get to a place where you hit these people in the heart. You've got to, you've got to speak to what they care about, what they love. And sometimes like we've all heard this, like sometimes that means that person's not right for your organization anymore and that's fine. And other times that means you're going to have to walk through the Valley of the shadow of death with them through a lot of their garbage to get them to where they want to go.

Ryan: As a matter of fact, I'm, I'm consulting in an organization right now where this is. So the case I've been there for about 14 months and I was hired in to help the sales team grow. And I shortly learned after starting that they had a very, very toxic culture and it started all the way at the top, at the ownership level and all the way through the organization. And there's one gentleman in particular that he loves the organization. He loves the customer. He just has a hard time letting go of the past hurt that people have hurt him

with there and the frustration that he just has outside of his life that cut that comes in. And so the common response when he gets a little too fired up or does something wrong from the executive ownership level is we've got to get rid of him.

Ryan: And My pushback all the time is you have such a valuable asset here. You just need to spend more time helping walk through that garbage with him, to get him to a place where he realizes he is one of your best assets and you are one of the best things that's ever happened to him. But if they're not willing to do that, then, then they're just going to be at this revolving door of people coming in and out and they're never going to build a great culture. Yeah. And when you think of the people on your team, individuals like that, or individuals who are already champions and doing wonderful things, it then, as you know, by default, HR serves the entire organization. It filters outwards. So those, those stories and that ability to sort of fix your own team, fix your individual self, and then watch that expand out to the stories you tell the organization about these decisions and why you're doing what you're doing.

Ryan: That's all people want. They want to be a part of the conversation and they want to hear the story around why is this corporation making this change to my benefits or whatever. When I, I just got done reading a biography on Elon Musk and I know that, you know, that that resonates with you. But you know, something that I appreciate in a story like that is, you know, it's very clear on what what kind of leader Elon Musk is. And he's very harsh. He's very critical. He's very to the point. And yet the same thing that people criticize him for and, and many employees have left and, or been fired over is the same reason why other employees absolutely love him. And so I think that as long as an organization is super duper clear without just trampling people, as long as they're super clear on who they are, what they're about and what they are seeking to accomplish, then that's all they have to do. And then they just need to make sure that they have the people on board that resonate with that in a way that's going to positively contribute to the organization.

Nate: Ryan, thank you for joining me today. I really appreciate the time and hope you have continued success on your mission.

Ryan: Thanks, Nate. I appreciate it so much.