

SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR



HOSTED BY ERIC TURNNESSEN, FOUNDER OF [membermouse™](#)

EP 146: How To Mindfully Work & Adapt In The Time Of Coronavirus with Chris Sage

INTRO:

You're listening to Chris Sage - my guest on today's episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Chris is a creative professional who works in the visual effects industry in Los Angeles. Yes... that means he's worked on Hollywood movies and television commercials you've probably seen. Chris is also a friend of mine who I first connected with over one of my main hobbies: tea.

In fact, the idea for this podcast episode came from a virtual tea session Chris and I recently did together. You see, now that we're all spending a lot more time in our homes due to the coronavirus, we're all coming up with creative ways to connect with our friends, families, and colleagues at a distance.

While Chris and I met for tea over Zoom, I got to hear a bit about what it's been like for him to transition from working in an office everyday - to doing everything remotely.

In this episode, Chris and I have a candid conversation about the challenges and the opportunities that remote work brings. We explore the pros and cons of how his work, relationships, communication, and project management style have changed.

So, I invite you to go grab yourself a cup of tea and join us in our exploration of these topics. If you're wondering how to adapt to life and business in the time of quarantine, this episode is for you.

As always, I'm your host Eric Turnnessen and this is Episode 146 of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Eric: Hey, Chris. Welcome to the show.

Chris: Hey, Eric. Nice to be here.

Eric: You and I know each other through tea actually. We've spent some time recently drinking tea together over Zoom conference.

Chris: Yeah, that was kind of fun. It's something we've been getting used to as we sort of hit this stride of what's new normal.

Eric: Exactly. This is actually something that we're going to be talking in depth about during this call. Actually, is something that came up while we were drinking tea because we were talking about the work that you do and how your work has been impacted based on the fact that everybody in your office has been sent home to work-from-home. Before we get into that in detail, can you just talk a little bit about your background and the kind of work that you do?

Chris: Yeah, sure. I'm a creative professional. I work in the visual effects industry, basically I work more in the commercial space. I had spent some time working on feature films as well, but that particular industry is one where you wouldn't normally consider it to be very work-from-home or mobile because of the particular hardware requirements. The type of work we do require a lot of processing power, a lot of distribution of processing power for network rendering. The kind of datasets we work with are quite large. We were never really a work-from-home model similar to anything like a company that works predominantly off laptops and mainly text-based. We're very different than that.

A lot of what we do is also very visual. That part of the process has been kind of interesting for me trying to figure out how do you work in this visual medium effectively where note-taking is more in sketch form or in commentary while reviewing something an image or a movie with someone. That's kind of where I'm coming from as far as the type of industry that I'm in and how this current circumstance affects me.

Eric: Prior to things happening, what was your kind of normal work situation like?

Chris: Our industry is pretty facilities' bound, so my workday usually consisted of going to an office which is going to be generally in most scenarios, most of the businesses in our realm operate in what I could best described as sort of an artist pit layout where you have producers that kind of manage the process and then a large work area with a variety of different people working on a variety of different tasks, but all related to the same project. It makes more sense for us to all work in physical proximity to one another. We have these big pits that we work in and teams form in and out of that space in different ways.

Sometimes they can be split across different parts of the facility. The space we talk about is usually fairly large, several thousand square feet of just pit area. In that context we are very much hands on approaching an artist, talking directly to them, face-to-face, reviewing what they have on their screen and that kind of thing. We do and have in the past, obviously when you're working in the commercial industry, you're going to have an end client to serve, which would be whoever's paying the bills for that particular commercial. That end client, you'll also have to either have them come into the building for reviews or manage those reviews remotely. It's the same concerns you've got something visual to discuss.

Sometimes that was mainly sort of sending videos back and forth and then they review them on their end and then provide a list of detailed notes. Over the years we've adopted different platforms that allow us to do collaborative markup on top of documents. Sometimes that's in the form of text. Sometimes we'll use something like a product called SyncSketch. SyncSketch

allows you to load any particular media into a player and each person can take control of that media clip and draw on top of it, provide notes, provide text dictation, general stuff that we would accomplish in our normal physical interactive space. We've in the past reserved to just how we collaborate with clients. We also occasionally work with vendors that are not in our facility or even in the United States in some cases.

We apply the same techniques to communicate with them and do reviews of work with them. Ultimately the end product, we're very much used to the final steps being a seat in the room type of thing where everybody's looking at things on one sort of screen that has color calibrated for the type of work that we're doing and there's an agreement that that's the final product. We're kind of also, while some of this territory we've mapped out over the years in various collaborative relationships, this new phase that's coming up is definitely going to be uncharted territory for most businesses doing what in our industry is called finishing, which is that very much like hands-on first person viewing of consistent image now has to happen remotely across multiple computers that all have different monitors and different color and all these kinds of things. It's going to be quite fun figuring out how this works out.

Eric: As you're kind of describing that situation, an impression that I get is just, there's a lot of maybe things that you're getting for free by being around each other. A lot of flow, a lot of just spontaneity that you probably now are realizing how those things were happening. Whereas before when you were just in the space together, you naturally do it, don't think about it, and now you recognize, "Oh, wait. We have to find ways to replicate that in a distributive way where we're remote."

Chris: Yeah, exactly. I think that's one of the challenges that most companies face is that human beings by nature, we're kind of designed to perform well in groups. That's something that we certainly take advantage of in our workflow or have been able to take advantage of in the past. Switching to full work-from-home has certainly been a lot of trial and error trying to figure out how we move everyone from this very traditional tactile conversational methodology to something that perhaps has a bit of delay built in. We try as much as we can to stay connected to each other because at the end of the day there are components outside of our strict success at the actual job at-hand that make for what we would consider our company.

Our culture, our sociability, the events that we have as a group, the things that we do together definitely helped to build that. In most creative industries, that becomes very important because you do sort of over time come to the realization that the quality of your work is only as good as your expansion of your world. The more you can interact with people and get different viewpoints on things and even if they're not work-related, it all comes back together. That's been a bit of a challenge for us, trying to figure out ways to replicate our company culture in a distant work situation or remote work situation.

Eric: That actually reminds me of, going back to us drinking tea. I feel like there's maybe some skills they you've learned in the process of drinking tea that'll be helpful in this situation because ultimately, we're talking about here with regards to kind of the benefits you get from

being in community with each other and working with each other and hanging out with each other. There's some sort of synergy that happens that then the relationships between people help to create a sense of belonging community, which then influences the work. It raises this, I feel beneficial introspection because then we start thinking about what is really at the heart of what we're getting out of being in community with each other. Is it really that we have to be in people's physical presence in order for this to happen or is there another way that we can accomplish that, given that we're forced to be a part like this?

Chris: Yeah. I think that's something that the world is going to have to really come to terms with, like what is the meaning of our civilized society and how do we participate in a way that is very different than what we're used to. Tea is a great example in that way that that's something we're very much in conversation with the people who are around us. Not just literal conversation, but almost metaphysical conversation, energetic conversation with people around us and trying to figure out how that translates in a meaningful way to the current circumstance. Hopefully this isn't as prolonged, but it is definitely going to have an impactful shift on how we view our relationships as a society.

I know that for me, my tendency is a bit more introverted by nature, so this is a bit more comfortable for me to be in a more introspective personal space on a regular basis. I'm also hyper where I have friends and family who really do best and thrive in a very connected sort of scenario and trying to figure out how to ... In the past he could have basically said, "I'm an introvert, you're an extrovert, we'll meet where we happen to intersect, but we won't push it beyond that." When you do have situations where now those two aren't naturally intersecting right now, you have to figure out a way to support each other and to maintain those relationships in this new format. Even if it is for a short period of time in the grand scheme of things, there's other reasons why it could potentially be game changer overall in terms of how we sort of understand our relationships and how we sit with each other. It's always something that you have to be mindful of when you approach your conversations now.

Eric: Yeah, and who knows. Sure, the situation may change and everything may be ready to go back to normal, but based on the length of time we do this and what strategies we come up with, we may choose to keep some of the things that we've learned going past when things are supposedly going back to normal.

Chris: Yeah. I think a lot of the things that there'll be some real value gained out of it. There are implications in terms of where we work and how we work that potentially could be impactful in the long-term. I know that the company I worked for, they have always had somewhat of an option on an occasional basis to work-from-home. They'd have provided that, but what it means for them in the long-term is that especially in a market like Los Angeles where cost of living is quite high, the cost of rent is quite high. Just the physical resources required to put a person in a seat to do work are quite expensive. Looking at this scenario where from a business perspective they could reduce overhead, reduce costs by having more people work-from-home.

Then from the personal perspective, how it impacts my life. Is it something where perhaps for me, the industry that I'm in tends to be very localized in certain very metropolitan areas because that's where the work is done. The film industry, everybody associates that with Los Angeles or the bare minimum major cities. Major cities are also more expensive to live in. Major cities also may not provide the lifestyle that I want or the lifestyle in which I thrive in. Personally, for me, the benefit, the silver lining to this cloud, if there is one to be had, is that by doing and fulfilling my role successfully during this time, I have an opportunity to prove that remote work not only is possible, but produces a great result.

That opens up a possibility for me personally of moving to wherever. I may want to live in Washington State, I may want to live in Vancouver, I may want to live in Taiwan or wherever, trying to find a place that is inspiring to me, as opposed to being sort of bound or limited to the particular location where the businesses.

Eric: Right. Again, that's your personality type. You may thrive like that and there are others who may actually want to be bound and they wouldn't actually call it bound. Right? Because that's terminology. I'm an introvert too, so I completely resonate with what you're saying, but maybe for an extrovert it feels expensive to be ... Like their travel interactions with different people is like traveling and living in different locations to them maybe. They experience their sense of fulfillment from that. Your position in the company, are you in a role of having to assess the challenges and come up with creative solutions for those challenges with regards to the remote situation at this point?

Chris: Yeah. I would say that in general, I'm part of what I would consider or what the company considers to be a leadership team. Our hierarchy is relatively flat compared to most companies. Obviously, we're in a creative space, our industry is in a sort of creative sector of the economy where hierarchies are a little bit more flexible than others. We're kind of at this point, which is really inspiring. In our case that they look at it as all hands on deck. There's nobody's ideas that are valued more so than another person. A lot of us are all contributing to actively in real time figure out how to resolve the issues that come up with this new way of working.

In general, there's definitely, I have a great opportunity in how I present this conversation at this time to sway the larger flow of the company I'm in. We've had offices in Los Angeles as well as New York for some time and so we've had this bi-coastal opportunity that maybe took hold a little bit here and there, wasn't always successful, but now we're all sort of pushed into that mode of being problem solvers and being actively involved in the decision making that's happening. I'm fortunate in that way. I know people that are working at other companies that are much larger in scope, international companies let's say with hundreds of thousands of employees. Their approach and their kind of going through a situation where they are also doing creative work, but they're forced to do it in a certain way. That way, it doesn't always work. Versus our situation where we're a bit more nimble somebody finds an idea that works, you can present it and the company will invest time in exploring it. kind of thing.

Eric: When it was early days in this and it was basically like very close to the time where the leadership decided, “Okay, we've got to send everybody home.” What were some of the first few challenges that were faced and that you actually found solutions for early on?

Chris: Our type of work like I mentioned before, is very much related to the hardware that we work on. One of the big question marks when we've decided to send everyone home is, how is all of this hardware going to hold up on Monday morning. So, there was a big unknown in that regard. We're talking about a relatively large-scale impact on our network infrastructure when you've got 150, 200 people all now pulling through the same pipeline in our internet connection, that was a big unknown. Fortunately, we already had some built-in redundancy because we do have a shared platform across multiple locations across the United States.

We had some redundancy in that network bandwidth, so we were able to sort of shuffle that around a bit. That's obviously a primary concern for most people is, what kind of data are we talking about? What kind of physical need are we talking about? The other one which was a little bit less tangible in some ways a larger unknown was how do we communicate effectively? Since we do often work with clients who are all over the world, we already had a number of teleconferencing or video conference solutions in place. We have done GoToMeeting and other virtual meeting platforms. Currently we're sort of stabilized on Zoom for our corporate communication and also our interaction with clients, so that was there. The ability to essentially hop on a call was something that we were able to scale up successfully.

In some ways that didn't have much to do with us. Just testament to the robustness of the platform itself. The other side of that is not just the actual ability to communicate is, how do we problem solve in the same way when we can't be near each other? How do you improve your communication skills? How are you going to have to finesse your language both written and spoken to be clearer in your communications because that's going to be crucial going forward. That's kind of the one area that's a bit more esoteric. We try to provide as much encouragement and coaching for each other in that regard, like encouraging people who may be very used to going over to someone's desk all the time, giving them techniques to really finesse their verbal communication in a way that it's more effective.

Those are some of the challenges that we didn't really know were going to be there because we've never had to sort of be confined to very limited interaction for our communications. We're obviously, I wouldn't say 100% resolved. We don't have all the answers. We haven't figured out everything at this point, but it's been a very interesting challenge for us. I think everybody to really sort of get back to this idea that our language and the words that we use do matter quite a bit and how that translates into effective work-related communication as well as in our personal lives.

Eric: Not only the language and the words we choose, but something that you touched on too is, when we choose to communicate, when is it appropriate? When is it about actually I need to communicate with somebody or is it maybe that I'm just procrastinating or maybe I can't sit with the fact that I don't have anything to do, etcetera? I know in offices there is obviously the

benefits of being around people. You can jump over to somebody and it can be an appropriate situation and you can really have this synergistic conversation where some great stuff comes out.

You also have the reverse of that where people are just mingling with each other and it's actually not productive and maybe it would be better if they weren't doing that at that time. It's this balance. I think that that's also a really important thing that's happening is, people have to consider more, is this the right time? Do I actually need to ask something? Do I actually need to communicate this and what is the most effective way that I can communicate it?

Chris: Yeah. It's kind of everybody's sort of getting a bit of a crash course in mindfulness in a way.

Eric: Exactly.

Chris: Really sort of being more considerate with the language that you use and the words that you use and the timing of those words especially when you look at, in the technology of it all, there are other sort of linear collaborative platforms something like Basecamp or Slack where you have these very long threads of communication. It's funny to see how much, when you have this open platform of something that is essentially linear and you're trying to get an idea across that needs to be communicated in segments and then you have people shooting their text in between you on each reply that you do, how that affects the communication.

Some of that is like this idea that you're talking to someone in real time. Them interjecting in that way is probably something that's recoverable fairly easily from a conversational perspective. When you're trying to relay a succinct set of ideas that need to kind of flow in a certain order and you have people sort of interjecting in that when it's just text is a whole other thing. So, part of it is like you said, it's learning when you need to speak and when you need to listen and being aware of the subtle difference of what that means.

Eric: And also recognizing there are some pitfalls with the tool and choosing the right tool for the right type of situation. For that type of situation may be, it may lead to thinking, "Okay, if I need to communicate something succinctly text-based, maybe Slack isn't the best tool to use because obviously people, yes, they can become more mindful. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong basically." The more that you can choose your tools to effectively support what you're trying to do, the better.

There's also another aspect of that as well because there are certain things that are better communicated through email. Certain things that are better communicated through sort of linear chat platform. Certain things are better communicated through video or audio conversation. The other aspect of all that is that right now, because a lot of this is going to be new for most people, one of the first things that you'll experience is communication overload. You'll hit a point where somebody is like, "I want to use Slack for this." The other person's, "I

think we should use Basecamp.” Then some people are communicating through text on your phone.

Some people are communicating through Zoom Chat, some people are communicating through Google Chat. Now, all of a sudden, the alert box on your screen and on your phone is just pinging like crazy and there's an impact of that as well. There's that additional level of trying to steer different types of conversations to different platforms that people can have a comfort level around and sort of standardize on those. That's been another side of that equation as well.

Eric: Where are you right now with this conundrum? Do you have any things you've implemented that have helped? Do you have any potential ideas for solutions?

Chris: For us, there are challenges that we still face that are particular to our industry, one of which is the visual nature of it and the larger datasets. We are working through some technology to be able to allow us to quickly migrate some of that data and information locally to our machines. Right now, basically everybody in our office is logging into the same machine they had at their workstation at the facility and controlling that machine remotely through VPN and remote desktop. In some cases, there's another platform called Teradici, which is another sort of distributed networkable workstation type scenario. That's the main way we're doing things.

As we run into those problems, we're seeing certain kinds of data are best viewed locally and so we're figuring out ways to work with that kind of data on a local machine, but also integrate it back into our larger scale system. Our industry is somewhat unique in that way. We have what we would call pipeline, which is quite complex and there's a lot of moving parts and it's very resilient as long as everything fits into the pipe. Once things start going out of the pipe, they get difficult to track and difficult to work with. That's one of the things that most companies are going to face is, if everybody's working from home and not working off the server let's say, how do you bring that information back into the fold so that everyone can access it?

Other things that we've been working towards is creating more or less an official set of policies and positions that are related to certain kinds of software. Like, what software we're using for our primary communication, what software we're using for our telecommunication. Those kinds of things have been pretty helpful, especially in the early days where everybody's like, “I want to use Twitch and I want to use this.” Then you have to kind of steer everybody back in a common direction because it's very clear early on you. We have directors that are part of the company, which is a bit nontraditional for this type of workflow.

As with any company where you have key individuals, they become incredibly busy and when you start exacerbating their already stressed timelines with a barrage of communication from all these different sources, things get lost quickly. We've had to adapt to that. One of the biggest things I think we've had to figure out how to do as a company is really an exercise in patience. How do we help each other become more patient with our workflow and with our

communication because things are not going to go the same way as we're used to for some time? How do you approach your communications with patients? For me, and one of the things I try to communicate to other people and how I deal with my colleagues is approaching it from the standpoint of we're all trying to do the best job we can.

If there is a communication bottleneck that becomes frustrating, it's not because the other person on the other side is trying to frustrate you. That goes back to some techniques of mindfulness and meditation, OF dealing with your ego and how much you can be stressed out or aggravated by something that is out of your control and something that is not actually happening. You're experiencing the frustration as a function of your mind, understanding frustration, but it's not really something that's there. It's how do you figure out how to move people in that direction where they don't become frustrated with each other too quickly and have patients to understand each other's situation.

We have some people who are zero risk individuals who are just doing the best they can in a space that they're not comfortable with because they need their social time. Then we have people who have friends and family who may be at risk and have those additional emotional stresses of both isolation and also concern for a loved one. We have people whose spouses or significant others have been let go of their jobs because of this situation. All of that impacts how we tend to deal with each other in our workspace. So, trying to find gentle ways to encourage people to just tap the brakes for a sec, let the information absorbed. If you've got to move to a different chat thread for a second just to reset, then do that.

Don't feel like everything needs to happen in real time, but do your best to understand what the other person's going through. It's particularly, in my case, I'm currently working with some vendors who are in Argentina and their situation is quite different. They were very much unprepared for a work-from-home scenario. They are struggling to figure out and still struggling how to maintain their efficiency level and maintain their output. They miss deadlines, they miss milestones. Part of my natural instinct is to go, "Why is this happening? I need to be stern with you." Versus trying to be a little bit more understanding that they're struggling with their own concerns. This is a difficult time for everybody.

How do I modulate my response in a way that ultimately is going to result in more successful communication because no one communicates well when they feel like they're being attacked or they feel like they are being scrutinized or they feel like they're being under severe criticism? Some of that stuff is not really solvable by technology and so we're kind of working through ways to deal with that as we go.

Eric: I love that that's happening. It's a beautiful thing because it's basically bringing humanity back into work-life where we spend a lot of our time. I remember, I lived in LA for four years and I was a consultant. I worked at Sony Pictures. I remember I sat close to one of the head executive's office and she's a woman. She was pregnant and she was going to give birth. In the sense that I got, she was basically the way that she was communicating to her team was like,

“Hey, I’m just going to go have this baby. I’ll be right back.” Kind of like that. It’s like, “I’ll just go take care of this little minor thing, but I’ll be right back to work.”

It really struck me as this off-balance thing and I could appreciate her position. I felt like she was fully in it. She didn’t have any conundrum about it because she was just so steeped and connected to her work. But it’s like there isn’t really a lot of room in our corporate environments for, hey, people need time for themselves. They need personal time because we’re always about deadlines. We have very strict things that come down from hierarchies. It starts with the client, we promise something. The managers and the executives have timelines and then that it gets impressed upon the workers. There’s really no allowance for any wiggle room, especially in the entertainment industry. I love that this situation is kind of like putting that focus on like, “Look, we are humans. We’re not machines.” And allowing for it. Yeah, the deadlines may slip, we’ll do our best, but they might slip. I’m really encouraged that people are having to face this and work through it.

Chris: Right. There’s definitely an opportunity for a lot of growth as a result, both professionally and personally. I think the more people engage in this sort of new normal, the more I think we’ll have opportunities to grow as a society, even if it’s just learning how to be a bit more understanding and communicate better with each other.

Eric: I imagine with you, because you have had practice, you have a mindfulness practice, you drink tea, that’s a meditative practice. I wonder from your perspective, drawing on that particular part of your experience, how is that assisting you? How are you dealing with the stresses that come up for you personally? When people come to you; friends, family, coworkers who are dealing with situations where they may not be as well equipped, how are you handling those interactions?

Chris: Well, each one is unique and I think that the biggest part of it is trying to be patient. I know that in addition to the issues related to trying to work-from-home or trying to figure out how to be successful at working from home, a lot of us are ... I’m married and now finding myself in a position where I share my workspace with my wife because she’s always worked from home and worked remote. A lot of people are facing a similar challenge, whether it’s a wife, a girlfriend, significant other, children. That impacts quite a bit when you’re home with your kids all day. It’s a totally different dynamic when you as their parent are seen as 100% accessible, trying to figure out how to sort of be as patient as you can with the various scenarios.

I think that’s one thing that I’ve learned from my practice with tea and my other meditation practices. I’ve never been a real serious sort of the personer goer commitment to meditation. It’s more as it comes. Tea is really been my form of meditation for some time. I think the one thing that I’ve picked up from that practice that I apply to most things in my life is having patience for what comes. By nature, I’ve always been a perfectionist because I work in visual arts and I consider myself to be a creative worker. My persona, my life persona, my work persona has very much been defined by this very demanding sense of quality.

What do I demand of myself? What do I present to others? Is it good enough quality to present others? I think one of the things that I've learned through my tea practice is a bit of softening in that regard and learning how we all come to this moment as we are. My interpretation of what meets a certain standard for perfection is not necessarily a universal one. There's a beauty in coming to terms with this perfection doesn't or this level of perfection doesn't conform with my expectations. Trying to figure out and learning from that experience of not having your expectations met, but still looking for the beauty in that experience is one I think has been really important for me.

My wife also brews tea as well. Over the years I've met many people who brewed tea and make tea and all of them as a practice, there's no one way to do it. I think the big point of the practice is your meeting, the experience at the moment that it's being presented. You're there for that moment, not for what you think that moment should be or what that outcome should be, but you're there to experience that. Once you let go of those expectations and those other things, that is mental constructs of how something should go, you open yourself to a whole realm of subtleties, of finesse, of refinement that you didn't even know existed because you are applying a filter on top of it. I think for me, that's what I bring to my work life the most is that constant effort to try and look at things objectively and to not constantly be inserting my sense of perfection. Now, at the end of the day in my industry, there is a final say as to what is correct. That's just how the workflow happens.

There is one person or group of people who are determinant as to whether this looks good or it doesn't. It's also for me a practice of accepting that outcome and accepting the idea that these people, they have their own ideas of what this should look like and my role here is to be of service. It's to help them achieve that goal. It's not to be bent out of shape because what they want doesn't match what I thought it should be.

Eric: Right. Those two things are also present in the tea practice. It is-

Chris: Absolutely.

Eric: ...just about acceptance, but also there is a range of a great way to brew tea in terms of how it tastes and it is about service. That's one of the beautiful things about the whole practice, is that all of those are present and in kind of a somewhat controlled environment where you can do it.

Chris: Yeah. One of the beautiful things in my personal journey being a tea person is how much I've been pleasantly surprised when going to sit down with someone to drink tea and they're using like the wrong kind of water or they're using this type of vessel to make the tea. My expectations aren't that high. Then being absolutely flawed by the result, both energetically as well as from a connoisseur's perspective with things like taste and aroma and those kinds of experiences. That's been the most important takeaway, is I've had the most amazing tea

brewed in the finest tea wear that you can imagine from Ming Dynasty, Song Dynasty, all this beautiful antiques.

Then I've also had tea brewed in a glass cup, which was equally amazing. It's a testament to how much these overall expectations make up a filter through which we view the world. If we can soften those a bit and be comfortable with things that don't meet our expectations, we really have an opportunity to experiencing something wonderful.

Eric: Yeah. I think for me one of the biggest lessons I've learned is having the expectations actually is the same as a lack of presence. You expect to repeat something you've already experienced before and therefore your mind is naturally looking for it. If what's happening, does it match what you're looking for, then you kind of close down in a way to what's actually happening. I think from experiencing tea, one thing that's readily available to experience is that like you said, "You could be drinking certain certainties from the most beautiful vessels or you could be drinking tea out of Styrofoam cups." You can have the experience that wow, like no matter which one, there's a potent aspect to this experience, which then allows some internal conditioning to relax.

Where in that conditioning is that idea of perfection where, "Oh, I need to in some way control my environment in order to feel the thing that I'm wanting to feel." You come to more of a place where, "Oh, I just seem to be present and surrender and the experience will happen on its own. It's not something for me to control." That internal relaxing, that acceptance of what is then helps us to be people that can accept where everybody else is at and not be critical of them. Then when we're not critical of other people, we give space to allow things to happen naturally.

Chris: I think that that space is really important. I can't really count the number of times where I've been in a situation where I've had a certain expectation. I've tried to force that expectation on something only to be disappointed myself with the outcome. I also have had many, many times in my life where by getting out of the way of that expectation, something that I was convinced would never work, turned out to work beautifully and ended up being a better result than if we would have gone down my path. I think it's one of those things where by releasing some of that control over the situation, you open yourself up to a wider array of possibilities.

Whereas if you approach everything from the standpoint of, "I see the road ahead and this is the turn we want to take and this is how we want to go and how fast we want to get there," you may be closing yourself off to avenues that could have gotten you there faster or taken you there in a more elegant way or produced a more beautiful result. I think adopting that mindset in your work allows you to treat the people you work with, with more agency. What I found over the years is that people who feel like they have a real creative vested interest in the outcome, will perform way better than people who are just doing what you're telling them to do.

It's important to ... As a leader of a team, obviously I have to be mindful of the direction that the client wants, the timeframe we have to do something, whether we can explore alternatives within that framework successfully, and I do have to impose some overall sort of controls on the process. I always find I get better results when the people who I'm leading feel that they have the freedom to create and that freedom is a direct result of the letting go of expectations as to how something should happen.

Eric: How do you bring that level of fluidity to say a briefing with your team, you have a project, you are going to explain to them what you need from them? What are some techniques that you're using in terms of the words you use and how you communicate what you want to get out of them?

Chris: I think from my perspective, one of the most important things is starting with a clear framework. What's the objective? What are the timelines? What are the milestones within that timeline? Those are the kinds of basics that I feel having that in place to begin with gives you more flexibility to operate on top of. I've always been a person that felt that by having some structure in place that sort of takes away certain aspects of what do I have to call this thing? What do I have to name this thing? Where do I have to put it? Creating a framework like that as a base layer allows you to function more fluidly on top of that.

I think that for me, is step one really sitting down and presenting the expectations and the milestones. The other part of it is trying to maintain fluidity. One of the challenges we face often is I work in an industry where there are a myriad of different artists who have different skillsets and different aesthetics. Given that there's millions of different options there, the likelihood of you finding someone who may not be a perfect fit is high, it happens. It's no fault of theirs. It's just they're of a different skill set, a different level in their career or perhaps a different aesthetic to achieve what you want them to do. By having a base framework, you have the ability to sort of shift things around and move things.

The constant evaluation of where things are even before hitting milestones is really important. Again, it's never a situation where you're trying to impose a particular outcome outside of that macro level stuff of you know when it delivers and you know what the end aesthetic should be to a degree. It's also trying to interpret an aesthetic that's not necessarily coming from yourself. There's an end goal there that is sometimes even for the person who you're producing it from might be somewhat of an enigma. It's sort of finding ways to figure out how to flesh out what that look is with them as quickly as possible.

A lot of it is steering the workflow into ways that you get the maximum number of iterations because quick iterations really tend to be the way that we get to our established aesthetic quicker. That kind of flexibility is really where I think for me that's how I try to look at projects, how do I get enough examples in front of the right people to make the right choices? Then after that it has to do with managing how this all comes together in the different components, especially when you have companies that are in other countries. In my case, I'm fortunate

enough to work for a enterprise. It's large enough to have additional resources technically that I can draw upon.

If somebody really feels like they need to use this piece of software to do this particular type of creative work because they are really good at that and not the one that we have, I can figure out a way to make that happen. Or if someone is providing us data that is in a certain format, I can lean on my pipeline department to integrate that into our workflow. In that sense I'm pretty fortunate, but I think in general it comes back to this idea of having a very clear framework for people to work on top of and then also allowing yourself the flexibility to sort of navigate the curve balls as they come.

Eric: Since you're in the unique position where you're also working with communication internally, but I imagine you're also dealing with clients and I think that this might also be a common thing that people are experiencing, especially in the entertainment industry is, I don't know how much production work you do, but do you do post production of course. A lot of production isn't happening right now in LA just because everything's shut down. How do you deal with managing client expectations and communication in the events where either your timelines are going to be because of circumstances extremely altered or maybe even can't complete it because you don't have the material coming in that you need to work with?

Chris: Right. Psyop is the company that I worked for and they have both production and post-production, so we are full spectrum service. We do have that production component, which has completely shut down at this point. There were projects that we had that ultimately had to get canceled because they were too much live action to really shift gears. We've had other projects that were already booked that shift gears to being fully post-production oriented, whether that's motion graphics or whether that's full character animation, other types of animation, that kind of thing.

What we've also seen, which is definitely one of those silver lining things is we've seen brands that normally would be operating solely in the production space or live action space calling us and asking us how can we achieve the same thing with animated characters. On the one hand we've lost a bit of business and that business will hopefully pick up providing the companies that are commissioning these commercials are still in business, hopefully. We've had some that just the company's no longer in a position to be doing this type of work, but we've also been fortunate to have some additional windfalls in other areas.

It's been a challenge, but a lot of companies are shifting at least for the foreseeable future to providing some content as fully post-production-oriented content. It's interesting to get into some of those workflows. I haven't started any of those projects just yet, but I have one coming up where we're going to have a client who is definitely very comfortable in the live action, traditional production world that we're now going to have to transition them as elegantly as possible to dealing with things that take longer for some things and take less time for others.

Eric: And also require more imagination, right?

Chris: Exactly.

Eric: Because you're going to have to show them drafts. "Really this does look like anything that I want." You're like, "Well, it's a draft. We need to wire frame it first."

Chris: That's been the case for some time now. We've been around for quite a while and so dealing with clients and trying to navigate expectations. I've dealt with clients that have never done post-production before and I've dealt with clients with all they've ever done is post-production. There's a big disparity between the two and you kind of try and flag it early on as much as possible. Sometimes you need to invest a little bit more on the front end with a bit more on the design side. Having people who can really beautifully sketch out ideas so that people can grasp them as opposed to showing them stick figure presentations, things like that. Some clients don't understand wire frames and that's just the way it is.

You have to find ways to guide them through this path because it's an unknown for them. They're not comfortable. The opportunity there is you're helping someone achieve something, you can be of service to that vision if you adopt a strategy of maybe needing to provide them with a little bit more guidance than you normally would. The upside is, is that once clients go this particular route, there's always an initial upfront cost in terms of building assets, building out an infrastructure and a platform to present the material. The next time they need it, they don't have to pay for that over again. You know what I mean? It's like if you're working in a traditional live action production, you build a set for one production.

Usually when that production is over, that set's torn down. Next time you do a production, you probably have to rebuild that set or a similar set over again from scratch. That's just the way it goes and it's an accepted part of the process. Whereas our process is a little different. We can keep these assets around because they're digital. We keep our sets, we keep our characters, we don't have to worry about actor availability, any of those things. The opportunity there is that by these circumstances pushing some of these projects to be more fully post-production oriented or innovation oriented, there's opportunity for them to, if they're successful, to look at this in the future and go, "Oh, this is easier and quicker or less expensive path to get the same result."

It's actually quite fun. We enjoy this, we enjoy doing these kinds of projects. In our profession, I think the big part of it is, is we're in kind of the making people happy business. We want to make sure what we provide makes the clients happy, but as an animation focused company we also are producing content that is shared a lot on YouTube and social media platforms. Ultimately, it's like is what we're doing making people happy as well out in the public? It's a lot of that making people happy business.

Eric: Also, something I'm hearing underlying everything you're saying that I think is a generally important lesson for people at this time is, take a time to listen and also be willing to change direction. Maybe you've been doing something in your company that's one thing and you're

hearing, "Oh, there's all this opportunity in this space." Well, now's the time to be nimble. Now's the time to pivot if you can. Listen to those new opportunities because like essentially in your situation what was coming up to mind, I have a couple of friends who are voice actors and I'm like, "Wow, this must be an actually a great time for them because all these switches happening."

Not to mention, I also thought about theatrical releases. I've been seeing ads on Amazon basically like movies from Disney and other studios that may have been slated for theatrical release. Now, they're finding, "Okay, how do we do our releases and profit from them in a digital way without relying on people coming to the box office?" This time is all about how do we adapt? How do we adjust?

Chris: Yeah. I think that's, if there is any lesson that I think applies to the populace urge it's how do you build your resilience? How do you build your ability to maneuver and adapt to changing circumstances? I think a lot of this had been very comfortable in the status quo and businesses are no exception. It's all about maintaining that flexibility and an open mind to what the future presents.

Eric: Ultimately, I think that as business owners we have a certain responsibility here to do that because your company's ability to make those switches means that you, for the people who have lost their jobs, maybe you're opening up new jobs, which then those people are making money. It's putting the money back into the economy. You're hiring more animators, you're hiring voice actors. Where jobs may have been lost, now they're gained. Now, the more that the economy is stimulated, now those people can then maybe find ways to distribute that money to others. I think as business owners we have a certain role to play where we're having resources come to us. How do we get that distributed back into the economy through the people that we hire and therefore from them to the close to home resources that they're supporting?

Chris: Another part of the equation is, how do we as a company navigate some of those more delicate issues where there are positions that are obsolete at the moment? How do we continue to support those people and encourage them or help them make transitions into other areas where they can continue to be a value even though their particular business segment may not be functioning at the moment? I think a lot of people are struggling with that right now. I feel pretty fortunate that I work for a company that has a general commitment to trying as many options as possible before letting people go. To say that we're all roses and honey from this experience is not correct. I think as a business there's struggling as well trying to figure out how to offset the lost work. Is the new work going to come in quick enough and is it something that we can execute on a timeline that the client wants?

It's still a bit of unknowns, but working for business and trying to support businesses that really have a commitment to helping people through this transition as best they can. It's interesting in the context of what the future holds for civilized society with various forms of automation and those kinds of things continuing to advance. What does work look like in 25 years? We're kind

of getting a preview of some of that stuff now. You're starting to see, well these were essential things and now they're no longer essential. What do we do with our members of our society that are kind of the collateral of this? How do we help them?

Eric: The question is, it's just as much a question for us as it is for them. It's more of a vision that we're connected. I forget where I heard this, but somebody used the metaphor of, you live in an apartment building and somebody's apartment is burning on the first floor and you live on the 12th floor. Well, you could say, "Oh well it's not my apartment." Really if there is burns down your neck, it's only a matter of time. I think that there's a really big sense of understanding here like, yeah, you may not be affected or you may be affected to one degree or more or less than somebody else. But if a large portion of people in our society are not able to live fulfilling lives, ultimately that bubbles up. I think that part of what this is highlighting is just this more community mindedness and not egocentricity or I-ness, focus on the I and what's good for me. The resources are there.

There's enough for resources for everybody, but the thing is there's a lot of stagnant pools of resources with people who are hoarding and who had been hoarding even before this, in one form or another that they're content to do. Technically at a deeper level, they're really not content, which is why they're hoarding, but that's another conversation. It's more about how still waters in the jungle is what develops disease. The same with resources from my perspective. If you're holding resources and it's not flowing, it's going to develop some sort of energetic stagnation that will affect your life.

Chris: Right. The fallout from this could go many ways and I think one of the things that we'll see as a result of that is a more deeper understanding of what it means to be a member of the society. Even if it comes down to just the act of, I don't necessarily want to be confined to my house. I don't want to be in this situation, but I'm doing it not because I'm necessarily concerned for my own health. I'm concerned for the health of the people that I don't even know. There is the tremendous potential for that to filter out as a general way of being.

Hopefully it does in a deeper sense that these people are or have been historically more concerned about their own wellbeing and amassing wealth for themselves start to really see, "Okay, this doesn't make sense because it doesn't matter how much I have or how much I want to get, if all these other people who over the years have been oppressing or not necessarily oppressing, but considering as an essential, I see what happens when they all of a sudden disappear. I see what happens to my empire once people stopped buying things."

Eric: I don't even think that a lot of these people are intentionally doing it. I just think that part of the challenge in our world is lack of visibility. Things are so distributed. We order food, we get things delivered. We hadn't considered the delivery man. We're considering the delivery man now. Just so much of our world just is automated in a sense. Even though it's automated with humans, we don't have that connection of a true appreciation, how things actually arrive that we need, where the food comes from, who's growing that food, how did it get to the store, who's working at the store, all these things.

Chris: Yeah. It brings things into sharp perspective. I think at the end of the day, we'll hopefully be able to look back on this time and learn as much as we can from the experience and take what we can and move forward in a more charitable way, in a way that really is patient with each other and a little bit softer. The outcome we don't know yet, but whatever that outcome is, I think if we learn from it, those lessons will come out as a better society afterwards.

Eric: Yeah, I completely agree with you. Speaking for myself, I'm not going back. When all this is "over" I'm not returning to the way things were before in a full sentence. I'm all for the positive things that are happening in this scenario and I fully intend that I want to keep learning these lessons and keeping mindful, increased connectivity, individual relationships, local community support, stuff like that

Chris: For myself, I think the opportunity of really taking a moment to consider what my quality of life is, how that relates to work, how that relates to my location in the world, whether there's a place that is more inspiring for me. I think if I do my job right, then I'm only opening up those opportunities for myself in the future.

Eric: Cool. Well, this has been a great conversation with you. I really appreciate you taking the time to sit down and talk about these things.

Chris: Yeah, it was a lot of fun.

Eric: Do you have a personal website or someplace that you would be open to having people learn more about you, if they wanted to?

Chris: You're more than welcome to give out the Instagram feed because that's kind of like collaborative between Mikki and I. That's more or less what we would go by.

Eric: And what's the Instagram feed?

Chris: @SageLove on Instagram.

Eric: Cool. Yeah. If people are interested in learning more about Chris specifically in terms of some of this stuff we've talked about with tea and mindfulness, that's the kind of stuff that goes on on Sage Love. I think often you refer people to different tea sources and different things in the tea world and just generally good stuff. Yeah, people can follow you there. Well, again, thank you so much, Chris.

Chris: Thank you, Eric.

OUTRO:

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to Chris from coming on the show and getting real about how the coronavirus has impacted his life and work.

I hope you enjoyed and benefited from our conversation.

To see the show notes and get a downloadable transcript of today's episode, head on over to SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/146.

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Thanks for being here and we'll see you next time!