

[00:00:05.370] - Wynne Leon

Welcome to the Sharing the Heart of the Matter podcast where we celebrate the why and how of creativity. I'm Wynne Leon, and in this episode, Vicki Atkinson and I are talking with our colleague, writer and corporate communication leader, Brian Hannon. In this episode, Brian shares with us what sparks creativity and impetus to write. We talk about paradoxes and George Garlin. Brian tells us the secret about his productivity to write, both personally and professionally. And because it's always informative to find out how others do it all, we talk about balance. This is a great episode with a fantastic writer and friend. Brian always brings such warmth and inspiration to our conversations and truly has a creative heart. We know you'll love it.

[00:01:13.650] - Vicki Atkinson

Hi, Brian. Hi Wynne. Hey there.

[00:01:17.360] - Brian Hannon

How are you?

[00:01:19.050] - Vicki Atkinson

I think we're good. We're happy to podcast with you again, Mr. Hannon. Thanks for joining us.

[00:01:25.770] - Brian Hannon

I'm excited.

[00:01:27.370] - Vicki Atkinson

Well, this one, this particular episode kind of came together in a blink because you and Wynn both wrote some beautiful pieces recently that just felt so complimentary. And we find this happens sometimes amongst writers where things just sort of ebb and flow and find their way together without any intention. And when, I'll blame you or give you credit, I'm not sure for the inspiration, but you wrote something recently, and I'm going to read a little bit of it because it's such a good, I think, entree into talking about maintaining creativity and chatting with both you and Brian today. But you wrote recently when it requires a spark to convert it to something, creativity, something other than Deadwood that we're carrying around. The spark can come from something like writing, introspection, or meditation. It can come from people around us or circumstances can set us off. But one way or another, something is likely to light us up in good ways or in bad. So I love that this idea of lighting us up in good ways and in bad. So, Wyn, is there anything that you want to say about that?

[00:02:46.420] - Wynne Leon

Well, I love that you read that, and it's so fun to hear somebody else's reaction to what we write. I mean, I think talk about lighting us up. Isn't that wonderful when we can write something that resonates with somebody else?

[00:03:05.930] - Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, it definitely did. And I think that idea of writing for cathartic purposes, to kind of get our ideas and our thoughts together, is one thing.

[00:03:17.410] - Wynne Leon

But you're right.

[00:03:17.950] - Vicki Atkinson

When other people read what we've written and connect to it, and then for me, as a reader of what you've done recently and then what Brian's done, it's just such a beautiful thing. To continue extending those circles and all of that kind of reverberating thought. And so, Brian, you wrote a piece recently about hitting a major milestone as a writer, and Wynn and I are always just enthralled with your productivity. You have now published, and since you wrote that piece, I'm not sure you'll have to tell us how many more times you've posted heartfelt content in your blog. But at the time that you had written it, it was 1100 times, which is an astounding number. And so we're curious for our listeners, can you talk, Brian, about the inspiration behind all of that? What keeps you humming along and writing and what you've learned? And also, if you have thoughts about what Wynn wrote, those sparks

that come from the inside out, the outside in, where does inspiration come from? So tell us everything, Brian.

[00:04:29.590] - Brian Hannon

Well, I love what you wrote when, because I think it shows why, it's a perfect example of why you guys are such great people to talk about creativity, because I do describe it or I do view it, my productivity or my writing to be a spark. And it comes from all over. But it's that introspection, that meditation. It's basically a spark that keeps lighting, that lights the way or lights the path. Because I think what often happens for me is I'll be in my day, I'll see something. I'm constantly looking for ideas. And that's the lesson to answer your first part of your question, Vicki, for me, there's things all around us. There are ideas all around us. And the question for me is what hits me or what interests me, that I have something to say and that I have a story or I have something in the back of cobwebs of my mind that I can write about, that I'm touched to speak to and thinking about it throughout my day, I'm constantly thinking about stuff that I might want to write about or that I find amusing and starting to think about how I'm going to make that connection, how I'm going to put it out there in front of others, how I'm going to sort of continue to get from point A to point B.

[00:06:19.440] - Brian Hannon

What are the stories that I'm going to tell in that piece? Why I think people should care or listen to what I have to say. And I think it's that creativity that I've often heard people talk about, whether you're born creative or you learn it, I just think it's something that you naturally come to when you're in this type of pursuit that comes over time, whether it's a creative spark or, okay, I need to fill that hole for tomorrow. To me, it's that constant journey and getting there from point A to point B. Does that make sense?

[00:07:05.190] - Wynne Leon

It does. And I love what you've said about sort of absorbing your environment. And maybe more than being creative, what you've sort of pointed out there is sort of that powers of observation and how we're tuned. We are in. We are. Vicki and I were just talking to Jack Canfora, who's a playwright and author, great writer, and he was telling us a story about the Beatles always come up in a Jack story episode, but he was talking about John and Paul writing Eleanor Rigby, and they were trying to come up with the name of the title character. They were going around and around, and it turns. It landed on Eleanor Ridby, and it turns out that they had been hanging out in a graveyard, where that was one of the tombstones, but they didn't really attach and note that it just was part of something that they saw. And the way that Jack put it was, it's hard to teach, but important to learn.

[00:08:15.070] - Brian Hannon

Interesting, that absorption. I find that I'm fascinated by that. And you're right, I do think it's noticing stuff around us. When I'm really creative nonfiction, I find that I'm noticing things around me. I wrote a few pieces a couple of weeks ago about my time in the airport, and it was one of those things where so much was happening around me that I just started to jot down a few things. I didn't know how I was going to use them. I didn't know what piece I was going to write. I found it fascinating. And it was just events, people, again, I think people who are creative tend to notice a little more than others. And I was noticing the people next to me, what they were wearing, what they were dressed like, their conversations. And, yeah, I didn't know how that would show up, but I knew that I was going to more than likely find a way to incorporate them into something, whether it was a fictional piece I was working on or a blog. And I'm fascinated by that, that they saw the name, and it came back later to them. To me, that's absurd.

[00:09:54.410] - Brian Hannon

That's amazing.

[00:09:56.670] - Vicki Atkinson

And I think it speaks volumes about, from, like, a psychological point of view, everything that we don't know about awareness, the things that we think we integrate as we move through our day, and the things that are still there, but they're untapped. They're not part of our sort of, like, conscious experience. And I think sometimes when we sit down to write, when we're in flow and things are just

kind of coming, I think there is this opening up where details kind of rush in, and it's the stuff that you may have forgotten about the scene at the airport and being able to kind of, in a sensory way, kind of put yourself back in the moment. And it's the sounds and the smells and the people and the dialog. And I think writers have this way of kind of immersing themselves in the moments, whether you were really aware of all of it at the time or not. And it's all that rich detail that you and Wynn both offer all the time when you write, it comes across.

[00:11:03.970] - Brian Hannon

I'm joking, but I think one of the things that has helped me be creative, I'm a little bit of a pack rat. And one of the things about going back, we were cleaning up our basement recently. One of the things that helped with a couple of pieces recently was going back and looking at some things that I had saved over the years. Some old newspaper clippings, a yearbook, and what else? An old photo album. And instantly being able to put myself back into what was I thinking? What was going through my mind, and how does that relate to now? And I find that fascinating. Making those connections.

[00:11:52.390] - Vicki Atkinson

Yeah, love that. And I can't imagine you being a pack grad. We'll just say they're boxes of future inspiration. We'll say that.

[00:12:03.720] - Wynne Leon

Right.

[00:12:06.490] - Brian Hannon

I need an organizer to come in and help me. Yes, you can throw that away. You're not going to need that.

[00:12:13.610] - Vicki Atkinson

Hard. That would be so hard. Well, we wanted to ask you also about kind of a favorite of mine. And this maybe speaks to the time and place when I was growing know, everyone knew about George Carlin, the comedian and all of his. I never get it right. He said lots of naughty words and was really famously funny. But you really had our attention recently, Brian, when you wrote about George Carlin and this idea of paradoxes. And I don't want to say more than that, but can you tell us that story about inspiration and what was behind all of that? Yeah, no swear words. So keep it clean. Keep it clean.

[00:12:54.790] - Brian Hannon

If only I was as funny as George Carlin, then we'd really have something. No, that piece, part of it was what was in the news. Some of it was political, some of it was religious. But I'd been thinking a lot about Paradox, about the abstract concepts like paradox being hypocritical. And I was thinking about for a while and I knew I wanted to write something, but I wasn't sure what I wanted to write about. And where it really came from was I had a boss a few years ago who said often that true leadership was about being able to hold two different ideas, two contradictory ideas at the same time. A paradox. His example was, we would offer great service, but we're going to make mistakes, we're going to be human. And I was always fascinated by that because to me that got into great leadership, it got into servant leadership, it got into really being someone that really cared for his crew, cared for his team. So I knew that I want to write something about that mixed and know with that, just my own experiences. I feel like the more that I've learned in my life, the less I really know.

[00:14:30.060] - Brian Hannon

And I think that's why I'm such a growth mindset, because it just reminds me of how little I actually know. But that's where that piece came from. It was just one of those things where I think abstract concepts, the more that we can hit on them and make them concrete and tell stories from our lives, I think there's a lot of good, juicy stories there, and I think that allows us to go in areas that we might never have thought were possible.

[00:15:08.080] - Wynne Leon

Right. And we can hold that tension. I mean, your story about the tension between two different ideas, that is incredible to play with. It's interesting, it's a hook, it's engaging, captivating. There's some

energy of its own when it.

[00:15:32.490] - Brian Hannon

For me, the thing that hit me with that piece was, or with that type of piece is I could write that till I'm blue in the face and it could be boring, but you mix it, or it could be very academic, I guess, is a better way of phrasing it. But if you mix that with personal story and you mix that with things from your life, I think it changes the whole scope and turns it into something else. My thing to you, I'm glad that piece touched you guys, but for me, I think there's so much there I still need to dig into to turn that into something, because I think I didn't really go very deep with me, how I relate to it. And I still think there's opportunity there to go back and do that. To me, that's what creativity is all about. There's the opportunity to continue to dig and take it a step further.

[00:16:30.310] - Wynne Leon

And that's such a great lead into sort of the next question that we were thinking, which is you write professionally and then you also write personally and talked about that as it's opening a vein, it's a lot of work. It's a lot of work to dig deep. It's a lot to work to deeper. So why can you do that personally after you've done it all day professionally?

[00:17:07.130] - Brian Hannon

It is a good question. I think it's actually a different part of the brain because I am fascinated with that. That how do I go from being in a writing somewhat or corporate communications corporate project role to coming home and being a writer? I think part of it is it goes back to really why I started the blog. I mean, one of the reasons why I started to write personally was, as you would expect in the corporate world, I had reviewers, I had business leaders who had to take a look at what I was writing or how I was positioning things. And oftentimes it took away from the creativity it needed to be, sometimes for legitimate reasons, it needed to be much more corporate or what have you. But I started to get frustrated. I started to get not being able to phrase things in a certain way, or not being able to be very creative. So to me, my solution was going home and starting to open a vein. And I want to talk more about that. But I will say I think writing at home has made my work work at work much more, has taken it to a different element.

[00:18:39.590] - Brian Hannon

I think it's made me a better writer, it's made me care even more. But I will say about opening the vein, it's hard work. Creativity is very hard now. It's enjoyable. When I post something that I feel good about, I'm on cloud nine, I'm feeling good. I'm proud of myself. I definitely share it with others. I think when I talk about opening a vein, to me it's getting very personal. It's being very opening up a part of myself that I might not, in normal everyday life, share with someone, it's being very vulnerable. I feel like in some ways, the friends that I've made in WordPress are probably tighter, better friends than some of the people I know in real life because they've seen me works and know they've gotten the true Brian in many respects. Now, again, I still worry at times about all the information security stuff like that with WordPress. But my writing from who I am is very honest, or at least I try to be. And to me, that's what opening a vein means. It's a constant struggle in terms of sometimes I worry, like, I wrote my piece today, in fact, on sharing the heart of the matter about listening to my wife.

[00:20:28.690] - Brian Hannon

The solution came very quickly. And I worry sometimes about, oh, that came too easy. Am I putting myself in a positive light too much so. There are things like that that I worry about. But from a vein standpoint, personal expression, I would be in a different spot personally, I think, if I didn't have the blog. And I'm joking, but semi serious, like meeting a psychiatrist or something, because it has allowed me to open up a part of myself. Does that make sense?

[00:21:09.030] - Wynne Leon

It does. And it's funny. A couple of things distract me. Back when I was writing exams for Microsoft, I tried to put in somebody is trying to access your site for nefarious purposes. And they were like, you can't use the word nefarious. And that styming of the wait. But that's a great word and I want to use it anyway. And the second part of what you do personally improves your work corporately.

[00:21:37.070] - Brian Hannon  
Yeah.

[00:21:37.540] - Wynne Leon  
I mean, that's a whole podcast in and of itself.

[00:21:40.370] - Brian Hannon  
Yeah, it is. Let me talk about the first one. The first one about getting rid of. I found that extremely frustrating. It can be extremely frustrating in terms of just changing word choice or even when right hearted people, they mean well, but they're putting in mistakes, grammar mistakes into your copy. It's demoralizing. It really is. So that's something that I think that's why I started the blog. I think where it's helped me, corporate wise, is just understanding that there's more than one way to skin a cat, there's more than one way to go about solving that problem. And I've always been very client service and how can thinking about the reader, et cetera. But I think understanding that my way isn't the only way, and other people may have a different way. So that's made me a better partner from a corporate standpoint.

[00:22:50.700] - Vicki Atkinson  
And working with leaders, it's hard, I think, to be in your profession where you have constantly shifting audiences when you're in corporate communications and you know, audiences, and this is what you're paid to do to understand that and create the messages and the campaigns and all that layering. But I think it's really hard sometimes to deal with that internal audience of the cast of characters where people want sometimes to do the group right, and the constant editing and the churn and the painful bits when you have powerful stakeholders that maybe aspire to be creative types, but they're dive bombing in. And I think just from my vantage point, having professional writers like you in my life and seeing the stress of all of that, I understand why you might write for regeneration on your own time, like Wynn was saying, just to kind of like, fill the bucket again. Right. I'm going to do this, and this is just for, and, and for my blogging friends, perhaps, or your friends on social media. But I think that's really difficult sometimes to create. But then have so many critics that all think they're helping. I don't know.

[00:24:15.970] - Vicki Atkinson  
How do you manage that?

[00:24:18.930] - Brian Hannon  
I think part of it is taking your ego out of it. I have gotten to the point where you want red. I had it at blue. I froze it this way. I've gotten much improved over the years in terms of, okay, it's just different. They want it their way. I think having my outlet has freed me up to say, okay, you want it a different way?

[00:24:48.110] - Vicki Atkinson  
Fine.

[00:24:50.510] - Brian Hannon  
My work was good, but you want to go a different way, that's fine. I do think sometimes it is what you described. Oftentimes I'll try and meet with leaders to say, here's what I'm going to provide you, and here's when I'm going to give it to you, and here's how soon I expect it back. To try and help with that, but understanding that, at the end of the day, I think I do come back to the fact that they're putting their stamp on it, too. So I got to be understanding that they may want to make some changes to it. So it's one of those things where you're very forceful, but also trying to be understanding at the same time.

[00:25:30.330] - Vicki Atkinson  
Well, and I love this thing that you and Wynn both do. You both have these kind of vast repositories of beautiful things that you have written. And I learned from both of you because I see it as this balancing act about being humble and having humility, but also embracing things that you've written that are part of your archives. Really, both of you. But I see both of you doing this sort of like, I'm going

to polish it up, I'm going to reframe it. But darn it, that was really good. And I'm going to give it a take two and post it again. So how do you do that going through now that we know that you've done over 1100 posts, and when I don't know what your number is, but how do you go through your own work and kind of decide that it's time for you to shine again? You're up. I'm going to put you in right.

[00:26:22.410] - Wynne Leon  
Here you go.

[00:26:25.850] - Brian Hannon  
I do view it as creativity in terms of what, a lot of times it does start from. Okay, maybe I'm trying to fill a spot or a spot in the schedule. So there is some very detailed reasons I do it, but I also do it because just in terms of letting pieces air a different time. A piece may have done well a few years ago, but maybe it didn't get the number of hits I thought it would. Or maybe it's a different time. I do notice, for instance, one of the pieces that I've run a couple of different times is the story of my mother leading the amish church and not becoming amish and just how she was a rebel. I've seen that it has hit different audiences when I've run it at different times of the year, and I just love the story. To me, it's just a neat story. And then on top of that, I think it's one of the better ones that I've written. So I think that's part of it. Some of its hits, some of it's what I think others might be interested in. There have been a couple of pieces where I put a new beginning or a new ending on a piece.

[00:27:59.450] - Brian Hannon  
I try not to do too much of that, but I have found that when I pulled pieces back from my archives, it spawned others. So some of it is okay. I'm trying to fill a hole. But then oftentimes, if you've noticed, I start to steal some element of that for a future story. And frankly, that's often how they come back into my memory, because I'm starting to work on something on, I want to write about this event that happened with my kids, and I know I've done something, a similar story back a few years ago. I pull that one back, and then I start to put together the new one. And a few weeks out, I run that. So it really is, in some ways, creativity.

[00:28:49.850] - Vicki Atkinson  
Love it.

[00:28:50.560] - Wynne Leon  
Refreshed creativity, revisiting that spark, connecting threads.

[00:28:57.760] - Vicki Atkinson  
Things that are happening now and reasons to pull things through.

[00:29:03.710] - Brian Hannon  
Yeah, I find that it's actually, like, at first I thought, oh, am I cheating? Is this allowed? I'm like, yeah, I get to whatever I want. So, yeah, to me, it's also reusing content. It's something I write, written. I like it. Why not share it?

[00:29:25.990] - Wynne Leon  
Yeah, right. So you bring up a great point of balance. Balance between personal life, professional life, between your interests, other people's interests. How do you manage all these aspects of creativity? How do you find that balance?

[00:29:46.170] - Brian Hannon  
I'm waiting for you guys to give me the answer. You guys are the ones who are. You've got seminars that you're offering? You've got busy lives, you got kids. I'm waiting for you guys to tell me the answer on this.

[00:30:00.370] - Wynne Leon  
Okay, Vicki, you're up.

[00:30:03.490] - Vicki Atkinson

Let's see. Friendship holds the world together, right? Find good people to commiserate.

[00:30:10.430] - Brian Hannon  
Yeah.

[00:30:11.030] - Vicki Atkinson  
Know who your people are. I don't think there's magic. I don't.

[00:30:14.420] - Brian Hannon  
Yeah. Come on. I was counting on you giving me the.

[00:30:21.890] - Vicki Atkinson  
You know. Well, I'll give you an answer. I think one of the tricks to life is being just goofy enough. Just goofy enough that you can do what you need to do. And people won't slow you down too much, but occasionally they'll step back and go, I kind of wish I could do a little bit of that. So a little bit of goofy maybe keeps you going. I don't know.

[00:30:43.920] - Brian Hannon  
Okay. I like that.

[00:30:46.350] - Wynne Leon  
I think it goes back to what you've already said, Brian, which is it's all about absorbing and observing wherever you.

[00:30:53.220] - Vicki Atkinson  
Yeah.

[00:30:53.760] - Wynne Leon  
That it's all creative fuel. And if you look at it that way, then it's all gravy, because for a writer, you're outliving your life and that giving you content.

[00:31:07.510] - Brian Hannon  
Yeah, I do think you're right there. I don't know. I'm not sure I'm a great example of balancing it. I just know I love writing. I know that if I didn't have a blog or if I didn't have a book that I was working on, I'd be writing for myself, then I would be still doing it. And so, to me, it's that, if anything, the blog gave me the outlet for the creativity. And that is enjoyment. That's my enjoyment. That's how I balance it, is by, okay, yeah, I have family, I have stuff that I need to be doing. But I think the thing that creativity is, I can be thinking about it on my drive. I can be thinking about I'm doing the dishes. I can be thinking about the problem I'm trying to solve or what I'm trying to write next. I don't have a great solution there. I think it's just trying to balance and keep it in perspective with maybe being goofy as part of that, with a little bit of humor. That helps, too.

[00:32:24.100] - Vicki Atkinson  
Only writers understand this, that if a day goes by and you're not writing, that you feel incomplete. And I've heard that from both of you, even if there was no project. It's a compulsion, a need.

[00:32:37.600] - Wynne Leon  
Yeah. And I think for me, it's a way to extend the funny notes of my life. Like last night, I was driving Mr. T home from his school, and he said, from the backseat, mom, I get scared sometimes. And I said, oh, what do you get scared about? He says, I get scared we're going to run out of marshmallows.

[00:33:03.210] - Brian Hannon  
Hey, that's important stuff. For what?

[00:33:09.550] - Wynne Leon  
A parenting challenge I bought for.

[00:33:14.270] - Vicki Atkinson

Oh, my gosh, she's so sweet, right? That must have, like, captured your attention. What do you got?

[00:33:23.570] - Wynne Leon

But, yeah, I went home and I got out all the bags of marshmallows because we've got plenty. But it was so fun to write that down and extend the fun of that moment. You have a child who's admitting his fear, and it happens to be one that we could handle. And that moment of both vulnerability and triumph.

[00:33:55.130] - Brian Hannon

That's the thing, too. Like writing it down, remembering it. I'm not a great storyteller verbally. For me, it's like getting it on paper so I have that so that I remember that when I want it. And that's a great story. You can use that many different places, and I share that fear. I'm right there with them.

[00:34:23.890] - Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. I'd be more worried about the Graham crackers and the chocolate. Actually, I think a good s'more is better without a marshmallow. Just saying.

[00:34:33.190] - Wynne Leon

Well, that's funny because we like our s'mores without the chocolate.

[00:34:40.570] - Brian Hannon

Wow.

[00:34:41.480] - Wynne Leon

No.

[00:34:42.970] - Vicki Atkinson

Oh, my gosh. But I love the examples that you two bring that every day is full of observations, large, small, in between and capturing them. We do it in the moment to write about things that matter. And I think writers are readers, and we all love reading those stories and those little snippets from other people's lives. But there's an endless array of things in front of us every day. If we just. To your point, Brian, and win, pay attention. It's all.

[00:35:18.770] - Brian Hannon

You know, I don't know if it was Stephen King or someone had written about there. We all see stories. Things are happening in front of us now. We don't think they're interesting, but they are. It's the same stuff that he's using for his novels. It's just he's turning it into something bigger and brighter, but he's seeing the same stuff as we do. It's just being. Putting the creativity to it.

[00:35:49.020] - Vicki Atkinson

Yeah. Oh, my gosh. You too. Such fun. So many giggles. So much.

[00:35:56.610] - Wynne Leon

Brian. It's so much.

[00:36:00.530] - Brian Hannon

Glad. I'm glad. I want to learn from you guys. You guys are the presenter. I'm learning more from you.

[00:36:10.870] - Vicki Atkinson

Figuring it out as we go.

[00:36:12.710] - Wynne Leon

Exactly. It's just in good company.

[00:36:18.250] - Brian Hannon

Thank you so much.



[00:36:19.400] - Vicki Atkinson  
Thanks for your time.

[00:36:26.810] - Wynne Leon  
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