

## **Episode 97: Bringing Your Hospitality and Full Self to Your Consulting Business—with Christopher Talley**

Deb Zahn: Hi. I want to welcome you to this week's episode of the Craft of Consulting podcast. This week, we're going to be talking about how you can build a thriving business by paying very careful attention to hospitality, customer service, and bringing your full self to the work you do. And we're going to talk very specifically about what that looks like. I brought on someone who I just absolutely adored talking to, Christopher Talley. He's with CPT Consulting. He's out of Philly, and he does this amazing work with consultants, consulting agencies, and other businesses to help them figure out how to get everything in alignment, their head, their heart, their spirit, their business processes—all of that good stuff to align so that ultimately you can build the business that you want. And you can build it from a place where it's a good fit, a wonderful fit for your life and the good that you want to do in the world. We had way too much fun on this episode. I can't wait for you to hear it. Let's get started.

Hi. I want to welcome Christopher Tally to my show today. Christopher, thank you so much for joining me.

Christopher Talley: Deb, thank you so much for having me. It's such a pleasure. I'm so excited to be here.

Deb Zahn: I know. So we've talked once, and we had such a good time. We're like, "We got to do a podcast."

Christopher Talley: I feel like when we talked, we connected spiritually. It felt like this was a conversation that we had several times. So it just was natural. And it just made sense to just jump on the podcast next.

Deb Zahn: And let's share it with everybody. So let's start off. Tell my listeners what you do.

Christopher Talley: Yeah. So once again, Chris Talley. I'm actually a Philadelphian. So shout out to everybody listening who's from Philly or have any family from Philly. And I bring that up because my life has taken me all over the world, all over the country, and just brought me back here to Philadelphia to start my own business. My own family as well. So it's a pretty exciting story, and I'm excited to share with you and all of the listeners.

But right now, I run and manage a business consulting firm. I have taken all of my years of experience through business management, business operations, opening business, marketing, sales, bookkeeping, all the different things that get tossed at you when you're navigating your career.

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah.

Christopher Talley: And you're trying to figure out exactly what you want to do. I figured out a way to ball it all up and give it to clients, where I'm saying, "Hey, I'm actually consulting clients now on all of the experiences and the opportunities I had the privilege to have." I'm bringing all that to the table and say, "Hey, listen. I might have been through this before. Seen this. Dealt with this. And let me give you some advice in a structured, professional way." But I like to say, "In a way that relates to the everyday person."

Deb Zahn: That's nice.

Christopher Talley: So business consulting from the Fortune 500 viewpoint and translated down, once again, to the everyday business person.

Deb Zahn: I love that. And we met because of someone you helped, Ashley DePaso from DePaso Solutions, who I had on my podcast. As she was preparing to be a consultant, you were helping her prepare to be a consultant. And you know, she took one step into consulting, and she's already got clients.

Christopher Talley: Yes. Yes. Well, Ashley is a rock star. She is one of those energies that come into your life and you're like...you feel the potential. You feel the energy. You feel the excitement. And all you got to do is just give a little tip, a couple tricks, and those people just run and take it. I'm just so excited. That really is what it's all about. It's being able to help people. Teach people a little bit of knowledge and in seeing them take it and take it to the next level. I believe that when you're a consultant, your job is to get fired. I want to give you all the knowledge, all the expertise I have, and you feel comfortable enough moving forward alone without me until you reach that next plateau.

And so, Ashley was one of those clients who said, "Let me absorb everything up." And it's just amazing to see folks like her just taking it and running with it. Following their dreams. Following their visions. Really trying to help the world. And how do we tie your passion...your dream into really servicing humanity? And so, it's so amazing to see folks like her just taking it and running with it.

Deb Zahn: I know. I know. I so celebrate her. And she sang your praises for helping her. So that's why I had to talk to you. I'm like, "I got to find out who this guy is." So today, we were going to talk about a mix of things, but they all go together, which is the hospitality. Which is a world that, well, from your previous work and customer service but then also bringing your full self to what you do to be able to embody those things in a real way and bring the fire, as you said. Which I just love. So let's start off. When thinking of that...hospitality. Customer service. Your full self. What are the key principles or the must dos that are associated with that?

Christopher Talley: Yeah. Great question. I bring it back to my time in hospitality. In the food service aspect of hospitality. That's where I got my scars and stripes from. Going up and learning business and understanding how real business works out in the real world. And there was a phrase we used to say, "It's just food and people."

Deb Zahn: Oh, nice.

Christopher Talley: That was literally what we used to say. We used to say, "Listen. If you keep the hot food hot, the cold food cold, and we focus on our people." Meaning our staff, our customers, the folks that affect our customers. I had the privilege and the beauty to work in school districts. I was able to provide food service to students. And so not only did we get to help and provide nourishment to the students, we were able to educate parents as well. So understanding what hospitality really means at the root of it, is just simply understanding what is your service you're providing. And just be the best you can at that. And understand that there is a people aspect to it all and the more you understand that there's a balance and...

I'll give an example. You walk into your office and your secretary, your admin, your partner, your business partner, seems a little down. And this is a very important day. There are certain things going on. To be able to execute at your best, there might need a five-minute conversation that might have to take place in the beginning. You might have to understand what's going on in that person's life. Their child was sick all night. So they were up and now they're tired. So different things like that all tie into hospitality. And if you are able to understand those things and bring them together every single day. Treat people with respect. Like, "Hey. We are equal. It doesn't matter what position I'm in." If I'm your consultant, if I'm your CEO, if I am your peer, it doesn't really matter what position we're all in. We're all equal and we all have a certain part of this operation.

And so, what I teach clients from that hospitality background is that when you're running your own business or if you're trying to help people run their own business, they need to first understand that they are in the people business. OK.

Deb Zahn: Yes. Yes.

Christopher Talley: You got to understand. Yes, you might be the best consultant out there and you have all of the special workshops and classes and master courses. But if you're missing the people aspect, you're not going to really affect change. And a lot of times, the difference, or let's say, the roadblocks that stand between getting your clients to do what you need them to do to change, that roadblock is usually something personal.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Christopher Talley: Yeah. Usually, there's something standing in the way that just stopping them from really taking it to the next level. You see them accomplish all the things that you know they can accomplish. So once again, taking it back to that hospitality background. Just working with everyday people. Working with real life customers. Folks that are spending their last dollar with you at times. Really gives you a sense of humility. Gives you a sense of importance to your role and your job. Really understanding that I need to show up and I need you to deliver because there's people expecting me to do so.

I'll give you a quick story. Once again taking it back to the hospitality world. In the school districts, sometimes we used to have students knocking on our window Monday morning at 7:30 in the morning. Because they didn't eat all weekend. And so the first meal that they needed to have was provided by myself and my staff. So we took a lot of pride into that and understood that the better we do, the better these people will feel. And in our case, the better they'll do in school. So it was a full cycle. Once again, bring your whole self to work. Leaving the personal stuff at the door. Or, once again, if you're working with a business partner, a client, to understand how to address the personal things so that you can go ahead and provide the best service. The best food. The best consulting. The best retail service. Whatever you're in. That's where it stems from. So I bounced all over the place...

Deb Zahn: Yeah. If you had said, "It's the difference between thinking you're serving food and serving people."

Christopher Talley: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Deb Zahn: And I remember working with someone once who thought...We were trying to accomplish something, and she thought that people were an impediment to what was actually happening. And she's like, "People are getting in the way of the work." And I had to say, "No. People are the work and since we ain't switching to hamsters, you've got to work with people."

Christopher Talley: Yes. Yes. Yes. And so it's funny. I tell people all the time, unfortunately, I believe we were programmed to be employees. Everything is in that hierarchy where we're in elementary, middle school, high school, college. Even when you enter into the typical 9 to 5 workforce, everything is in a hierarchy structure. So you learn how to be an employee, learn how to be in your place. And I think that when you do that, you lose a sense of communication or compassion and empathy for others and really understanding that other people have lives, and other people have things going on.

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah. *That*.

Christopher Talley: And so, if I take the moment to stop and say...In your case. In your example you just brought up. If this person has always been late or is turning in these deliverables late all the time, well, let's stop and have a conversation. Maybe they were in the middle of a move and the apartment fell through. So they might be sleeping on their grandparents' couch and they're just depressed and upset, which is causing them to show up to work late. Because they have to wait till their grandma gets out of the shower now.

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah.

Christopher Talley: It's just a whole situation. And, like you said. If you just take a moment to understand, "Hey, whoa. The work will be done, but it can't be done unless we can get the people mentally, spiritually aligned." And so a lot of what I talk about with my clients, with my friends and family, and just folks in general is just alignment. Alignment across the board. When you're serving folks, people can read your energy. When you're trying to make sale...You know when you're trying to make a sale to somebody and this is the first time you're interacting with them, energy is what is sensed first. Your spirits and your souls talk to each other first. And if you are not bringing your whole self and being genuine and really believing in what you're saying, you're probably not going to make that sale. Or you're probably not going to have that customer come back again.

Deb Zahn: Because they can tell. And if you think that you are slick and you can hide it, you will leak in some way. It'll come out. It might not even be verbal, but they'll see it. And I think one of the mistakes that a lot of consultants make when they first start out, and this fits so perfectly with what you're saying, is they think that they're going to get business from businesses and organizations instead of people. They think they're a consultant selling things instead of a person who does consulting who's selling things. So talk about how you get them over that hump. So that when you're working with folks that they understand that really you're in the business of people.

Christopher Talley: That's a great question. And it's probably one of the hardest things I struggle with, especially when building a new relationship. It takes a lot of unlearning, to be honest with you. It takes a lot of taking a step back. A lot of times, I just paint the picture. I literally lay out what's going in with your operations, your business, your service, whatever is the issue. The reason why I'm here. Let's just look at it. And the more you try to come up with excuses outside of addressing the true issue, which is, "Hey. I'm not relating to that person." Or, "I'm not taking a moment to truly understand where these clients or

these potential clients or these leads are coming from to be able to relay my services to them. I'm force feeding, or I'm not hitting the right mark."

And it takes a moment for them to look at the full picture and then me asking them the question, "Well, this is what's happening. What can we change?" And then, when you talk them through and you start asking them questions. They start speaking out loud. Normally...hopefully, fingers crossed...clients will start to realize that, "Oh, it's me. I'm not really bringing my full self. So that's the issue why I can't land my first client when I'm trying to roll out my consulting business." Or, "I can't get the right traffic to my website for my retail online boutique." Or, "I can't get the right people to go to my YouTube or podcast and subscribe."

And sometimes, we have to take a step back and say, "Look, you have a dope logo. You have an amazing website. It has all the glitz and glamor. You have pretty packaging of your services, and it's communicated well, but are you connecting with these people? Are these people understanding who you are? Who is the person that they're actually talking to? Or do they think you're just a salesperson? Do they feel that you look at them as just a dollar? Like I'm just trying to take a dollar out of their pocket versus I'm trying to help. I'm trying to bring value?"

And the only way you can really do that...once again, bringing it back...is understanding that you're a person. They're a person. You meet on that person level. Literally the answers to all the questions. The solutions to all the problems that they're facing. You will be able to see once you connect with those people. And it's funny. I listened to one of your previous guests. I cannot remember her name. I'm so bad. I can't remember.

Deb Zahn: That's OK. If you tell me what it is, I'll probably remember.

Christopher Talley: So she was talking about pricing and making sure that you build in doing emails and doing research and...

Deb Zahn: Aparna Mekala. Yes.

Christopher Talley: Yes. Yes. Yes. And so one thing that stood out that she talked about that I think relates really, really well was when you...I'm trying to remember exactly what she was saying. But pretty much, it just goes back to when you ask the right questions. Or you get that person to open up in the right way. You will see or be able to put together the pieces that's needed to solve their problem. Or bring the solution. Or even get them to obtain more services from you that they didn't even know they needed because you are now connecting with them on a level that's more than just paper. You're connecting with them more on a level of a people...A spiritual level. And when you're able to do that, people tell you a lot more. People will be more vulnerable. People will be more open. People will share.

And you talk about, you mentioned earlier, a lot of consultants will think they're just dealing with a business. They're just trying to land this business. But you need to really know who is the key person in that business. Who's the right person that's going to make that call? And then you really need to know what makes them tick. Because if you're not aligned with their mission...their everyday schedule of their thought process of what their vision of what needs to happen is, you're never going to land that sale.

So the more you're able to connect with that person personally. Understand that, "Hey. This person has a family or doesn't have a family. This person loves dogs. This person loves goth. This person loves to meditate and do yoga..." There's so many cool and different things that a lot of people, honestly, bypass. A lot of people just let it go past them because they're not looking for that spiritual and personal connection. They're looking to make a sale. They're just trying to land that client. It's like, you're going to miss it. You're not going to hit those sales targets that you want.

Now I will be honest with you, Deb. It does take a lot of energy, OK. So you have to find ways. And that's why I love your questions at the end...And I'm jumping ahead...but how you ask people how you recharge and how you focus yourself and just...I love how you did that. So that was really, really cool. But the more you're giving and trying to feel out these energies. Feel out these people. It's going to take a lot out of you. So you got to make sure you replenish yourselves. Make sure you can connect with different people. That's why I loved our conversation because that's a recharge. That's a fueling. When you get around other like-minded people and can share ideas and stories and trials and tribulations.

Deb Zahn: All the sausage-making.

Christopher Talley: Exactly. The real behind the scenes. And you want to get that recharge so that you can go back, and once again, make those personal connections.

Deb Zahn: So in a lot of what you just said, you actually said something that's kind of Jedi stuff I want us to dig into. You said it casually because you just know this. But it really is important for consultants to hear and that is the power of asking questions. Not generic boring questions that anybody could ask. But ask questions that are really trying to get at the heart of who your prospective client is in front of you. What they care about. What they worry about. What they aspire to. And so talk a little bit about the types of questions you help folks figure out how to ask.

Christopher Talley: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's so funny. You have great synergy, Deb. I love it, Deb. So one of your other podcasts that I listened to, it was another lady...and of course, I can't remember the name as well. So maybe it will come to you. But she talked about questions and asking the right questions as well. And one thing that stood out to her, she said that she can't really explain it and she was talking about wanting to sit down and write it all down. That's in your head. So it's intuitive. So let me try to write down when I mean intuitive questions. The first thing, tool or trick, I would say is you have to be engaged.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. Present.

Christopher Talley: Present. In the moment. You know what I mean? So you can't, like you say, have a script already. And I actually recommend having your set script. Make sure you hit all your main points, blah blah blah. But it's not about, like you said, just reading to just get questions answered and send back a proposal. No. It's about sitting down and listening. Being in the moment. Engaged in the conversation. And when you do that and you open your spirit a little bit, you open that person's connection. Intuitively, the question just comes. So it's almost like you've been with that person through the experience and you're almost just like, "Tell me about that again." Or, "Why did you do that way?" Or, "Let's rewind it again. Bring me through the story and tell me how you got to this point again." And so, when you're engaged in the moment, you'll ask just intuitive questions that then will bring the client to expose what you really need them to say.

Because you know how it is. The first layer of the conversation is usually you try to chip away. So I'm trying to chip away at the real meat of it. I'm trying to get to the potatoes. So I'll chip away a little bit at the beginning. Ask those little intuitive questions. Being in the moment. Once you get them to really expose themselves as far as being vulnerable and really saying, "Hey. This is truly the issue. I've been beating around the bush a little bit."

Deb Zahn: "Let me tell you what's really happening."

Christopher Talley: "What *really* keeps me up at night." And then, this is the trick in it all. So once you're able to get them to really tell you what is keeping them up at night, the true issue. Or you're able to listen to the answer of their question and figure out for them because sometimes they don't know. You can say, "Well, listen. This might be the real cause of your struggles." Then you know how to deliver. Now you know how to execute. Now you know how to meet their expectations because it's no longer what they tell you they need help with. Now it's a collaborative conversation and agreement on collectively, we believe this is the issue now.

It might be a little bit of what you originally brought and what you thought was the issue. It might be a little bit of what I'm bringing with my past experience. Let's mush this together. Make it a little customized. Plan a roadmap that's not unusual. And we don't have to recreate the wheel, but it's a little custom towards you. Because now I know exactly what I need to drive at. You know what I mean? I'm not just shooting all over the place. And you have now told me or we have figured out together, this is the true root cause. So let me build my entire proposal, my strategy, the team that I bring on to support me. We are now going to focus. Drive it. Execute on what is causing your true pain because all the other stuff you've complained about is just imaginary.

Deb Zahn: Right. Or a symptom of what the actual problem is. The other thing I love about it is it also helps you define your scope and effort much better. So I'm thinking of an example of where I was talking with a client about a potential engagement. And I kept asking questions to get at the heart of it. It seemed pretty straightforward. They wanted to figure out their key strategy and a signature initiative and all of this stuff.

And I kept asking and he finally told me, "I'm the leader, and I feel like I'm all by myself. That I have these folks who are supposed to be my lieutenants, and they're not in it. And so I feel like I'm charging ahead, and I got no one behind me who has my back or who shares the same vision I do." Now that was 20 minutes into the conversation because the first part of it was, "Well, we have to achieve X and Y and Z." But that was at the heart of it. That's a completely different engagement than what we first talked about.

Christopher Talley: It might even be a completely different service, too, with a different offer.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Christopher Talley: So you as a consultant...Once again, let's bring it back to consultant and consultant. So you as a consultant need to filter through, "Well, the first thing he discussed maybe that is very tangible things or a la carte type services. We can execute those things but if you truly want my service or you truly want me to help you get better as a company, as a group, as a team, whatever the situation

is. The second one you brought up, not having that support..." And I'll tell you a book that I think all of your followers should go get. I don't know if you read this. It's called *The Energy Bus*.

Deb Zahn: Oh, I haven't.

Christopher Talley: So let me tell you the synergy of that. Guess who told me about The Energy Bus?

Deb Zahn: It would be Ashley.

Christopher Talley: It would be Ashley. Yes.

Deb Zahn: Oh, of course.

Christopher Talley: So crazy how the...Look at the universe. So in that book, it talks about the description you said. Not having folks on your team or the wrong people on your team on your bus. And how do you manage the energies because sometimes you can't control who's on your bus. So how do you manage those things? So like you said. Getting to the root cause is the key. Understanding what the real purpose is.

But on top of that, you as a consultant need to maybe define the services more and say, "Well, thank you for both of that. Now let's actually have a real conversation because the latter is going to take more of a retainer service or a more long-term approach or more strategy behind it because I understand and I have some examples that I can share with you of companies or teams or organizations that solved this issue of the people versus 'Hey, we got to meet these numbers' and 'We're off these metrics'" and so forth and so on." So you're so right.

Deb Zahn: Because they're in the business of people, too. And sometimes they don't know that.

Christopher Talley: Most of the time, they don't. Most of the time they don't, unfortunately. And honestly, that's why folks like you and I are able to continue to grow because, once again, we just weren't taught this. This is something that I think a lot of folks even run from at times because it does take a little bit more energy. It does take a little bit more compassion. It does take a little bit more love.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Christopher Talley: Because someone...You can even have an existing client. They're coming in and they're cussing you out. They're yelling and screaming and they're sending crazy emails. And maybe it's just a miscommunication. And once again, you have to remind them, "Hey, listen. This is a people relationship, so let's understand what really is your issue. Why are you really upset? Because I didn't do anything." Or, "I met all my requirements. So what's really the issue?" And it could be, hey, their partner left them last night and you don't even know that...

Deb Zahn: You don't know that. Yeah.

Christopher Talley: ...and you're just catching all this energy. And so before you mess up a potential relationship that could be a new business sale for you, you got to take a moment and say, "Well, let's talk. Let's just sit and spend five minutes talking about everything besides the business."

Because a lot of times when you do that, Deb, all of the answers. All of the...You talk about the Jedi mind tricks and asking the right questions. All of that stuff exposes itself through other conversations. And then you can tie it back to, "Hey. We were talking about this with your granddaughter, and she was having some health issues. Maybe you should switch your meetings up to this or that or maybe you should tell your clients you're going to have a three-week turnaround now."

You can take those different things that will solve so many key issues that they're having. And they just can't connect the dots. So that's really what you're there for. How to piece it together. How to put those in the right order.

Deb Zahn: Or even to be able to say to the client, "Let me offload. Let's switch up what we're doing because right now, this is the most important that's obviously causing you tremendous anguish. Let's deal with that. We don't have to....We can change the contract. We can change our terms. We can do whatever. But let's work with what we have in front of us. Not what we thought we were going to have in front of us six months ago."

Christopher Talley: Exactly. You know what? Deb, I'm going to give some finger snaps on that one.

Deb Zahn: I got some snaps.

Christopher Talley: I was finger snapping a lot of the interviews you did, so I love it. That was such a good gem you dropped there. It's so good that I just did this two days ago where a client that's really heavy into social media influences. She's really connected on the digital scene. And so we had some backend deliverables that were due. She needs to get these things done but she had some projects coming up and some personal things going on.

And one of the things I do with my clients...so this is a tip I'll share for all consultants....I always kick off my check-in calls, whether it be. The weekly calls or monthly calls. Whatever it is. We check in on the personal side first. We call it the spiritual check-in, right, "Tell me just what's going on. Just talk to me." Because like you said, 9 times out of 10, their energy's going to change. Their deliverables are going to change. Their priorities are going to change. And it's going to be influenced by things that you don't even know about.

So if you're trying to work on things from six months ago, and they've got all these new things going on with them inside, that's going to change that direction. You got to be locking step with them. So taking a moment to say, "OK. I understand. Last week, we talked about that." Or, "Last month, we talked about that and that was your goal. But you were dealing with X, Y and Z and that's why you didn't get these done. So let's do this." Like you said, "Let's change" or "Let me take offloads from you. Let's change our focus. Let's switch from calls to text because you're super busy with your kid and the babysitter situation now is off. So look, I'm OK. Let's do a virtual text check-in versus hopping on a call where you have to stop your day."

Deb Zahn: Part of the value that we show up with is we can help facilitate a process that is actually sane and enjoyable. And this comes back to hospitality and customer service. How do you create an experience that honors their full self by you being your full self? And helping them see that it's OK if things change and we can handle that because we're in it together?

Christopher Talley: In it together. And I believe it was the first lady I referenced from the podcast. She talked about that and really talked about your clients are human just like you. Your customers are human just like you. They understand we're in this together. Let's have those conversations so that we both can be aligned. So that I can deliver at my best ability because now I understand what your priorities are or she made a reference to changing meetings or, "Hey, I need to cancel." And it's OK because they understand. They're people as well.

So the more you get your customers and clients to understand, "Listen. I'm not no special guru and I can't just come in and move all the pieces and make everything perfect. We're going to work on this together. So the more vulnerable you are. The more aligned we are in a professional, respectful way. The better we're going to be able to accomplish what you need to accomplish. And that's my goal."

Deb Zahn: I love that you've said vulnerable a couple times because, one, it probably scares a lot of people. It doesn't scare me because I think vulnerability is a huge strength. And you can be vulnerable and still have appropriate boundaries. It is not suddenly you have no boundaries. And I'm in there talking about things that they really don't need to hear about.

Christopher Talley: Yeah.

Deb Zahn: But to be vulnerable is to meet human to human. And to recognize each other's humanity in all of its forms. Because the good, the bad, the ugly spend and-

Christopher Talley: Exactly. And normally, it takes you showing your ugly to show people, "Hey, I'm just like you. I can be vulnerable. Let me tell you a horror story first."

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah.

Christopher Talley: You know what I mean? And then they can open up and tell their horror story. And then...So you're 100% right. Yeah.

Deb Zahn: I remember when I broke through with a client once who had just been a little stiff. And we found our vibe in working together. We were at a particular meeting and somebody went after them in a really inappropriate way. And because of the circumstances, the person had to just take it. And I remember I was on the call and I texted the person and I said, "Oh, man. That made me want to go to jail." And he thought it was hilarious. And he also...And I felt it. It wasn't staged. I'm like, "Oh. Oh, goodness. Bless your heart that you can sit through that." And it changed the dynamic of our relationship because I recognized that this may be your job to take crap from people, but it doesn't make it easier. And I want you to know I recognize that.

Christopher Talley: And when you take that empathy and you show people that empathy. Oh, they're going to love you. You know they're going to. And they're also going to give you grace as well. They're going to have compassion and empathy for you and understand, "Hey, listen. I might be difficult to work with. I understand." You know what I mean? "Let me tone it back because I know it's a lot for you to work with me as well." And so it's a give and take. And so sometimes it takes you being the bigger person to open that, once again, that layer of vulnerability. Understanding. Compassionate. Just meeting that person on their level. You know what I mean? I love that. I love that story.

Deb Zahn: Luckily, I did not go to jail time. So that was good. So let's go back to what you said in terms of refreshing and balance because all of this takes energy. So how do you do that? How do you enable yourself to bring your full self by doing what you need to do off camera?

Christopher Talley: So in running CPT Consulting, a business firm that focuses on startups, established businesses and the retail side of business and business consulting, I get pulled in a lot of different directions. A lot of different energy. Energy-draining tasks. A lot of mental tasks. A lot of therapy sessions at times talking to folks. And also being open enough to let people contact me if they're not on the schedule. Friends. Family. Old clients. That just need a little bit of advice. So it's a lot of different things. And like I mentioned earlier, my beautiful wife. My three beautiful kids. But they are the biggest energy drainers of them all because-

Deb Zahn: Of course. That's their job.

Christopher Talley: ...I have to be...That's their job. And I love it to the fullest. So I also have to factor that in, right? Because I have a family that needs my energy and that relies on me. And so how do I balance it all? It's a hard question. It's a tough question. And I was thinking about how to answer this part of it.

The first thing I do is I always fall back on knowing who I am. Who am I. What I do. What I do for others fulfills me. So being a good person. A standup citizen. Trying to do the best in this crazy world around us. Trying to help people. Trying to take the knowledge that really I was privileged to get...And a lot of times, I'll be honest with you, growing up in corporate America, I was the only minority in rooms at times. I'd look around the room and it was just me as far as being African-American male. And just being in these settings around these people who are sharing these different things and I'm just like, "Wow. This is knowledge. This is real good information." And so, knowing that I had that opportunity. I'm grateful for it and now I have a bigger opportunity to share that knowledge with other people. That fills me as well.

So I just think about what I've been through, who I am, what really makes me tick, my family, my friends. So shout out to all of my family and friends. You all know who you are. They really give me that fuel. And it's crazy. Some of my close friends, some of my male friends, we have radars. We have sensors. So we can detect when somebody is pulling away-

Deb Zahn: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Christopher Talley: Detect something. So I have this one friend. He is my radar man. So he knows. He reaches out to me. He's, "Come over. Bring the kids," because he has kids as well and they're around the same age. So he keeps me in check and says, "Look. You need to take a moment. You need to chill out. You seem a little stressed. You seem a little overworked." Or, "I haven't heard from you while. Where you been at?" That type of thing. So family. Friends. Knowing who I am is probably the number one go-to that I look to refuel myself. Also, exercise. Yoga. Meditation. Spiritual practices. Daily spiritual practices.

Once again, understanding business and understanding how to run a business. You can teach yourself that on YouTube. You don't need me. Go on YouTube, search it, let somebody teach you. But understanding what it means to be a person running a business and what does it take as a person to run

that business. All the moving parts is something that I got to make sure that I'm just whole around myself in addressing all those different things in myself. So when I present myself to my clients, I'm practicing what I preach.

So just taking a moment to check myself, consult myself. Making sure that I'm in line and I'm doing what I need to do so that once I step in front of a client, a customer, I'm confident and I feel comfortable in my own skin. So no matter what energy's in front of me. How much energy is taken from me on that day. And it could be a...and I don't know if it makes it negative. This could be a great day. I could have done a three-hour sales pitch with one of my clients and we won the business and I got a 20% commission check and blah blah. But that takes a lot of energy. Deb, you know. You know it takes a whole lot.

Deb Zahn: Even when it's good.

Christopher Talley: Even when it's...Sometimes it's more energy when it's good because now you got to go and celebrate. You got follow ups. You got emails. The job keeps going when actually landing the job. So that takes a lot of energy. So being able to do those things for other people. I gotta keep that.

The question you asked me at the forefront, I have to say, "What do I need? What is it going to take for me to feel better about myself? About my business? What am I doing each and every day to help others?" So like I said...And when I say exercise. I am not hitting the gym. I am not a gym rat. I ride a bike. I'll be honest with you, Deb. I ride a bike. That is my exercise. I found my thing. That's what I like to do. And my son, we do pushups and sit-ups and stuff like that.

Deb Zahn: Wow.

Christopher Talley: These competitions. We got a rule in this house, if you leave a room and you leave the light on, you got to do three push-ups.

Deb Zahn: Nice.

Christopher Talley: So we go at it. My son tries to trick me and turn the light on to make me do push-ups. So it's pretty cool. So we make it a family thing, trying to make it whole. My daughter and I, we do yoga together. So that's my time to spend with her. We do yoga. My wife does yoga with us. So those different things really, just once again, brings me back to who I am as a person. Then I feel good about helping others.

Deb Zahn: That's right. Well, and you said something in there that I also just want to highlight because I think it is so important is you're not trying to do stuff that folks can learn easily from other sources. You're staying within your zone of genius. Your zone of magic. Whatever you want to call it and what you can uniquely bring to people. Because if you do things that you're not best suited to do, that's even more exhausting. If I'm trying to do something and it takes effort plus I'm bored...oh, no, no, no. It's like 10 times more exhausting than doing something I like.

Christopher Talley: Oh, my god. You are hitting it on the head right now. It's exhausting. You can't be...It's so hard to be fake.

Deb Zahn: Oh, gosh.

Christopher Talley: It is so...It takes a lot. Why waste all that energy to be fake? Try to swim in a lane that you have no business swimming in that you don't even want to swim in?

Deb Zahn: No.

Christopher Talley: You're just swimming in it because you see everybody else swimming in that lane. No, no, no. And it's so funny. I work with starting out consultants or consultant businesses that need help, too. So it's always that first initial like, "OK. Consulting. Consultant. What's going on?" But I'm always...And you felt my energy. I'm always bringing like, "Look, I'm ready to learn. Let's have a conversation."

Deb Zahn: Exactly.

Christopher Talley: You know? I'm trying to learn. I'm the student here. You know what I mean? I'm going to take a seat first and let you speak first because I really want to hear what I don't know. What's missing. I think a lot of consultants miss that opportunity to just learn and just bring it all together. And like you said, understanding...I always think about my family and just why I started this and why I'm helping people now and doing those certain things. It's like your calling. So it's like following what makes you feel good. That's your calling. That comes to you.

You can be a thousand consultants out here, but if you just bring what makes you feel good and what makes you laugh and your style of things, you're going to find people who are going to connect with your energy.

Deb Zahn: That's right. And if they don't, so what? Then don't work with them.

Christopher Talley: It's OK. Yes. And you know what I always do, too? "Hey, you know what? You don't match my energy, but I might have somebody that might be able to help you."

Deb Zahn: That's right. That's right.

Christopher Talley: You know what I mean? "You're not feeling this vibe, so I have somebody that might be on a different vibe for you."

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Christopher Talley: And it's all love. It's all just, "Listen. I want to see you win and maybe you might still refer somebody to me that you meet along the way that you might think that matches my energy."

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Christopher Talley: So, yeah...

Deb Zahn: Who would totally dig how you do things.

Christopher Talley: Exactly. So it doesn't matter how many consultants. I tell people there's 45 different cereals when you walk down the cereal aisle.

Deb Zahn: That's right.

Christopher Talley: Come on. There is no such real thing as competition. There really isn't. Everybody matches with other clients and customers. You match for a reason. You match for a purpose. And the more you bring your whole true self and do what makes you feel good and not trying to just follow the fad or the trends, the better and more quickly you'll find those people that are out there. Because you'll stay in that lane and then you'll stay in that energy and energy attracts energy.

Deb Zahn: That's right. You'll become magnetic. I love it. Chris, oh my gosh, I just adore you. I could talk to you for so long.

Christopher Talley: We could keep talking. We could keep talking. We definitely could. You know what you got to do? You got to tell your editors because I'm going to be vulnerable. I don't care if you keep this, too. I feel so bad that I was not ready for the video side. So tell your editors to put a little mountain up.

Deb Zahn: Like a slick office in the background?

Christopher Talley: No.

Deb Zahn: But you know what? This is one of the benefits of being a consultant. What do you think I'm wearing on the bottom here? You think I'm wearing something sassy? No.

Christopher Talley: And you know what? What I'm going to do is...and I'm going to learn from you and from this to say, "You know what? I got to be ready either way. You know what I mean?"

Deb Zahn: Yeah.

Christopher Talley: And I will use this to teach other people. You know what I mean? And I told you the side of editing. I'm taking that and running with it because I met so many people that do not understand the importance of editing. So I just...It's just so important.

Deb Zahn: Editing forgives so many sins.

Christopher Talley: I love it. But thank you so much. No. This was such a great conversation. Every time we talk, I feel...I will be honest. My wife said that I should drive up once things clear up.

Deb Zahn: Absolutely.

Christopher Talley: My wife was like, "You need to go talk to her."

Deb Zahn: Are you kidding? We'll go biking. And we got to get Ashley up because when I first met Ashley, my mom was sitting in the room because her cable or something wasn't working. So she was

over here and after I got off the Zoom with Ashley, she's like, "Oh, I like her a lot. You need to have her on your podcast."

Christopher Talley: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

Deb Zahn: So we'll go biking with mom. It'll be great. But Christopher, thank you.

Christopher Talley: Yes. Thank you, too. And so, we'll bring mom back and the four of us will have a little podcast, live podcast.

Deb Zahn: I love that. I love that. I love that idea. So thank you so much, and you are definitely going to be back on the show.

Christopher Talley: It was my pleasure. Thank you so much for the time. I appreciate it. And keep doing what you're doing. Educating others. Supporting us consultants out here. We needed it. So thank you, Deb. Thank you for the time.

Deb Zahn: Right back at you.

Thanks so much for listening to this episode of the Craft of Consulting Podcast. I want to ask you to do actually three things. If you enjoyed this episode or if you've enjoyed any of my other ones, hit subscribe. I got a lot of other great guests that are coming up and a lot of other great content and I don't want you to miss anything. But the other two things that I'm going to ask you to do is, one is, if you have any comments, so if you have any suggestions or any kind of feedback that will help make this podcast more helpful to more listeners, please include those.

And then the last thing is, again, if you've gotten something out of this, share it, share it with somebody you know who's a consultant or thinking about being a consultant, and make sure that they also have access to all this great content and all the other great content that's going to be coming up.

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