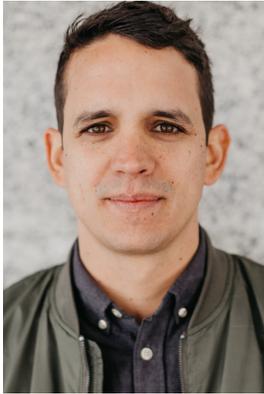


## MASTERS Audio Club, August 2019

### Trevor Muir

#### The Power of Stories



**Trevor Muir** is an author, international and TEDx speaker, project-based learning expert, popular social media influencer, and above all else, a teacher. His inspiring videos have been viewed over 24 million times.

Interviewed by **Winn Claybaugh**, Trevor reveals why the power of stories can engage and transform us into better teachers, mentors, parents, and human beings. He tells why the skills of communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and confidence—often called “soft skills”—are actually essential skills desperately needed by the generations of today.

**Winn:** Hey everybody, Winn Claybaugh here. Welcome to another amazing issue of MASTERS. As MASTERS gets older and older, year after year—I think we’re into year 23—I’m just exposed to the best of the best of the best because people know that I’m always looking for wonderful speakers on a variety of different topics. And today just unfolded exactly how it’s supposed to. I was introduced to this wonderful guy named Trevor Muir. Somebody sent me his TED Talk and I’m such a junkie with TED Talks and so, of course, I watch whatever anybody sends to me. And I was engaged, immediately engaged. And then the fact that he looks like he’s 12 years old was beside the point because his *[laughs]* message was strong and his background was unique. And I’m just so happy to introduce to all of you, my new best friend, Trevor Muir. Trevor, welcome to MASTERS.

**Trevor:** I’m so glad to be here on my thirteenth birthday.

**Winn:** Thirteenth birthday?

**Trevor:** That’s it.

**Winn:** Oh my gosh, I know.

**Trevor:** You know what? It’s so funny, is when I started teaching, parents would always say to me like, “Oh, you look like one of the students.” And as a young 20s guy, I was always self-conscious about that.

**Winn:** Right.

**Trevor:** And then, you know, when you start to get into your 30s, all of a sudden you’re like, “Well, thank you.”

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: “I appreciate that.”

Winn: Now it serves you well.

Trevor: That’s right. I’ll take it.

Winn: That’s great. Now Trevor has a book called *Epic Classroom: How to Boost Engagement, Make Learning Memorable, and Transform Lives*. Trevor is a professor at Grand Valley State University, a former faculty member—and we’re going to talk about why you’re a former faculty member—for the Buck Institute for Education. You are one of the leaders of the Educational Design Expedition, which is an international committee based in Holland that is tasked with rethinking education and creating a system that prepares students for the evolving and innovating career world. That’s a mouthful, right? Your writing has been featured in the *Huffington Post*, and *Ed Week*. You, again as I mentioned, gave a TEDx Talk, which was titled *School Should Take Place in the Real World*. I love that. You have a great Facebook page called The Epic Classroom with inspiring videos that have been viewed over 24 million times. So we’re going to get into this. You have—obviously you have the background and I love the whole message of creating a different learning environment. So you quit a job. You—oh, I said that earlier and you corrected me: you didn’t quit, you transitioned. Is that what you did or—?

Trevor: I just changed where I worked.

Winn: Okay. You changed where you worked. And why did you feel like you needed to do that?

Trevor: Well, so I went into becoming a teacher because I despised school. You know, I spend a lot of my time now speaking with other teachers and I find that a lot of people who teach, in whatever type of learning environment, was an environment that they thrived in themselves and so they naturally thought, *Okay, I did well here so therefore I want to teach in it*. I’m the exact opposite. I hated school. I was bored in it. You know what? My teachers probably thought I was a pretty boring, passionless person but then I go—

Winn: Are you talking about high school? You talking about college? You talking about all of it?

Trevor: I’m talking about elementary, middle, high school, and college.

Winn: *[laughs]* Okay, all of it.

Trevor: I just couldn’t stand to be there because it wasn’t made for me. It was—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —made for kids who can sit still and listen and take notes and then regurgitate that information and then just repeat every year to get to the next level. And, you know, I was a kid that, I wanted to be outside barefoot catching alligators—I grew up in Florida—like I wanted to be out catching gators, riding waves, getting in trouble, like just being myself. And yet every day for 16 years, I was sitting in a desk being told, “You cannot talk and you cannot do this and you need to move to the next level.” And, you know, I was blessed with a mom who made my butt move to the next level because if I didn’t have that, there’s nothing that would have motivated me to work hard.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And so then when I became a professional, you know, people were like, “Oh, you’d be a good teacher.” I’m like, “Ugh, that’s a terrible idea.”

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: I would hate to put kids through what I had to go through.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: But then I started thinking about it and I said, “Well, what if I was a different type of teacher?” You know, “What if I had an environment where kids could be up and moving and conversing and talking and building skills rather than just getting knowledge?” Like, “What if I was the kind of teacher who built relationships with my kids, with my students? Like where I got to know them and their stories and got—went to that deeper level,” like the few teachers that I had throughout my life who really did help steer my ship and inspire me. And so that was kind of what my mission was and that’s what I did for several years, is work in a high school classroom trying to be that kind of teacher.

Winn: Was that your first job as a teacher was—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —in high school?

Trevor: Yeah, my—well no—my—yeah, my first seven years were spent in a high school classroom.

Winn: What subject?

Trevor: Teaching history and English.

Winn: History and English.

Trevor: Yeah. You know, I always loved writing—

Winn: And somehow you could make those two subjects come alive.

Trevor: That's it! Yeah. You try to find a way to make it come alive. And that's why, like my TED Talk is called *School Should Take Place in the Real World*. You know, I think so much of school is about preparing people for this future that we don't even know about when, really, I think school should be the real world. You know, the real world should be happening now. You know, it's so crazy, I had these high school seniors who were graduating and it's like they just spent the last 12 years of their life in this mandatory, obligatory system. And it's like now they're ready to start the real world? Like what a waste of time if we're telling them this whole 12 years is to get you ready for something. How about we actually do the real work now?

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: Like how about we serve people now? What if we started businesses now? What if we start using these skills that we're learning to actually do something now? And so that—I mean, that's my mission as a teacher and then I'd go around and I'd start getting to work with other teachers on how to do this themselves, and I designed a process, and trying to figure out, okay, well how can people replicate this in their own schools? And as I said, I transitioned to another job. It was kind of hard to be able to be in a high school classroom 180 days out of the year but then also travel to the Netherlands and speak or come to LA to speak from where I live in Michigan. And so I kind of had to decide, do I want to spend my time working with just a certain group of students or do I want to work with everybody and—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —help everybody get to do more of this with their kids?

Winn: Wow. You know, give a call to action to people listening to this right now who are thinking, *Oh, this message doesn't apply to me*.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: *I don't have kids. I'm not a teacher. I don't have that kind of influence. So just reel everybody in right now and—*

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —tell everybody listening to why this is applicable to them.

Trevor: Yeah, you know, the thing—my book is called *The Epic Classroom* and that really has two meanings. Like, the one meaning is “epic” means memorable. So how do we have experiences that are really big and memorable? But the other meaning comes from the epic is—you know, it's a synonym for the word *story*. And I am a huge fan of well-told stories. I love telling stories. I love

watching stories, reading stories. And I love looking at my own life as an unfolding story, you know, with real conflict. You know, so when we hit obstacles, these aren't just challenges, these are parts of the story that makes us better. And so that's what I try to do intentionally in the classroom, is how do I introduce students to stories that they're going to remember later on? So when they get to the end of whatever the learning experience is, it was actually a story that happened. They're not just thinking of it as a bunch of information that accrued over a certain amount of time. It's actually a story that happened. And that's why I think anybody can view their life that way.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: I call it the Epic Mindset.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: So how do I view my life as an ongoing, unfolding story with real challenges and conflict? But all of those conflict—if we let it, it makes us better. It gives us the tools that we need to be great in life.

Winn: That's perfect because I think we all want to be interesting. We all want to be engaging. We all want to be—not the life of the party but if I can sit down and have a conversation with Trevor, I'm going to learn something, I'm going to remember something. And by the way, it's not just about Trevor; you're also drawing those stories out of me, as well.

Trevor: That's the idea. I mean—

Winn: Cool.

Trevor: —I think that's what an epic life is, is how am I living out a good story?

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: You know, I look at my own childhood and there were some really bumpy, hard places as a kid. You know, when my parents were divorced in middle school and I had to choose which one I wanted to live with. And my dad—and then it got—the trauma got in there and it got really, really rough. You know, it'd be easy to look back at that period of life and say, "Oh, I just want to forget about that."

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know, like that was the really difficult stuff that I just kind of want to pretend didn't happen. But then when—you know, if you spend the time reflecting on those periods of your life—and there's other periods where I got in a lot of trouble later on; when I got old enough to get in real trouble. You know, we can push those aside or we can look at those and be like, *Wow*,

*what did that do to actually shape me?* You know, any of the good that I have now—which I've got a lot more space to get better as a person—but whatever I am good at now, that conflict shaped that, right? That came from the hard stuff.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And I feel like too many people just want to shut the door to those rough experiences rather than being open to what they can do to shape us, who we are. So as a teacher, I want to do that for my students. As a speaker, I want to do that for whoever I get to speak to.

Winn: I had a speaker the other day who, I sat in her audience and then she asked me for some input. You know, "How was my presentation?" And I said, "Are we speaking the truth right now? I mean, do you give me full permission?" And I told her, I said, "You didn't share one personal story."

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: "What you did was I could have pulled you off the stage and put somebody else on the stage and there would have been no difference because—"

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: "—all you did was quoted principles and—"

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: "—and epilogues and—" Meaning anybody could read that from a book and then memorize it and quote it—

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: —from the stage. There was—tell me the lesson, tell me the life lesson but then tell me a story of how you fell down with this—

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: —lesson and how you picked yourself back up and how you screwed it up and you didn't believe in it but then this happened and then this changed and now you have a powerful engaging story. And none of that existed. When I asked her, "Why didn't you do that?" she said that she got advice from a speaking coach who told her that she should never interject personal stories because the audience would think that the story—that the whole presentation was just about her. I'm like, "But if it's not about you then—"

Trevor: That's the worst advice I've ever heard!

Winn: That's what I thought!

Trevor: Yeah!

Winn: I love stories.

Trevor: We all do.

Winn: But I love other people's stories, too, so obviously we have to have those good habits, "This is my story, tell me your story."

Trevor: Mm-hm. Well, I—there's this quote from Brené Brown that, "True—"

Winn: Love her.

Trevor: Oh, it's that, "Creativity comes from vulnerability."

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: Like you cannot be truly creative if you're not vulnerable. Because, you know, anytime you create something, you're risking that people won't like it. Because, you know what? That speaking coach might be true, maybe people won't like your story.

Winn: Hm. Oh well.

Trevor: There, you're taking the risk.

Winn: *[laughs]* Right, right.

Trevor: You know, oh well. And that's—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —my attitude. I was like, "Well, if you don't like it, you don't—"

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: "—have to like it."

Winn: It does—

Trevor: I like it.

Winn: It does make us interesting, though.

Trevor: Yeah, right?

Winn: Those stories.

Trevor: Oh!

Winn: You know, what do they say? God loves a sinner. Why is that?

Trevor: Why is that?

Winn: Because it makes you more interesting. *[laughs]*

Trevor: Uh-huh! Exactly!

Winn: Yeah!

Trevor: That's right. Yeah, or how about the other line that, you know, there's no grace without sin. You know, there's no redemption and overcoming something if you don't screw up in the first place. And so I embrace that. I embrace my mistakes and then I try to not make them anymore.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know, that's also part of it too.

Winn: Yeah, that's another—we'll try that later on.

Trevor: Yeah, absolutely.

Winn: I'm 60 now, I tend to repeat things a lot. Okay, so give us a visual of what one of your high school history classrooms looked like.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: 'Cause I have a feeling already it was not at all what my high school—

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: —experience was like.

Trevor: Well, and it wasn't like mine was—what my experience was like either. You know, one day I had this woman name Beth Lisa come and speak to my students. And Beth Lisa came and told the story to my group of 14-, 15-year-old, ninth-grade public school students about how she was a young girl living in Rwanda in the early '90s when the genocide happened.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And, you know, she went and took refuge in a hotel in Rwanda, the Hôtel des Mille Collines, and while she was in there, her whole family was murdered with machetes and then she was in there for three weeks and then eventually escaped and went to a refugee camp where she lived in Kenya for more than 17 years on nothing more than rice and corn. And then one day she was put

on an airplane without the slightest clue where she was going, ended up in our hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan, in January, during a snowstorm. And Beth Lisa had never heard of snow before. She thought there was a volcano nearby and it was just this cold ash coming to the ground. She wasn't prepared for that. She didn't know how to work a light switch, didn't know how to use any of the household appliances. She told the story of one day she got on a city bus and didn't know how to signal to get off. She didn't know you're supposed to pull the cable and so she was stuck on the bus for eight hours until the driver made her get off in January during a snowstorm. And so my students are sitting here—

Winn: *[laughs]* Oh my gosh.

Trevor: —listening to this woman who only got here a few years before this and speaking in broken English about, “This was my experience. I wasn't prepared for the modern world that we live in here.” And they were just like, you know, they were like crestfallen. And so when she left that morning, I remember we went through this brainstorming process we had about, like, “Okay, we've got a problem introduced to us.” So in story terms we've got a real conflict now. Our worlds have been rattled, like there's some type of inciting incident. Like, “Now what do we do?” And I remember one kid raising his hand, he was all opinionated, and he goes, “Well, this is stupid.” Like, “What's stupid, opinionated kid?” *[laughs]*

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: And he goes, “Well, it's just stupid nobody told her how to get off a bus. It's easy.” I was like, “It's easy?” He's like, “Yeah, I ride the bus all the time.” I was like, “Well then, let's do something about it.” Right? Like, okay, “So you know something that can serve somebody else that can solve this conflict. And so let's do something about it.” And so for the next month my students—while they were learning about the industrial revolution and modernizing and learning how, like how the world changed with technology, which is what refugees from places like Beth Lisa's hometown learned about the day they get to America—while we're learning this content that the state of Michigan says you're going to have to learn anyway, it's the technical knowledge and skills—while you're learning that, let's also serve refugees and apply that knowledge and apply those skills. Then at the end of the month they presented tools, like how to use appliances flash cards, and what kind of cookbooks can help you learn how to boil hotdogs, or whatever it is that we take for granted that refugees might find useful. Or that one opinionated kid made a how-to video of how to use the public bus system. They presented it to social workers and now those tools are actually being used in Grand Rapids for incoming refugees. Not just teaching them how to help people someday. They're actually helping people in high school.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: And so, you know, I mean, if you're a kid that's not interested in grades and not interested in making your teacher or parent happy, but you are interested in serving Beth Lisa, this might be the secret sauce that might help you actually engage in school.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: This authenticity, you know, this real story that's happening.

Winn: Oh my gosh. I could end this interview right now and I feel like I got the *[laughs]*—

Trevor: Well and that's the idea.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: So, as a speaker, I was on the road for many, many years and companies, business owners, would hire me to come in and create a classroom.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: Create an experience for their people. "Bring Winn in. He's going to make them laugh. He's going to make them cry. He's going to make them write down goals. He's going to make them hug each other and commit and by the time Winn leaves, they're all going to feel something amazing." Well, "Winn, are you available?" "No, I'm not because I have a daughter now. I don't travel."

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: "But let me teach you how to create that experience—"

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: "—without paying me to show up." What's the advice that you have for people to create an epic classroom? Because an epic classroom can be a staff meeting.

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: Where you've got to meet with your team on a weekly—

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: —basis. An epic classroom can be meeting with your kids. *[laughs]*

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: So there's all kinds of classrooms that we need to control—

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: —where we need to control the environment so that people are engaged and that they're learning the lesson. What advice do you have for people to do that?

Trevor: You know, I start with, "You have to be willing to do it different," you know? Meetings are supposed to be the boss stands at the front and gives all the information, and everybody listens, right?

Winn: And, "Does anybody have any problems?" *[laughs]*

Trevor: "Does anybody have any problems?" Yeah, sure, I'm going to really feel comfortable to raise my hand and speak up—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —in this situation.

Winn: Yeah, right.

Trevor: Or maybe a classroom is supposed to be: the teacher's at the front of the room, gives the information, you write it down.

Winn: A talking head.

Trevor: That's right. Or, you know, parenting: "Oh, I'm supposed to be the leadership figure here and you're supposed to just be subservient to whatever I do."

Winn: "I'm the know-it-all. I have every answer as your father."

Trevor: That's right. And so we've got this traditional way of doing things—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —that isn't actually effective sometimes.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: Not to say that there's not space for all of these principles. There's still room for that meeting where, you know, the leader stands up and talks but there's so much of it that is ineffective. And so I think the first step in, you know, creating epic learning experiences is being okay with doing it different than the status quo.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know, as a teacher, that creates friction—at least in the system I’m in. But usually any time you push against the system, there’s going to be pushback, right? There’s going to be friction. And I firmly believe that we have to—we have to push against systems.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: We’ve got to see which way they can go and that takes some courage. You know, there’s consequence for pushing against systems sometimes. There’s the risk of failure. When I talk about project ideas and things that we’ve done in the classroom, I usually give the nice, bow-tied version of it, about how it turned out. And sometimes—it’s easy to leave out the examples of when it’s crashed and burned and when it failed. But the truth is, sometimes when you do new things, and you try to innovate, it doesn’t go well the first time.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Right? But that’s all part of the story! You know, when it doesn’t go well, “Okay, well, the next time we do this, how do we need to pivot?”

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: “How do we need to iterate and figure out how do we make it work well?”

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: But it’s having the guts to allow it to fail if it needs to and being okay with that.

Winn: Actually, that’s one of our principles within our company is that failure is not fatal.

Trevor: Oh, I love it.

Winn: When it’s fatal—now that—there are some things that are fatal.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: You steal, you’re fired.

Trevor: That’s right.

Winn: But there’s some things that aren’t fatal and failure is not fatal because people need to be able to have the safety net, so to speak, to try something different. But I like this advice that—just be willing to do something different.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: So whatever that classroom for you is, whether it’s parenting or managing a team of people. One of the things that we tell people to do is to sit in a circle

so that we're breaking that norm of a talking head, an authority figure in the front of the classroom dictating ideas or announcements to the team.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: Sit in a circle, everybody. Now we're all equal, we're all facing each other. So just little things like that.

Trevor: And as a leader, that might be a tough thing to do, you know? Like you've worked this whole time getting to this level and now I'm putting myself back at the level of everybody else. But—and I'm sure at a leadership position, there's so much value when everybody's on the same level.

Winn: Have you ever read that book called *Flight of the Buffalo*?

Trevor: I haven't, no.

Winn: The whole idea of—in the early days, the way the settlers could decimate an entire herd of buffalo was all they had to do was kill the leader.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: And then all the other buffalo just stood around because without that leader, they didn't know where to go.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: They didn't know what to do so they just stood there and they could just kill off the entire herd—

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: —like that. And it's called *Flight of the Buffalo* because they likened it to, instead, a flock of birds.

Trevor: Okay.

Winn: You know, that fly in that V-formation and studies show that they can fly further and longer because of that synergy that they create. And they actually take turns being the leader so it's not the same bird that's in the front of the V, they actually take leaders—

Trevor: So is it the idea—

Winn: —'cause they take turns being that leader in that V.

Trevor: And they don't rely on one person—

Winn: No, they don't.

Trevor: —for the success of everybody else.

Winn: No, they don't.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: And they say if a goose drops to the ground, they're never left alone.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: Another goose will fly down to the ground to stay with them until they're well enough to rejoin the flock.

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: Well, and, you know, one time—the first school I ever worked at, we had this principal who just let us do whatever we needed to do to succeed. You know, and she always said, “My role here is to give you whatever you need to be successful.” And that was—that was it. And she's like, “If it's money, I'm going to find you money.”

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: “If it's like—if it's me having your back when somebody's trying to tear you apart or whether it's a parent or somebody else, I'm going to have your back. My job is to help you be successful.” And it was *glorious*.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: And we did all of this amazing stuff that was just changing our community and changing the world at large. And then she quit and we got a new leader, and hers was much more of that traditional path we were talking about.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: That, “Hey, this is a hierarchy and I'm at the top of the hierarchy.”

Winn: Right.

Trevor: “And you are not.” And in one year the school fell apart, seven people—

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: —you know, half the staff quit, myself included. Like people—it was like chopping the head off a snake. And so when you talk about the *Flight of the Buffalo*, it's, you know, maybe our team wasn't as strong as we thought they were—we were—because as soon as we got rid of the leader, it all kind of fell

to pieces. Whereas, you'd think that a strong team, it doesn't matter who the leader is, it's going to withstand, so.

Winn: I don't know if that was the lesson. *[laughs]*

Trevor: Yeah, I don't know.

Winn: I think the lesson was the importance of a really good, strong leader.

Trevor: Strong leader. Yup.

Winn: 'Cause leadership is about service, not about policing and—

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: —dictating. I mean, that's so old school.

Trevor: Yeah. Leadership is about service.

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: Yeah, so.

Winn: See, 'cause at the end of the day, that principal really wasn't in the classroom all day long.

Trevor: Nope.

Winn: Meaning, the end result is a happy student.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: A happy, engaged student who's graduating with good grades and the parents are happy, et cetera. That principal probably never interacted with the students in a classroom all day long. But the people who were (i.e., you), you weren't happy because that was her job.

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: Wow. Interesting.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: And that happens in business. That happens—

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: —in classrooms. That happens everywhere, which is why this topic is so important. So in the job that you quit, that you transitioned from, how often

were you in trouble in the classroom because you were making too much noise or, you know—what—'cause your students weren't, you know, sitting in rows, completely—

Trevor: That's right. *[laughs]*

Winn: —in line, taking notes.

Trevor: I was in trouble a lot.

Winn: Okay.

Trevor: And we're—I was in trouble as a teacher at the school.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Yeah, there—I mean, just crazy things were happening. You know, like, you know, one time my students, I challenged them, I said, "Hey, if we raise enough—if we collect enough shoes to give to refugees—" 'cause this was a different year. We'd done that refugee project I told you about—

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: —a lot of times. We were like, "What else can we do?" And we found out that refugees in Grand Rapids—cold Michigan—need shoes. And we learned that from a refugee coming in and saying, "One of the biggest needs we physically have is we don't have closed-toed shoes in the winter."

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: So my students said, "That's not right." And so I told them, "If we can collect enough shoes that we form a pile that will touch our eight-foot tall ceiling, I will do a polar plunge." So I'll go and jump—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: —in an ice lake, you know, as teachers do, right?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: So I said I'm going to do that. Then the kids were just so fired up about it and this one girl—her name was Hailey, I just don't forget it—under her desk she pulls out her phone and she emails the news. And she's like, "My teacher says he's going to do a polar plunge if we raise enough shoes, it's like 700 pairs of shoes. I just want like you to know about it." And the news goes and calls the front office of the school and they said, "We want to come and cover the story. This is the kind of stuff that, you know, the community loves. It's inspiring, it's funny, it's positive education." And I got a written letter in my file

for that and put on probation because my principal said that my students should not be contacting the media without following the proper protocols and what—

Winn: Oh, there's protocol now for—

Trevor: Oh, there's protocol for—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: —student engagement. You know, like—and so—

Winn: *[laughs]* Like you could stop them.

Trevor: As if I could say, “Hey! Why are you on your phone?”

Winn: Right.

Trevor: “You better not be emailing the—”

Winn: Right.

Trevor: “—media over there, are you?” You know what I mean?

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: And so it was fear because she was like, “Well, if we—if I'm not calling the media, I can't control the message. I can't—”

Winn: A fear-based culture.

Trevor: Oh, it's a fear-based—and so all of a sudden I'm getting in trouble and there was this new rule in the school that nobody can contact the media. Well, in the past, when I'm doing projects that are serving World War II veterans and doing all these huge, big things and contacting the media for everything 'cause that's just—I love—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —making things epic.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And now, “No, you may not.” And so—and then it was like that throughout the year. And then all of the sudden I'm like, *Gosh, now I'm actually afraid that my students are going to act out of line*, 'cause, you know, again I had nothing to do with Hailey doing that.

Winn: Wait, so did you ever do the polar plunge?

Trevor: Oh, hell yeah, I did.

Winn: Did they raise enough?

Trevor: Yeah, they touched the ceiling. But then—

Winn: *[laughs]* So how'd you get away with it, then?

Trevor: I just got in trouble. I don't know.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: I just said—

Winn: There you go.

Trevor: “—sorry.” *[laughs]*

Winn: I know.

Trevor: I don't know what to tell you.

Winn: That's been my philosophy for most of my life.

Trevor: *[laughs]*

Winn: I'd rather ask for forgiveness than permission 'cause—

Trevor: I know.

Winn: —I could never get permission and I knew I was always going to be in trouble so I'll just deal with that.

Trevor: And you know what? If what I'm doing has heart behind it, if there's a positivity behind it and I feel convicted that it's worth doing, I just usually do it. Yeah, forgiveness instead of permission. That's what it really came down to. If this inspires kids to collect shoes for refugees, then I'm going to do whatever it takes to make it happen. And, beyond just that, do you think my kids are ever going to forget that day that—

Winn: No.

Trevor: —I went outside and doused myself in 20 degree weather in the freezing water? They're never going to forget that.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: That's a story that's going to stick with them.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Like that's an experience. And then when we went back inside and I said, "Okay, now we're going to write five paragraph essays," or, "We're going to do whatever school is," you're going to do it 'cause you love—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —being in here. And I think that's a message for everybody. If your employees or your students or your kids are engaged in whatever it is that they're doing, they're going to be successful. Yeah.

Winn: I'm 60 now and I decided many years ago that if the future growth of my company was dependent upon me, we're in trouble.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: Now, if you asked me that question 10, 20, 30 years ago, 40 years—absolutely, it's up to me and I can take it on.

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: Not that I can't take it on now, 'cause I can, but I don't want to.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: I want it to be about the next generation and the generation after that, which means, you know, I don't want to have to do the work of 10 people, I want 10 people to do that work 'cause I empowered them to do that.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: I inspired them to do that. So I created a memory, I created a story—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —so that now they want to write that five-page essay and that's what—

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: —you were doing!

Trevor: That's right. Well, 'cause the truth is, I'm sure a lot of what—you know, just like anything, not everything's fun all the time. Not everything's like is desirable and engaging especially in a classroom but also in the workforce. I'm sure there's plenty that your cosmetologists and your school leaders have to do that isn't actually a blast to do.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: But—right?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And that's the nature of life. I can't stand paying taxes. I don't like changing dirty diapers. I don't like doing all these—I don't like sitting at the airport sometimes. You know, everybody thinks that it's sexy: you get to fly around and go and speak in new places. Yeah, sometimes it's fun but you know what isn't sexy? Like delayed flights.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Spending the night in Minneapolis 'cause I missed my connection.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know what I mean? Like there's these things but I love so much of it, I'm so inspired by so much of it, that I will put up with the mundane.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: I will put up with the headaches.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And I need—I've got to teach my students how to do that: "Listen, you're going to love the payoff of when you present those tools to actual refugees. That engagement is going to make you want—you're going to be okay with the tough parts."

Winn: Right.

Trevor: "With the challenges; with the rising action of the story."

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: So, that's the idea.

Winn: What's this work that you're doing with this Educational Design Expedition?

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: This international committee based in Holland? So tell me about this group and what's the mission, what's the purpose?

Trevor: Yeah, you know, it's people that, you know, it's just a group in Europe that's really trying to push for more realistic education. They've identified a lot of the problems that I've also identified and that I think all of us intuitively know is wrong with the education system of any kind. "Sit and get" doesn't work.

Motivating students just with grades does not work. That's why 20 percent of Americans don't graduate high school on time 'cause we're—our main motivator is grades. And so, you know, they asked me to come over there and help them rethink, you know, what does school need to look like? And so, you know, we just had a conference over there in January in the Netherlands where people from all over—from Germany, from Spain, from Italy, from England—kind of came together and it was just some really big discussions about how do we actually design education experiences.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And what I felt was really interesting about this is that nobody at this conference was treated as a quote-unquote teacher, which is usually—at least in our common terms—is somebody that delivers information.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: That gives information. You know, the idea is anyone who can't do, teaches, right? If you can't do it—

Winn: Right, right.

Trevor: —then you teach. But everybody at this big conference was treated as a designer, as an artist.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: Like how do we actually design experiences?

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: How do we take on the mindset of an artist rather than a quote-unquote teacher? And so, yeah, I was getting to be a part of that and help lead that actually and then bringing it back to America: how do we apply these same principles in the conversation over here? How do we view teachers as artists?

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know? Designers.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: Which I really believe teaching is a creative profession.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: I think it's inherently creative and to get somebody to be able to do something that they weren't able to do beforehand. You're working, you're making something out of nothing. I think that mindset's so important.

Winn: My daughter is in first grade and I tell the teachers all the time, 'cause I'm in the classroom a lot. I'm a—

Trevor: Are you really?

Winn: Oh, I'm a room parent.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: Of course I am. The only dad in the whole school; I'm a room parent.

Trevor: I love it.

Winn: Yeah. So I'm in there a lot and I'm always saying to them, "You know, there should be a tip jar in your classroom."

Trevor: *[laughs]*

Winn: As parents pick up their kids every single day, I just want to leave a tip—

Trevor: I love it! Yes!

Winn: —for those teachers—

Trevor: Huh-uh.

Winn: —because of what—

Trevor: Come on!

Winn: —I volunteer for an hour, I need to go home and take a nap. I'm exhausted.

Trevor: I know. And we're talking—

Winn: —And—

Trevor: —eight hours a day.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And that's only the time that you see—

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: —them. That's right.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: It's hard work. It's really difficult work, being a teacher. And in any industry, whether you're teaching high school; whether you're teaching, you know, beauty; whether you're teaching technical skills or—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —whatever it is. It's hard work 'cause you're dealing with people.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: You know, you're dealing with all the complexities that come with students and yet you still have this goal of teaching them very technical, complex information.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And so that takes work. That's creativity.

Winn: Do you know the facts on where the U.S. falls in terms of education systems on the planet?

Trevor: Yeah, I mean—

Winn: You're shaking your heads—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —right now.

Trevor: You know, like 18th—

Winn: You're like—

Trevor: —in math.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: You know, in other subjects it's not much better. And so—although—

Winn: Worldwide.

Trevor: Worldwide, yeah, we're 18th—although, a lot of that is because there's so much disparity in our country, as well. And so, you know, if you go and look at some of our best schools—and when I say best schools I mean test scores, and that's a whole different conversation. But a lot of those rankings come from how we assess—we're right there with Finland and the Scandinavian countries. But it's the schools that are being under-paid-attention-to or, you know, they're high-poverty areas or high-crime areas, you know, that's pulling that whole average down.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And so I think a big part of the conversation is (a) is how do we pay more attention to everybody in the education conversation? You know? Like how do we give more attention to these kids who've got a lot more going on in their minds than learning how to write essays and learning grammar and learning the Pythagorean theorem? How do we engage those kids?

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: But then the other thing is, is how are we actually assessing our schools? Are we paying all attention to, you know, that they learn the content—English, history, math or science—or are we also looking at essential skills, soft skills? You know, the stuff that actually *[laughs]* is valued.

Winn: We're going to get into that.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: We're going to totally get into that, soft skills. So, well, you brought it up: test scores.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: What's broken—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —with that system? You saw the documentary, *Race to Nowhere*?

Trevor: I did, yeah.

Winn: Yeah. Whoo.

Trevor: Mm-hm. I know. It's frightening stuff.

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: Well, the thing is, is test scores are such a small snapshot of the whole person, right? Like if you—and I'm just going to use myself as an example 'cause I know most about myself but I'm a very, very passionate person. You know, I love grabbing life by the horns and giving it everything I've got. And yet, according to the education system, I'm a very average person.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: Right? I'm near actually a failure of a person, if you looked at just my scores.

Winn: Scores.

Trevor: Right? But like I said, I am absolutely capable of learning new stuff and my favorite thing to do is learn and figure out what can I do with that knowledge?

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And getting excited about things. And I can work like a racehorse, you know what I mean? Like I love to grab life by the horns. And yet, if you look at just my SAT scores, oh, they were just enough to get me into a decent college.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: Right? If you look at my math scores, “Oh, you’re dumb.”

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: Right?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: “You’re not very smart.”

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Well, that’s not true.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: You know, that’s just not true. And I’ve seen it all over the place. I’ve got—

Winn: I can show you text messages that happened just like three nights ago—

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: —during math homework for a first grader—

Trevor: *[laughs]*

Winn: —where I’m texting back and forth with the teacher—

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: She’s like, “Would you like me to spend some extra time?” because I didn’t have the answer.

Trevor: Uh-huh.

Winn: I mean, I can run a \$500 million company—

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: —I barely graduated from high school but first-grade math, I'm like screwed.

Trevor: Yeah. But you're not screwed 'cause you're not actually even using that information anymore. And that's a whole other conversation. I mean, we can take this everywhere but—

Winn: Well, I think she got—there's probably only 10 answers and with my help I think—

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: —she got three or four of them wrong.

Trevor: Okay.

Winn: Thanks to dad.

Trevor: Yup, "Thanks, Dad."

Winn: And I just finally said, "I'm just going to her to school," 'cause I sent the homework to the teacher—

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: —said, "Here's the finished product." She said, "Four are wrong." I'm like, "You know what? I'm just going to send her that way."

Trevor: *[laughs]*

Winn: Because—you know what I mean?

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: 'Cause I could fix them right now because the teacher just told me what the right answer was but I'm not going to fix it right now.

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: Like I almost wanted my daughter just to go through that experience of—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —you got these wrong and what does that mean to her?

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: 'Cause the score doesn't matter to me and I don't know what that makes me as a dad. *[laughs]*

Trevor: Well, I think it makes you a human.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Because the truth is you just know that your daughter is so much more than a stupid test score. You know that. You've seen how much she is, and yet the school system is telling her that, "No, you are these test scores."

Winn: So how do we get—how did we get there?

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: How did we get there to where the score, the system of today is prominent, is so, so—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —important?

Trevor: I think a lot of it came from legislation and people making these decisions that were not qualified to make these decisions.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know, you look at some of that early 2000s, the Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind. It was all about scoring schools and rewarding schools—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —based on test scores. And so, you know, you'd have a school that's in a really high-income area where every parent is going to invest a tutor for their kid and they're going to make sure their kids go to school and every kid's eating a meal before school and has a nice lunch packed and has dinner. And those kids are all taken care of. Well, guess what? They're going to do better on tests.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And then you go to a low-income area where kids only eat food when they're at school so they only get the school-provided breakfast and lunch. They don't eat dinner at night. They don't eat dinner on the weekends. You know, in Kent County where I live in Michigan, one in five kids are hungry and those kids are distracted when they get to school. They're thinking about having to like go home and raise their little brothers and sisters. They're thinking about, *How am I going to clean up all the drugs on the ground before my friends*

*come over 'cause my mom's passed out on the couch.* Those kids are not doing as well on tests.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And yet, what this education system does, it says, “Okay, that school is not teaching as good so therefore, we’re going to penalize it. We’re not going to give bonuses to that school. We’re going to give bonuses to the schools that are getting good test scores.” Well, those good test scores have good families, quote-unquote good families.

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: And—you know what I mean? And so it’s like this broken system. And so what happens is, is that those schools that are already suffering are going to suffer more when they really need more help. You know what I mean? They’ve got way bigger issues that they’re dealing with and the schools that are doing well just get to keep doing better and better.

Winn: Well—

Trevor: And so it’s a broken system.

Winn: So that we’re not pissed off by the time we end this—*[laughs]*

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —this interview, let’s get into what that change needs to look—

Trevor: Uh-huh.

Winn: —like then. So do you see the education system changing to fit the modern world?

Trevor: Okay, I do.

Winn: Okay. Tell us about it.

Trevor: Because I really do believe in teachers and I believe that parents also want these things, you know. And I know it’s jumping ahead a little bit but about the soft skills, essential skills is, you know, I wrote an article about soft skills. Like and it was essentially the premise was I’d just read this article on LinkedIn about how the number-one reasons that millennials get fired is that they don’t possess essential soft skills, the stuff that actually matters. They don’t know how to communicate. They don’t know how to critically think and problem-solve. They’re having trouble with confidence and collaboration. All the things that I’m sure you know.

Winn: Something as simple, they can't make eye contact.

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: They can stare at a device—

Trevor: Yes!

Winn: —but they—

Trevor: You know, or they run into a problem and they don't know how to fix it without somebody telling them what to do.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And so that's why people are getting fired. We all know this and so I wrote this article, it was "Stop Calling Them Soft Skills," 'cause there's nothing soft about getting fired. And it got shared like 200,000 times.

Winn: Yeah, I read it.

Trevor: Whoa! It was something I spent 20 minutes writing the stupid thing.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And it's gone nuts, which tells me we all know—not even deep inside—we all know right out on the surface what's important and what school should be doing. And yet the system is still not allowing that. And I feel like with this many people knowing what the problem is, you know—and I mean anybody—everybody that owns a business knows that we need more employees that are more employable and have these skills.

Winn: Oh yeah.

Trevor: Anybody that has a kid knows that they want a kid who can look you in the eye and shake your hand and show up on time and work hard and not complain when asked to stay a little later, whatever it is. We all know this and I feel like that there's only going to be a natural reaction to this knowledge.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And I'm already seeing it. You know, there's a lot of teachers doing way cooler stuff than I'm doing with their students. There's schools popping up all over the place like the XQ Schools and the Alt School by Facebook. And, you know, just a regular public school in Byron Center, Michigan, that's adding a whole career aspect to senior year. Like there's things that are happening and moving and I just think we have to keep pushing. Like I said earlier, we've got to push and see how far we can push it.

Winn: So talk more about soft skills. And, by the way, I did read that article—

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: —that you wrote.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: So talk more about that.

Trevor: Yeah, I mean, it's been interesting, you know? When I started teaching, I started working with kids about 10 years ago, obviously there was still some struggles where—this was before everybody owned smart phones and before social media was as prevalent. You know, the first group of students I ever had, none of them—like their parents didn't allow them to go on Snapchat or Facebook or Instagram. Well, you know, flash-forward just a decade—not even—*everybody* has—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —everybody's inundated with this technology. Everybody's solving their problems by asking Alexa and Siri rather than trying to figure them out themselves. And you can just see that these soft skills, these essential skills, are getting chipped away more and more and more. You know, I talked to my stepfather, he runs this big business in Nashville, Tennessee, he just says, "I can't find employees."

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: "I cannot find people who are willing to cold-call and pick up the phone and talk to people. And not even just sell but just like talk to people about the business. They're afraid to do that." And so as an educator, I'm like, *Okay, this is a problem. [laughs]* You know, this is clearly something that our society needs. Well then, let's do something about it, let's tie in essential skill training in schools. And does that mean that we need to have a soft skills class? No, I think English class should be teaching soft skills.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: I think math class, algebra class should be teaching soft skills, right? Like I think—

Winn: You mean, all those topics—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —should be applicable into the lives we live today, the world—

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: —that we live in today.

Trevor: That's right. You know, if you go to a Paul Mitchell School, you're learning how to do hair but you're—you know, I was looking at your textbook. Like there's a whole chapter on soft skills.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Right? Like, you know, and so, yeah, we're going to teach you how to do hair and makeup and whatever, you know, massage and all that other stuff but you're also going to learn how to listen to people and talk to them. And you're going to learn to have confidence and you're going to have work ethic and—you know what I mean? And you're going to have all of these essential skills—

Winn: Well, as you say those are—

Trevor: —I don't want to call them soft skills.

Winn: —those are the things you can get fired because you don't have those skills—

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: —but they're also the skills that could get you hired.

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: That could give you the opportunity. Well, maybe we should start talking then about social media. And I'm sure that this is something that you're dealing with in middle school and in high school, you know, young kids—putting iPhones into the hands of children.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: I think as children—I watched this thing last night and Bill and Melinda Gates were saying that they didn't put iPhones into the hands of their kids until they were 14 and they even regret doing that.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: They felt like it should have been later, like 16 or 18, before they got an iPhone. And then they were featuring—like they had two cameras: one was a camera on a high school class that allows cell phones and one on a high school campus where they don't allow—

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: —iPhones in the lunchroom. And just the difference: night and day in terms of the interaction and the conversations and the engagement—

Trevor: Yes.

Winn: —and the fun in the high school. And they were interviewing the kids, you know—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: “Yeah, it really pissed us off that they said we couldn’t have our iPhones anymore but now, you know, I have a better relationship with my friends. I have more friends. We have more deep conversations. We have—” It was better because no iPhones.

Trevor: You know, I was talking to a friend of mine who drops their kid off at elementary school every day and because they’re a teacher, they have to drop off an hour early. And so the kids can go into the gym and they can go play volleyball or basketball—and these are elementary students—kickball, whatever it is. And she says every day when she walks her daughter in there; the walls are just lined with kids on iPads—

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: —and nobody’s playing.

Winn: Nobody’s talking.

Trevor: Nobody’s running around.

Winn: Wow.

Trevor: Nobody’s learning how to compete. Nobody’s getting into fights. Not that I’m encouraging fights but nobody’s—like nobody’s figuring out conflict. Nobody’s flirting with girls and boys and doing all the things that kids are supposed to be doing, that’s forming their brains and helping them become humans. They’re just sitting on games and playing and it’s like there’s going to be a consequence to that. Actually, I think we’re already seeing the consequence to that.

Winn: Oh, I think we are.

Trevor: We’ve got this country that’s just tearing itself to pieces and everybody’s doing it on the Internet.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know? Like nobody's actually—you know, nobody's figuring out how to deal with this stuff. We're just diverting ourselves, our attention, to social media and I think—I don't think it's good.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: Can you imagine if I was on my phone the whole time we've been talking right now?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: How much less of a conversation it would be?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: It wouldn't be nearly as strong.

Winn: So obviously this enters your world in the career that you have—

Trevor: Yes.

Winn: —to help people create epic classrooms.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: How are you dealing with this? What's the advice? What's the input that you're providing for people on this?

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: It scares the heck out of me.

Trevor: Sure does.

Winn: Mainly because, am I on the phone too much? Oh, absolutely.

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: And I'm working on that. I'm reminded of it 'cause I have a daughter. I watch TED Talks about it.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: I'm on my iPhone watching videos about how I should not be on my iPhone.

Trevor: Watching videos.

Winn: There you go.

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: Yeah, there you go.

Trevor: *[laughs]*

Winn: *[laughs]* So I'm trying to get better at it.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: And I am better today than I was even a couple of months ago—

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: —about really, really limiting my time.

Trevor: That's great, yeah.

Winn: But this is probably something that comes up in your world a lot.

Trevor: Yeah. Well, and I think the answer for me is, you know, I can try to develop discipline but if I'm doing it on my own, it's going to be really hard to develop whatever that discipline is. I need tools that help me do that.

Winn: Okay.

Trevor: You know, I'm working on my second book right now. It's all about collaboration and getting people to work together and how do you actually teach people to collaborate.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And it is—I mean, you know, it's hard work to sit down and write a book.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: Right? You're creating 250 pages out of nothing.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: And so I have to like remove myself from my house. I have a downstairs office but I've got a five- and a three-year-old and they're not in school yet so I hear *[makes thumping noises]*. You know what I mean?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: All this stuff?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And it's really difficult to work there. And so what do I have to do? I have to go to the public library and I have to like put on headphones and I've got to create a space where I know I'm going to work better.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: I just know myself. If I don't create that discipline, I won't do it. And so it's the same with phones. I wish I could just say to every student I ever have, "Hey listen, you're grown up or you're getting older, I just trust you to just not pull your phone out." But I just know that doesn't work.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And so, me—maybe this is against my generation a little bit, but I say, "No phones allowed in my class."

Winn: And how does that go? *[laughs]*

Trevor: It's the rule.

Winn: Right. *[laughs]* Okay.

Trevor: And—you know what I mean? And it's the rule and I discuss why. It's not because I said so. It's not because I have this ego like, "Oh, I do not want you on your phone if I'm talking to you."

Winn: Right.

Trevor: It's because I know from experience how distracting these things can be and so I'm going to help you with this and give you some accountability and say, "If I see you on it like I'm going to remind you but if I see it again, then we're going to have to have a conversation about it—"

Winn: Right.

Trevor: "—and maybe even take it away from you." And I know that sounds old school because there's this whole movement of like, "Okay, well how do we figure out how to use phones in school?" Which I think there's space for. You know, if my students are trying to translate their notecards for refugees into Swahili, and the best way to do that is to call somebody, of course you can pull your phone out. Now it's a utility. But if we're in conversation with other people or, hey, if I'm giving you really important information, or if we're creating something, it's just not going to help you to be on Instagram.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And so you're not allowed to be on Instagram.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And so it's about creating structure. It's the same with myself. When I get home every day from work and I want to be present with my kids, I have a drawer that I put my phone in and I lock it in there because I know—

Winn: Do you really?

Trevor: —if it's in my pocket—yes! 'Cause if it's in my pocket, I'm going to answer it.

Winn: See, I put mine—

Trevor: There's too many people trying to get a hold of me.

Winn: —in water and then I freeze it in the freezer.

Trevor: *[laughs]*

Winn: No, I don't do that.

Trevor: Well, wouldn't you be a—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: —badass if you did though?

Winn: Isn't that what they say you're supposed to do with a credit card if you're trying to like—

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: You freeze your credit card in an ice cube and so by the time it thaws out; hopefully you've lost the urge to spend—

Trevor: Or it was like the moms in high school—

Winn: —something.

Trevor: —if you went to their house, they'd freeze your car keys. You know, it was those moms, like, "I don't care if you drink but I'm going to freeze your car keys."

Winn: Oh, I didn't—I never heard that one.

Trevor: Now you're looking back and you're like, "Wow, you were cutting-edge weren't you?" *[laughs]*

Winn: *[laughs]* That's right. Okay, so I'm sure you get kickback on this, you know, no cell phones. 'Cause I've heard it just the rumblings, "No, my kid, my first-grader, has to have a cell phone—"

Trevor: Ugh.

Winn: "—just in case something happens and I can reach them."

Trevor: Yup.

Winn: And I'm in the back of my head thinking, *How the heck did I survive?* *[laughs]*

Trevor: *[laughs]* That's with everything!

Winn: Right.

Trevor: How did—we all made it.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: I mean, you've been here—

Winn: I was—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —bouncing in the back of the station wagon—

Trevor: That's right. I used to ride between my parents—

Winn: —with no seat belts and somehow I—

Trevor: —in the front seat and I used to ride in the back of my dad's truck down the interstate.

Winn: Right, right.

Trevor: And the truth is, a lot of kids didn't make it.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Right? Like, you know what I mean?

Winn: So we had to have laws but I—but parents kickback, "No, my child has to have that cell phone on them." And my daughter has—

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: —you know those little GizmoWatches?

Trevor: Yes.

Winn: So she has one of those.

Trevor: So she does. I've heard about those just recently.

Winn: Yeah, it has GPS on it.

Trevor: Mm-hm. Brilliant.

Winn: We can limit—I think there's four people that can call her, you know, her dads, her nanny, her grandma.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: Her godmother. She can't—there's no camera on it.

Trevor: Okay, that was—

Winn: So she can't take photos on it. There's no Internet. That's the main thing: there's no Internet.

Trevor: Some creeper can't—

Winn: No.

Trevor: —talk to her. I mean, 'cause that's—

Winn: Correct.

Trevor: —the other big fear. I've got—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —stories, tons of stories.

Winn: So there's—there is a better way to be able to—

Trevor: So that's what I was talking about.

Winn: —track your child.

Trevor: I'm helping you, you know what I mean? I'm helping create that discipline because there's going to come a day where your little girl does not need that type of accountability. Or she's not going to want it and you're going to have to, at some point, say, "Okay—"

Winn: Right.

Trevor: “—you’re old enough to where I can’t make you do this. Well now, hopefully, you’re equipped to know that life can operate without being on your phone all the time.”

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: You know, that, “Hopefully this training and teaching has taught you that you can do it now.”

Winn: Well, let’s go back to storytelling.

Trevor: Yes.

Winn: So what do stories have to do with thriving in life?

Trevor: Hm. I think if you’re thriving in life, you’re living out a great story. You know, Joseph Campbell was this mythologist and he studied all of the great stories throughout history and he calls it the hero’s journey. And essentially what the hero’s journey is, if you’ve got this hero who lives in their ordinary world, this is what the world looks like; whether it’s good or bad, this is what the world looks like for them. But then something happens that draws them out of the ordinary world—the problem, it’s disrupted—and the whole journey is about encountering obstacles and encountering mentors and going through some type of death and transformation so that you can return to the ordinary world with what Joseph Campbell calls the gift of the goddess or the return with the elixir. You know, all the challenges of the story made you better so that you could take that problem on.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: Like, you know, *Lion King*, you’ve got Simba that lives in this great space and his dad’s always there to protect him; even if you get attacked by a hyena, your dad’s there to protect you. But then his dad died and now he’s pulled out of the ordinary world and the whole journey is about figuring out who he is so that he can face his demons. That’s what an epic life is.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know? That you’re not afraid to get drawn out of the ordinary and when you encounter conflict, you embrace it; you do something about it so that you can face down whatever gets in your way.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know? Have you ever read Richard Rohr?

Winn: No.

Trevor: Oh, he's brilliant and he just talks about how there's two halves of life. There's the half of life where you try to figure out who you are and then there's the second half life where you're like, *You know what? I know who I am. I'm not about ambition anymore. I do things for another reason.*

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know, *I do it for fullness.* And, you know, he talks about most people don't actually make it to the second half of life. They're always chasing and chasing and chasing instead of just living in it. And he talks about the best way to get the second half of life is through tragedy, is through heartbreak, is through conflict. And, you know, and I won't even say I'm necessarily to the second half of life yet. And he says it usually happens in your 30s and I don't know if that's true or not but it usually takes some really tough challenges in order to make that transition to where you're not caring about, *What do other people think of me? Or, How much money do I need to make? Or, What ladders do I need to climb?* Instead, you're just living into whatever life is. And so, what do stories have to do? How do you recognize the story that you live in?

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: Right?

Winn: You're a parent now.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: You have a three-year-old and a five-year-old.

Trevor: Yes.

Winn: Boys? Girls? What have you got?

Trevor: Yeah. Jack is five and Piper's three.

Winn: A boy and a girl.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: Okay. So how much of this has changed—

Trevor: Oh!

Winn: —if we're talking about—*[laughs]*

Trevor: You know, I—that's—

Winn: —being a dad? Like, especially talking about we have to deal with conflict and we have to deal with tragedy. As dads, we're like, *Oh my gosh, I've got to make sure there is no*—what do they call them now? They're not helicopter—

Trevor: Helicopter—the lawnmower parents.

Winn: —they're not—lawnmower parents! We're going to just wipe out any—  
[laughs]

Trevor: Yup, yup.

Winn: —threat.

Trevor: I'm going to cut down any grass in front of you—

Winn: Exactly.

Trevor: —so you have a nice smooth path to walk on.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And so I'm such a hypocrite because the truth is—

Winn: [laughs]

Trevor: —I will do anything to keep my kids—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —from having to experience—

Winn: From tragedy.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: Absolutely. You know, like I'll see him climbing this tower and I'm like, gosh, I know at his age I was climbing towers like this and here I am. But I'm like, *But if he slips and falls backwards, he's going to break an arm or even worse.*

Winn: No, we've already dealt with that. We—

Trevor: Have you already?

Winn: Oh yeah, broken arm.

Trevor: Oh!

Winn: Yeah—I've never broken a bone, not one bone in my—

Trevor: Your whole life.

Winn: —60-year-old body—

Trevor: *[laughs]*

Winn: —and yet, at seven years old—six years old—she breaks her arm.

Trevor: Yeah. And you don't want that to happen. You know, you don't want those things to happen.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: But, you know, scar tissue is stronger than the original bone.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Right? Like and so—yeah, that's going to be a tough thing. You know, my kids are still young enough that I think it's still okay to shield them from stuff. But at some point, I'm going to have to let back and realize, *You know what? I've got to let them live out a story.*

Winn: Based on the training and the education that you're providing to teach teachers, real teachers, teachers who have that as a career, how to create a better classroom environment, and now that you're a parent, are people asking you now parental advice? Your expertise, does that now spill into the parental world, as well?

Trevor: Yeah, I kind of have a hard rule that I'm not going to give any parental advice until kids are out of the home.

Winn: Okay. *[laughs]*

Trevor: You know what I mean? 'Cause—

Winn: Right.

Trevor: —I think people love to throw out how to parent and I just think there's so many ways to do it and there's so many ways to be a great one. All I can talk about is what I actually do. You know what I mean? If people ask like, "Hey, how do you get kids to listen so well?" I'm like, "Well, this is what I do." You know what I mean?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: Like this is what it looks like for Jack and Piper. And, you know, my goal—when you're a parent, you just—you start caring so much more about them than you do yourself.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: Right? And just giving them the greatest life possible and just soaking up every minute of it. Like I don't know how I have a five-year-old. It felt like he was just born. And, you know, they give such a marker for life, like if there's—there's such—it's almost like the clock's ticking faster all of a sudden so I just want to soak up as much as I can of life now. 'Cause it just goes quick and you don't get the time back.

Winn: So on your Facebook page, which is called the Epic Classroom, I watched a couple of the videos that you have created and posted there. What are some of your favorites? And what are the messages of those?

Trevor: Yeah. About three years ago now, I borrowed my friend's camera for something. I was going to film like a short course and I had a camera sitting there and I was thinking about this really rough learning experience I had in sixth grade. And I was like, *Oh, you know, it'd be funny to just tell that story on the camera.*

Winn: You were in sixth grade—

Trevor: So I—

Winn: —or you were teaching sixth grade?

Trevor: So I was in sixth grade—

Winn: Okay.

Trevor: —and, you know, this teacher liked shamed me in front of everybody and it started this whole downward spiral throughout life in math. Like it was this math class, he made me hate math, and it made me hate math the rest of my life.

Winn: Wait, how did he shame you—

Trevor: Okay, well, it's a whole—

Winn: —about math?

Trevor: —story. I mean, so when I was in sixth grade—

Winn: I just want to make sure I'm not already shaming my daughter about—

Trevor: Well, it—

Winn: —math.

Trevor: But it wasn't even math and that's—

Winn: She shamed me the other night, I want you to know. She knew the answer. But anyway, that's another story. Okay.

Trevor: Well, and it wasn't even really a math thing. You know, I was in his class and I was asking my friend about like who he thought was hotter, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, you know, pretty good question to ask in 1996 kind of thing.

Winn: Right, okay.

Trevor: And so *[laughs]* I asked him that and the teacher stops class and he just called me out in front of everybody. And they had this incentive system where you could earn money in class from doing good; they called them flamingo bucks. And, you know, so I amassed all this money and I was excited to go and buy like a waterproof Walkman or something and then I talked and he like—and he called me out in front of everybody and then he took all of the money I raised the whole year and just took it from me. And he said, "Oh, you shouldn't have talked in my class," and the whole class stared at me and then we got to the auction at the end of the week and he made me sit in the back of the lunchroom and watch the whole thing happen from afar. I mean, just—it was a shaming moment.

Winn: This is abusive.

Trevor: Oh, it was terrible.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: It was awful.

Winn: Where is he today?

Trevor: I—you know what? I don't know. And—

Winn: I hope he's sitting in one of your audiences.

Trevor: Well—

Winn: I hope he read your book.

Trevor: You know what was funny is I was just down in Florida—which is where I grew up—and I actually spoke in my hometown recently. Just randomly. They didn't even know I was from there. And so I went and spoke in my hometown in front of this whole crowd and I'm telling this story. I don't tell names.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: But I'm telling this story and there's a lady in the crowd and she came up afterward. She's like, "Hey, was that teacher so-and-so?" I said, "Yeah, it was," and she goes, "That's my husband." I'm like *[yells]* "Oh!" *[laughs]*

Winn: Oh no! My gosh! Really?

Trevor: I was like, "Well—" and here—so here's the whole point of the story—

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: Here's the point of the story: he—

Winn: Well, finish the wife story.

Trevor: Okay.

Winn: Did that play out okay? Was she okay with it?

Trevor: Well, this is what I said to her.

Winn: Okay, okay.

Trevor: I mean, she—well so—and I even said it in my talk, too—but no—I mean, she was like, "Oh, that's so rough. I'm going to have to tell him." I was like, "Well, don't tell him that," because here's the whole point of the story.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: That guy was probably—he's probably seen this kid talk out in class before and wasn't in the mood to deal with it and he dealt with it like that and he probably went home that night and wrestled with his kids on the floor and had dinner and read a book and went on with his life, probably having no idea that he helped tip this domino in part of my life's trajectory. I hated his class from then on. I did everything I could to get under his skin and so therefore I failed sixth-grade math.

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: I wasn't paying attention anymore. I hated the man.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: So in seventh grade, I was behind in math. I wasn't ready to be in that class, so I struggled again. Eight grade, struggled again, all through high school, into college. I failed college algebra. And it all really started—

Winn: In sixth grade.

Trevor: —with this really negative experience. And so my point was: that same year of middle school, I had another teacher—I will say his name, his name was Mr. Peters. And, you know, I remember the week that I had to decide which parent I wanted to live with in court and my dad was going to find out that I didn't want to live with him and my world was just falling apart. And I'm sitting in his English class and I hated life at that time, and Mr. Peters comes up to me afterwards, after all the kids leave the room, and he goes, "Hey, I heard that your parents are splitting up right now." I said, "Yup." And he goes, "I just want you to know that my parents split up when I was in sixth grade and it was really, really hard for me." And I just sat there. And he's like, "How are you?" And like all these kids are piling up to get into the class and he's like, "They can sit out in the hallway. I don't care." And he just sat there for 15 minutes with this broken kid, just letting me tell my story and he told me his story. And he started doing that every day after class and now I'm an English teacher.

Winn: *[laughs]*

Trevor: Are you with me? Right!? Like and that's the domino. And so my point of that story is, is that we don't—teachers, any type of teacher, whether you're a high school teacher, whether you're a parent, whether you're a pastor, whether you teach in a technical school, whatever, the impact you have is going to have a lasting impact, whether you know it or not.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: And so let's be aware of that. And—and so, I told this story on this video and people loved it. You know?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: And people are like, "Oh! Finally, somebody's telling true stories from the classroom—"

Winn: Right.

Trevor: "—and being raw about it." And, you know, like I have done some real—like I've made some big mistakes with kids before, calling out kids that spent the night in the hospital the night before. Not knowing that and shaming them and realizing, *Oh gosh, I can screw up, too.* And so it's sharing those stories and telling teachers, "Hey, you're going to screw up and that's okay."

Winn: Right.

Trevor: But just know that you're going to have an impact on kids and so dig into their lives, engage them in that way. So I started making videos on it and people started watching the videos and then one of them got millions and all of a sudden I grew this big audience out of nowhere. I mean, I'm just like a high

school teacher and all of a sudden now I've got over 100,000 people like following me every day and all this stuff. And so I started making these videos and it just kind of turned into like, okay, how do I inspire teachers? How do I push teachers? How do I like push them to keep trying new things and not being afraid to do that? And then also, how do we support teachers? You know, 'cause it's hard work and we've got a system that's not set up for them. And we've got a society that doesn't always pay them the respect they deserve. And we've got politicians who don't respect them nearly enough either. And so I just try to be a voice in whatever way I can to support the hard work that they're doing. 'Cause that work is not just for students, it's for society, you know? If you've got an area that's got really good schools, there's going to be low poverty and low crime in those areas. If you've got an area with bad schools, you're going to see high poverty, high crime. It affects everybody.

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: You know, that's why you've got some states where they put very little money into education and then they have high crime and they wonder like, *Gosh, why do we have all this crime?* 'Cause you're not taking care of your schools. Right? So, any way that I can be a voice for that and support that is what I'm going to do. And I found social media is a really great place for that.

Winn: This book that you're writing on collaboration, why that book? Why that topic?

Trevor: 'Cause, you know, all politics aside, our country is not collaborating very well right now.

Winn: *[laughs]* You think?

Trevor: You know?

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: People don't know how to disagree with each other and continue to work.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: You know, people think tolerance is having to like agree all the time when really it's how do we disagree and still have a productive relationship?

Winn: Right.

Trevor: How do we give each other critical feedback? Like you said, earlier, I love that when she asked if you have any feedback. You weren't like, "No! It's perfect!" I mean, you were like, "Do you want some real feedback?" And so we've got all the—like how do we actually collaborate in that way? And, you know, and use our creative powers, you know, in the best way possible. And so I think

we've got to teach that. I think we've got to be intentional about it. And right now, most classrooms—not all, but most classrooms in America are very individual-minded: individuals getting to the next level, individuals getting the grade, the individuals going to college. When really it needs to be this corporate mindset: how do we take care of each other? How do we solve problems using all of our brains?

Winn: You're so right because it's collaboration in the workforce that absolutely produces higher profits and employee loyalty and customer loyalty. It's—I mean, if you're the smartest, most talented person at work, I feel sorry for you. *[laughs]*

Trevor: That's right! Uh-huh. You're not surrounding yourself—

Winn: No.

Trevor: —with the right people then.

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: You know, I just talked to—as I was interviewing for this book—an engineer for Google. I mean, and she—so she's doing all of this really complex math. I mean, the kind of stuff that would make us want to like curl up into a ball. So she's doing all this very complex math and she's working with these systems analysts and trying to figure out the best ways for Google to operate in certain ways and I said, "Do you do much collaboration in your work at Google?" She's like, "Oh, 70 percent of the work we do is collaborative."

Winn: Hm.

Trevor: "And you know, and that's why we have all these big open spaces and pool tables and all those things that we talk about." And I was like, "Do they do that just for company morale? Like is that to make everybody feel good?" She's like, "Google's a corporation that wants to make a lot of money and they would not do anything that isn't going to affect the bottom line in a positive way." And so there's no false collaboration at something as high-stakes as Google. They collaborate because it's productive, because there's strength in combining brains. You know, we're going to have fewer problems and encounter less resistance when we're collaborating. And so—and she's like, "So we have to be able to collaborate, which is not good for me, as a math person, because I was a really good student and I was very good at taking care of myself." So she's like, "There was a big learning curve when I got to a company like this to learn how to work with people because so much of my life has been done individually." So I'm writing a book on how do we teach people to do that?

Winn: Wow. Today's one of those days where I wish MASTERS was video and not just audio.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: So that people could watch you, 'cause you're very animated—

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: —as you speak and you're, you know, it's obvious that you—not only are you passionate, they can hear that in your voice, but that you really believe this.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: That this isn't just a job for you, you're on a mission.

Trevor: That's right. It is a mission. I think we should all be on missions, right?

Winn: Oh yeah.

Trevor: I think we should all be on a mission, no matter what kind of work you do.

Winn: Have a purpose.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: Have a why to everything that you do in life.

Trevor: Hm.

Winn: Wow. So what do you see for yourself in the next—I mean, you're young.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: You look even younger.

Trevor: Good. *[laughs]*

Winn: So— *[laughs]* What do you see for yourself?

Trevor: I just want to keep doing what I'm getting to do. You know, I love to say yes and see what opportunities show up in front of me. And so, it's been really neat. You know, I'm working at a university part-time so I'm still getting to be in a regular classroom and working with students. It's higher ed but it's still getting people ready for the rest of life and—

Winn: Mm-hm.

Trevor: —making learning epic for them. So I get to do that and that helps me stay grounded. I want to continue to do that but, you know, the more—and this is just, I guess, a life lesson—the more you put out there, the more opportunities that show up, you know? If I, you know, get it—you know, writing that soft

skills article has opened the doors to so many opportunities. Like, wow, one thing went really well and it was just another thing—you know, I put out two pieces of content a week and all of a sudden like I get to—here I am with you in Beverly Hills.

Winn: Right.

Trevor: I'm going to Columbia in a couple of months to talk about soft skills. Like it just opens doors. So, I just want to see what's next. I don't know.

Winn: Hm. Good for you.

Trevor: It's fun.

Winn: And, by the way, just so our listeners know, we never met until 10 minutes ago.

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: Face-to-face.

Trevor: Mm-hm.

Winn: We've been back and forth in email and phone calls and stuff. And I obviously became aware of you because of your TED Talk and your soft skills article and watching some of your videos and stuff. But that's what I did, is I took a chance. And this is a huge chance for me because the best of the best from my company are sitting in that room there where you're going to presenting in about three hours, right?

Trevor: That's right.

Winn: So, but—

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: —this is what we do. You know, we find topics and mentors and heroes that we feel like, *Wow, they're passionate about this*, and this is a topic that I think that all of us really need to be passionate about: just the idea of collaboration and engagement and storytelling. I just love storytelling.

Trevor: Yeah.

Winn: It just builds relationships and builds rapport like nothing else can do.

Trevor: Mm-hm. Yeah and, you know, as a speaker, you know that like the best way to engage a crowd is tell stories to them, right?

Winn: Yep.

Trevor: Like if you really want people to lean in and dig what you have to say, then just tell them good stories.

Winn: Yeah.

Trevor: So.

Winn: This is great.

Trevor: Well thanks, Winn. I'm inspired by you, as well.

Winn: Trevor, do you have a final message for our listeners?

Trevor: Yeah. You only get to live one time as far as we know, right? And so let's soak up every minute of it, you know? And not that you have to enjoy every minute of it but, you know, just—I think it's so important to keep our ear to the ground to what's happening and just, you know, trusting our instinct to go where it takes us. Whether you, you know, clean rooms for a living, or landscape yards, or do people's hair, or teach students, whatever it is: life is this big unfolding adventure but it only really is an adventure if you choose for it to be. So, I think it's just a mindset. And I'm enjoying it so far.

Winn: Beautiful. Well, thank you for living an epic life and creating your epic story and then sharing those skills with us.

Trevor: I appreciate it.

Winn: Good job.

Trevor: Thanks for talking!