

The Power of the 'GAP' in Communication – Improve Relationships, Projects & Profitability

Mick Slatter Interview Episode 02

Matt Jones: [00:00:00] Good day, Jonsey here. Welcome to Power Up Your Business Podcast. On this episode, we speak to Mick Slatter.

Mick Slatter: [00:00:06] Going home the day that you've been told that you could potentially lose your house is probably, it's one of, it's not the worst time, but it's definitely one of those times that I liken to getting hit in the face with a brick.

Matt Jones: [00:00:20] Hear more from Mick where he shares his story, transitioning from the depths of despair while operating his tradie business to now educating and teaching tradies how to reduce risk in their business. Today's episode is brought to you by the Cube software platform, assisting business owners how to plan, market and improve their financial decision making. To find out more about the Cube go to www.thecube.network and click Request a demonstration. Now.

Matt Jones: [00:01:20] Hello and welcome to this episode of Power Your Business Podcast. I'm your host Matthew Jones and I'm here with my cohost Craig "Bush" Markham.

Craig Markham: [00:01:29] Good morning, how are you Jonesy?

Matt Jones: [00:01:30] Good thanks Bush. Great to have Michael Slater in the studio today, brings a wealth of business experience, a colourful story of both highs and lows. Currently Michael manages an engineering firm and business services operation across Asia Pacific. Sydney office has 80 staff. Michael also provides adult education and lecturing plumbers at TAFE relating to mentoring as well as how to get their best out of their business and also contract administration. Michael has a passion for assisting other tradies to be successful in life. Michael has got a great story operating and struggling a sole trader plumbing business. Like a lot of the listeners who gone through the struggles, the highs and lows of operating a business by themselves. Then went into a failed partnership operation with another business owner, who was an alcoholic. This led to a bit of the depths of depression and frustration. We see a lot of it from a business owner perspective where you start a business hoping for it to be all good fairytale ending but often ends in that depression mode. Obviously we're keen to really dig into that Michael shortly. Through that depression really had to look internally, seek out professional help, seek out the right support and then really found a calling in life. This has really led you into this journey. Welcome Michael.

Mick Slatter: [00:02:49] Good morning. Good afternoon. Thank you. I think the podcast is done. I think you just covered everything that we were going to talk about.

Craig Markham: [00:02:55] It's his biggest entry to date so you should be proud.

Mick Slatter: [00:02:59] I'm feeling pumped up.

Matt Jones: [00:03:00] It was a great story.

Craig Markham: [00:03:01] It is. Jonsey and I talked about it. This needs to be told and it's inspirational as well.

Matt Jones: [00:03:05] The whole principle and the outcome of what we want to do with this podcast is to actually provide inspirational stories. For business owners out there for tradies out there listening. It's not always about just opening a business and having success. **There is a lot of**

highs and lows and your testament to rebounding from a low end really going for that self searching, "What am I about?"

Mick Slatter: [00:03:25] Yes, sure. I think that's something you don't sort of sit out with the intent. I think it just sort of grows. You get times in your life where things are hard and that's probably when your focus is at its best. Then you get times when you laugh, when everything's singing along nicely and you're not looking forward because you think well everything's great. As we break down, parts of the story are great and parts of the story not so great. It delivered me to where I am, which is where I'm happy to be.

Matt Jones: [00:03:48] Now that starting point, how old were you when you started your first plumbing business as a sole trader?

Mick Slatter: [00:03:54] I started, I did my apprenticeship with commercial stuff, went through trade and then I started my business. My first introduction to business was in a partnership, it seemed like the safety of a partnership was a good way to go.

Craig Markham: [00:04:06] Safety in numbers

Mick Slatter: [00:04:07] Exactly right. There was a bit of a yin and yang thing, a good cop bad cop thing. So I had a pretty good sort of attention to detail with people in relationships. My partner was very good at getting things done. On paper looks like a good thing to forge forward with. So that started, the time will probably evade me a little bit but let's say between the 1999 to 2001, around that period.

Matt Jones: [00:04:33] How long have you been operating that for?

Mick Slatter: [00:04:35] Operated in that partnership for around 4 years and that was a hard four years. A lot of stuff going on, which someone holding the other parts there was a lot of things that crossed the boundary between friendship and professionalism. Looking back it was a good time for me to look and try and assess those professional relationships that I was putting myself in front of. Obviously you mentioned in the intro there was some alcoholism, which was definitely the case. It was probably the thing that sort of drove up to finishing the year.

Matt Jones: [00:05:10] With the end in mind now with the business when it came to that failing, you mentioned to me, before we got online, is that you didn't realise you were going broke until the day that you'd tapped my shoulder and said, "You are broke."

Mick Slatter: [00:05:24] Yes, absolutely.

Matt Jones: [00:05:25] Talking about the market smacking you in the face, business smacking you in the face and reality, what happened post that? Once it came the reality that this business has failed. We've got to move on.

[00:05:33] Yes, right. I guess there was an aspect of just despondency and disbelief. You kind of never think of yourself as a failure. I think the industry's changed a little bit now but I look back on the time of the industry. Times were good. Things were going well in the industry. If we were doing everything we could to look forward in the industry I reckon the changes may have been different. There was a lot of other influences but the industry was in our favour and that was probably what the biggest surprise was.

Matt Jones: [00:06:03] It was pre-Olympics wasn't it.

Mick Slatter: [00:06:04] Around the Olympic period. There was a lot of investment. It was booming. I mean some compare it to times we're actually having now in the industry.

Matt Jones: [00:06:11] It's the reality. This is a thing where we want to try and especially those organisations just starting now, just because the economy's booming doesn't mean you're going to boom.

Matt Jones: [00:06:19] Yes.

Mick Slatter: [00:06:20] It's a big realization and I think that's all our own sort of professional responsibility to understand that. When you're young and you sort of want to be your own boss and you sort of try it. It depends on how you open up business. What frame of mind you are going into it with? If you're opening it to escape because you want to be your own boss that doesn't mean necessarily you're focusing on the right things to make that business successful. It was definitely the case for myself and my partner at the time. So to answer your question, which I was dancing around a bit going home the day that you've been told that you could potentially lose your house is probably one of, it's not the worst time, but it's definitely one of those times that I'd like to get hit in the face with a brick. It really is hard to look at. We were sort of trying to have kids at the time and thinking about the future and things like that. It puts everything into question. It puts a cloud over everything. It's not just a case of calling you suppliers, who you've known for 15 years or however long in and saying, "Look I'm hard out. I can't pay you." Born of that came a lot of a lot of really good things. I came to know the friendships that I was leaning on. What was a real friendship? Some people scarpered for the trees. Some people got angry, the mates that loved me were the ones that were really critical. One, if I indulge that for a sec, one story that I did drag out of it, which is a shining light moving forward. I remember one of the nights that I was trying to finish off one of the jobs in a vague attempt to try and salvage something, all pride on the line. I rang a mate of mine at about 3:00 in the morning. I was working, we were doing some relocation of some cabins at a local caravan park. I picked them up because I was a crane driver as well. We were picking them up and relocating them on these pads and then climbing them up. I thought look if I get this done these people don't find out that we were bankrupt. Maybe we can get some cash, make good on...

Matt Jones: [00:08:08] Keep moving.

Mick Slatter: [00:08:08] Yes, well some of the people that had worked hard because they had families too. I did that and then at 3:00 in the morning I went to the ATM just in a haze. I put my card in, gone. I was like, "Shit this is real." I had some fuel left in the car and I was like, "What am I going to do?" I rang a mate of mine. He was actually my wife's best friend's husband. I didn't know him that well but it was the only sort a person I could even think of to call. I don't know why, he's just sort of struck me as a stand up fellow and rang him. I said, "Look Richard I'm on the skin of my pants. I need your help. He's like, "Yes, look I'm in bed. Come up and we'll put some food out for you and a stubbie. You know you'll be you'll be apples, you know you'll be right. When I got to his house, sure enough that's what was there. He didn't come out. He didn't mamby pamby bullshit me. He just said, "You know what, this is it really. I'm here for you." Now he's one of my best mates and he will be forever in a long time. He's one of those blokes that just stands besides you whether the stuff is good or bad. It was kind of in amongst all the bad stuff, there was some good stuff too.

Matt Jones: [00:09:20] I think that's the key there with a lot of people. If things aren't going right they'll look at it as like, "What I do now, I've got no where to turn or I'm a failure." I'm definitely in the belief that when you're going through those tough periods you are growing as an individual. You're eyeballing things in terms of, "Okay what do I need to do? "Who's on my team?" "Who can I trust?" I've got a family to look after. I've got people I've put my promise out to and I need to

deliver. So for you going through that at a critical point in your life, you try to have a family. You're trying to look forward long term and then all of a sudden you got no money in the bank. This then led to obviously depression?

Mick Slatter: [00:09:59] Yes. Well that was probably the first time but I didn't know it was depression at the time. So I think in a lot of listeners will probably...

Matt Jones: [00:10:06] Didn't call it depression on the job? So just call it, toughen the fuck up.

Mick Slatter: [00:10:10] Yes exactly. Just get on with it. I was young enough then just to lose myself in drugs, alcohol or whatever was coming along and there was plenty of work around. It was a case of closing up and just going back to the grindstone on commercial loans, which you know paid the bills and sort of progressed. We sort of moved through from there. **I didn't really understand how I was feeling at the time. I had no self-awareness.** I was very different today. I'd be able to put a name on it, dissect it, paint a color and tell you a story about it. Then the awareness was just definitely not there. I would say only retrospectively that was the **first time I experienced depression.**

Matt Jones: [00:10:48] Then that catalyst was really then I think seeking, finding or coming across it a coach, a mentor that really started helping you. Flick it over to Bush from a coaching perspective and the importance of having the right team on board. You can obviously relate in terms of getting the right advice at the right time and someone that really actually cares for you to guide you.

Craig Markham: [00:11:08] Yes, I haven't jumped in. I love the story. I love hearing it from you. We got the bullet points you and Jonsey know each other well. What I love about this show is that it speaks to everyone. Parts of what you talked about you've gone through a whole jigsaw puzzle of things. Some plumber, electrician, carpenter or tradie's going to go, "Shit, I resonate with that," and to actually have the power to speak up. You're right, until you get help I was the same. Jonsey's my first business coach. Real one another one had all the pencil case with the colors and I did the diary thing. It was amazing, you should see the painting I did.

Mick Slatter: [00:11:41] Was it a finger painting?

Craig Markham: [00:11:43] Believe it. When Matt came in and taught me and I said this last night about Jonesy that a G.P. wasn't a motor race in Adelaide, you start to understand where you're at. When he says, "Fish stinks at the head," and you start to go hang on because as you know you give yourself all sorts of excuses. I love how you said, **"I didn't realise it was depression at the time."** Now it is and it's labeled. I love the old toughen the fuck up mentality. We're not any less tough, we're just more aware I think. You can't take the tough as well. We're better educated. For the guys that listen, this is so far my favourite podcast because this is real. **This is happening right throughout Australia. People are struggling.** So the Power Up Your Business podcast is giving power through your experience, through your expertise, these guys have got an avenue. They've got to talk. They've got to get out. They've got to get a coach. Well they've got to do better. They've got to start by getting up the Power Up Your Tradie Business book. **It's a blueprint for success but do you what know what it is? It's a blueprint to insure yourself that it's okay to have problems** and you can get out of them that's what I like.

Matt Jones: [00:12:41] The key thing that I'm passionate about is building that community. If we can have like minded people in the community where, "Hey I need, whether it be contract admin, whether it be legal or whether it be bookkeeping," we've got a trusted circle here and that we're in it for the long game. We're not out for that win loss, we all are taking money now. It's like we want to

see you succeed. Our passion is to be with business owners on their journey. Like your journey you've had a lot of ups and downs and we want to be able to support and provide people advice when they when they're down it's okay it's cool. Don't worry about it. It's learning. You don't realise it right now but you are learning you are getting better at what you're doing. You will respond and rebound from this and that's the key. I'm keen to now in terms of getting into where you are now because I love what you do in contract admin. I love how you are now lecturing at TAFE assisting other trainees coming through, guiding them and mentoring them. Coming from that exec coaching through that self-awareness process and now into fulfilling your calling, tell us a bit about that now and what you're doing, I suppose at the coalface and some stories potentially of how you've assisted some tradies?

Craig Markham: [00:13:49] Can we just, sorry Jonsey you've done such a good job pre framing where you've come from and it's incredible to think where you are now from where you were, if you can just start by giving our listeners a bit of the journey along the way. I know you're a bullet point man, which is cool, because that's impressive. Where's the turnaround point? Did it start with your mate, the ex army Chris, who just kick your arse? Where was it and where does it take you to?

Mick Slatter: [00:14:09] There's one key point that I'd pin most of what I've done in the last 5 years and that was just a point in my life where things changed. I had a job and I thought it was everything that I wanted. I'd oversold my own self to it. It was into a consultancy role. I firmly believe in biting off more than you could chew. This time I was really hit from the side because I thought I was doing a great job. I had one of the guys that I actually did some time as an apprentice with or worked at the company he was at and he was like my connection into this business and into this new life or what I thought. Long story short we went through a lot of different things. He actually sat me down, who I was always his senior in life. He actually sat me down and they released me from my position at that company.

Matt Jones: [00:14:54] So you got a tap on the shoulder?

Mick Slatter: [00:14:56] Tap on the shoulder and I got sat down and here's your cardboard box see you later. On the way out from that business I had the M.D. at the time was walking in as I was walking out. He said, "Where are you going mate?" I was like, "Didn't you know he just punted me." He was like, "I had no idea." This kind started me thinking, "Wow what's going on here?".

Craig Markham: [00:15:16] What were you punted with do you think?

Mick Slatter: [00:15:19] I think I was injected into a role where I had to do a lot of litigation reporting, which consequently is what I do now for a job ironically. I didn't have report writing experience because I was a tradie. I knew my stuff but putting it on paper was really bloody hard. Even as it would be to some of the tradie listening like writing an email to a consultant can seem somewhat intimidating. It is intimidating because you don't know and it really can pull your pants down if you write it wrong. It can be inferred and interpretation. It's a heavy weight to bear when you're not trained in doing it. You haven't spent time in a classroom doing a degree writing about communication skills you got no chance. So anyway I dropped the ball massively. There was probably conjecture there. We could argue about it. What am I going to get 12 weeks as a maximum if I appeal it. So I just went or even went right to, "What's next?" So that was about 2 nights after that I was at home. It was that time I definitely can absolutely say I was depressed and that to me was exemplified by bluing with my wife was really hard. She's my princess, I wouldn't do anything to hurt her and that really hurt me. I got in my ute and I drove down to the local oval and I opened weirdly. I went over those big logs they have to protect the cricket pitches and all that. I've got my Nissan Navarra up over that somehow, drove out into the oval on a concrete cricket pitch. I opened all the doors to the ute, folded all the seats back. I just lay there and I wanted to kill myself. It was

because I'd just epically failed. Off the back of having a failed business my new sort of venture was doing this, I couldn't do that. I was like, "What's going on?" Strangely enough I rang the same mate. I don't know why he keeps picking up my pieces but he's still around. So I rang a few people and then just by fate that's when Chris Wightwick from The Mind Kit came. We sort of crossed paths and I had a chat with him. He kicked my ass into a new sort of realm. It was then that was the catalyst for me saying, "Right, I can either drop to my knees here or I can start to take this seriously." People will keep taking unless I start taking back. It was then when I decided there's people out there that have exactly the same experiences as me. If I tight lip it and I don't provide bullet points to people that are powerful and are truthful. I could tell you that I'm a great success. I manage this many people. I'd do this. I've come through these. If I don't tell you the rubbish that happened, it loses all its power. I think in our industry we tend to hide our emotional lot and we don't call things as they are. I mean from the snippets that I've read of the Power Up Your Business book just flicking through.

Craig Markham: [00:18:16] The business bible?

Mick Slatter: [00:18:16] Yes, the business bible that's right. I see that's sort of capturing that reality. It's giving people stuff that they don't know but they're not supposed to know. Tradies get to a point in their lives where they've spent 20 years in an industry and they feel embarrassed because they're supposed to know this stuff. Newsflash no one's supposed to know anything, if you haven't been through it and you don't know if no one's teaching you.

Craig Markham: [00:18:38] Matt and I agree on anyone that goes into business for himself, I call him a soldier because they're going into battle. They battle with themselves. They battle with what they know. They battle with their ego. They battle with pride. They battle with their customers, their expertise and then they'll start battling with their mates, who they thought it was a good idea to go into it. I'm a classic example. One day Jonsey will interview me.

Matt Jones: [00:18:58] That is going to be a long podcast.

Craig Markham: [00:18:58] It will be. What I love is you've come in here and you've pretty much got business naked. It's what resonates with our trainees because we're going to talk about how you got to the success point but you've hooked me and everyone including our producers into, "Wow what happened next because it's a great story." It's what we're talking about. It's just another story of an Australian tradie who's come through the other side and now I'm looking forward to getting to that.

Matt Jones: [00:19:25] The whole thing about this podcast, it is about honesty. As you mention it is about the bare bones. It's the reality and people need to understand the reality. It sort of comes back to, I think you mentioned your business coach there or the exec coach that sort of shook you around and got you thinking differently. It is around that mindset where we want people to know it's not about just continuing doing more of the same. It's not going to change things. You've got to think differently. You've got to make sure. Who's around you? Have you got the right support network? Are you doing the right things long term? Ultimately as a business owner whatever decision you're making a day will affect your family. It's going affect your kids. It's going affect your future lifestyle. It's not just about saying yes to jobs. With that in mind coming back in to a now and loving your work, what you're doing now in terms of workshops. You're talking to people, talking to 20 30 tradies in a room. You really are inspiring them at the moment. What are some things you're looking for at the moment where you're capturing some of the things that the information that you're sharing part of your story? What's really resonating with your tradies that you're talking to? More importantly, how's that then converting to success or a change in their behaviours?

Mick Slatter: [00:20:30] Sure. I think it's a good question. I think the biggest thing I'm finding at the moment with trades is, there's an indelible fear amongst tradies when they step into a contract. When they start to look at the paperwork, when they start to sign the GC21s or they start to sign these things up. There's always a powerful word in our industry called variation. Variation is like a swinging around about. It always comes back around the other way and I've seen that break people with one email. I've been on the receiving end of that. It's to try and break down that the power that that contract have has been one of the most powerful things. Same thing just through a conversation driven by integrity and information and it's about empowering the tradesman that we see to have a respectful communication with people.

Matt Jones: [00:21:25] They can be educated.

Mick Slatter: [00:21:28] They can be educated. It gives them an awareness perspective as well that there are two sides to a contract. It's not always just because someone accuses one of missing something or doing something incorrect that doesn't necessarily make it so. I advocate for people to interrogate these things but interrogate them without the emotion. As tradies, we often hit things someone writes an email and we go "effing" consultant. I did a lot of hard work with Chris in trying to define the difference between reacting and responding. The awareness that I've got around reaction and response. If I get an email and someone written it and they're mega pissed at me because I've made a wrong call.

Matt Jones: [00:22:09] Who would be writing that e-mail?

Mick Slatter: [00:22:11] Let's say my current role and she's been on the other foot so hopefully this is courtesy.

Matt Jones: [00:22:16] Run through sort of a real life scenario.

Craig Markham: [00:22:19] Yes, a little case study.

Mick Slatter: [00:22:19] So case study, I'll change the terminology a little bit.

Craig Markham: [00:22:22] And the names.

Mick Slatter: [00:22:23] Yes and the names. So Harry writes me an e-mail because Harry is the plumber. I've just written a, let's call it a defects report, I don't issue defects report. I issue something different, site investigation report or a committee report. I brought up a problem that's in there and Harry to be honest I don't believe that's a true interpretation. Now I've got a choice as the plumber now emailing me. He's quite agitated. Obviously it's going to cost him 15 grand to fix. I'd be pretty pissed too. So with the level of understanding I've got a choice in my communication on how I write back to him. If I've already done that which is hard because I'll usually point out if I'm going to bring something up in a report. I'll bring it up to a tradie face to face first and then see what the story is behind it. What I would do instead of giving him a directive and telling him what my interpretation is I'll ask him to elaborate what his interpretation is and how he draws it. Try to find the fabric of what he's actually saying. Is there context? Were you instructed? I don't know because one line on a report to make someone lose 15 20 grand is not fair. A lot of companies that I'm associated with I see that happening a lot. I think that all that does is drive a wedge in. If we educate people in communication skills and responding to these things not reacting. If I react I tell you you're a dick and shut up. Here's my interpretation and I'm right. Pay your bills. If I'm responding, I'm saying, "Look Harry look, I understand there's a bit on the line here. How about I come over, we grab a bite of lunch or something and we'll settle down." Now that framework doesn't always fit

everyone because not everyone's got time to grab a coffee because we're all busy making money. What it does do is show him that I'm willing to talk about it. I'm not going to hold a hard line but if you're wrong you're wrong. It's simple as it is. We're both at the table for a reason because we're both very good at what we do. So let's have a chat.

Craig Markham: [00:24:15] Michael the conspiracy theorists out there would say that some companies deliberately do it and in your experience you get these contracts and they try. They get to the end and finance is an important thing, completions important, deadlines and penalties and all the buzz words that go and variations. All those shocking words it sends shivers down tradie spines. Are there companies out there that actually use this as a tool to reduce costs?

Mick Slatter: [00:24:40] I don't believe so. I don't think there's a malicious intent in any company. It would be hard for you to confirm and prove otherwise. What I do know is there are people with a very keen acumen for contracts admin. I think where the variants come from, if we're honest about it, you can interrogate a contract as a tradie. You can manipulate that view to your best means as well. If you were to get a tender and see holes in it, which I've been a part of, you submit your tender. You say, "I know there's a variant on that and then I'll submit." Then next day you issue you variant. So it's a two way street and often a tradesman and again I say that from the position of being one, **often a tradesman will often think people are out to get them.**

Craig Markham: [00:25:31] I just wanted you to say that because Power Up Your Tradie Business in the way Matt coaches and I've seen Matt do many presentations at Reece. He's worked with our teams and stuff. What I love about what the book says and what you're talking about, our default mechanism is blame or defence. No one actually sits, in my study in a with a man in Texas Keith Cunningham is a business genius and hugely successful and he says, guts and glance don't help. Unless you're on a footy field and it's 1 minute to go because that's all you're left with. If you make educated decisions, which the Power Up Your Tradie Business book is trying to teach people to do. You've just reinforced and re-endorsed it. So where do they take those steps? Say a young tradie's listening to this and he gets a variance. Looks at his contract he thinks, "I heard this podcast, where do I go," besides Matt Jones.

Mick Slatter: [00:26:25] One thing there are like how Mick frames it too is **beware putting your head in the noose before you sign a contract.**

Matt Jones: [00:26:31] It's both sides though.

Mick Slatter: [00:26:32] There are both sides but from a tradie perspective again we don't have to be fearful of the numbers or contracts. It would be daunting overall. Sometimes you say, "Look the contract is fine because they look at the job and this is a big job. This jobs is going to set me up for life. "Baby we're on the way". I can see the penthouse," but let's come back to reality. Beware of what you're putting in terms around your neck potentially. I don't think I mean most contracts have to have a framework that's based on fairness and equity. They'll soon and I've seen it happen through my current position. I've seen contracts get completely redlined from because they're just nonsensical and they're completely unfair. So when we enter into a contract and I speak personally when I enter into a contract, if it's for a plumbing job, if it's for life insurance I'd like to read it. I'd like to know. For one I don't believe insurance companies are designed to pay but that's probably another podcast. **I look for the things that are going to be of interest.** So when I went out grab a specification I'll look at the things like authority connections. There always a thing that are going to blow my mind. I look at that's a big risk to my to my bottom end. I look at the inclusions. I look at the PC. I look at the items, the provisional sums that are excluded. I look at the big picture items, the finite things I can justify. If I missed 500 TMVS on one job or I got no one to butt heads with that myself because I didn't read the docs. **You can't plead ignorance to a document and be proven**

wrong time and time again and say I didn't know I didn't know. On the flipside of that you can all standards all NCC is interpretation for the most part. So because it's an interpretive document, we have to communicate to interpret. It's kind of what I encourage in the lectures that I do is everyone again has got a seat at the table for the right reasons. We need to ask smart questions. Further to the question, who do we call? Look I think it's about growing your network in the industry of people that you trust, not listening to the fluff and sort of saying, "I don't pretend to know everything but I definitely believe that any problem that I have, I've got someone in my network that I know who to call. It's the confidence in that and for the young guys listening, I would encourage them to next time a consultant comes out and you get a report. Just ring them up say, "Look I got this report. Next time you're out, can we sit down and go through it?" Say good day to the bloke. I've worked with consultants before, some of the best guys I've known. I would say the same for tradies. I still have tradie mates that I know. We're not different but apparently there's this I don't know there's some identity that's present in the industry that no one knows where it came from that someone is better than someone or someone is not better than someone. So we all need to adjust their paradigms on how we think. Maybe we'll get a collaborative approach to these things to stop it from being bigger than my own.

Matt Jones: [00:29:30] I love that when you mention about how you respond as opposed to react. I think that's critical. I think that communication to many people as a tradie in a lot of things on you will get of correspondence that you don't like and you can react poorly. You can then verbatim throw out things that you wish you didn't say which can impact you for the next 20 years because you put people off site. We're playing a long game here and it's a serious game.

Craig Markham: [00:29:57] Tradies love sport and the analogy here that I think of in rugby league we love it. If you see a player give away penalties or drop balls because of stupid things or throw a ball at someone's head, they get penalized and that loses the game. We've all seen it.

Matt Jones: [00:30:10] Then argue with a referee.

Craig Markham: [00:30:11] And then argue with a referee. This is what happens and you're talking about that in the plumbing game. I think the message that I get and I love this is if you go down the coach path not the blame path then you're going to win. Either that's seeking to coach, be more coach-like, Silky's taught me this week with a great podcast, before you respond bounce it off someone who's actually absolutely impartial and is going to give you the great advice to say, "Mate, we've all done it, do you think I should send that?" Then they go, "Mate, do not send that."

Mick Slatter: [00:30:39] The thing like awareness is about getting in the gap I call it. The work I do with Chris. The work I do with an osteo. The work I do with the biomed GP. The work I do with psychiatrist. There are 4 critical people in my life that need to keep that balance for me. I'm not saying that's everyone.

Craig Markham: [00:30:58] Five, don't forget the princess.

Mick Slatter: [00:30:59] Well true but it's critical. Thanks for that. You just saved me.

Matt Jones: [00:31:03] That's the number one.

Mick Slatter: [00:31:03] Yes that's the number one actually. I did say that before we recorded. I said that.

Craig Markham: [00:31:09] Well you just saved yourself.

Matt Jones: [00:31:10] Yes, thanks. And you love it more than. And the essay you wrote and the little good they to look at putting a good picture.

Mick Slatter: [00:31:16] So it's about getting that gap so the difference between response and reaction is a gap. It means that you have time to think. So like you rightfully said it's bouncing it off a colleague or something like that but more to that point. Not that you're burning incense and saying a mantra but you're just conscious and hearing. You're thinking and so often the construction industry allows us to be who we are. I remember someone came to a site once and I had a massive stand up spat with them in an office. It was a courier dropping plans and he was just frustrated because he couldn't find the site. It was perfectly reasonable but don't shout at me about it.

Matt Jones: [00:31:51] Don't shoot the messenger.

Mick Slatter: [00:31:52] Exactly. We had this massive slanging but then fast forward 15 years and I'm in an office you'd never see that happening because there's a certain level of leniency in the construction game that allows you to be free with your emotions. It's a good thing. It's not that we all have to hold stuff in we just have to channel it in the right ways. Getting that gap you can only get that gap when you start to become self-aware, when you start to understand what is my stress response. We do a role play in one of the classes that I do. I bring each person up and I sit them on a chair in front. Already and straight away they're uncomfortable. They hate it but the thing is when I reflect on it every semester that's the thing that constantly comes up in the feedback. I really love the role play because it put me in a position where I was uncomfortable and I was monitoring my stress response. You go around the class and you say what your stress response do you think. Some people are aware of it some people aren't. Surprisingly 50% are probably aware. For me it's like my chest gets tingly. My hands get a bit sweaty. I get this tingling in my jaw. It's kind of like that feeling you get just before you chuck one in a fight. It's about trying to recognize what that is. It's where you try and identify that's when you need to get. It's about I park these these guys in front of the class. I say, "Look I'm the architect and I'm driving you. You've just given me, I give them a scenario, 100,000 dollars job but you're asking me to do all this extra work. I'm pissed, my bosses on my back. I'm going to grill you about it and you're going to tell me what you think. I don't tell them the outcome I want. I just want them to feel the feeling that they're going to feel. I go hard like it's a case of sit down, berate them or call them names. There's probably a whole bunch of lawsuits I could get into because of it. What it does do is it prepares those blokes when they go out and become a consultant, when they're in the grind even as men or women, they understand what it's like. What that feeling is the precursor to trying to find some space. I use a term which Bernay Brown uses in one of her wonderful presentations on TED and she says, "You need to just be present." It's sometimes you just need to say, "I need to reschedule these meetings. They're not productive." As much as the context of that sounds really unfitting to a contractor, in my line of work now as a consultant, I've actually used that line a few times. Sometimes when I find that gap I need an escape. It's not about the 6 or 78 people in the room that are baying for blood. It's about me and my preservation and that's okay. It's the position where you need to get to your in your self-awareness journey.

Craig Markham: [00:34:23] I think it's an important tool that anyone can use. We all have testosterone driven tradies. We're all sitting there with your balls on the line, with the business, you get the missus at home, family commitments, you've got all sorts of things happening.

Matt Jones: [00:34:38] No money in the bank.

Craig Markham: [00:34:39] The ability to stop and think.

Matt Jones: [00:34:40] Who wouldn't be cranky?

Craig Markham: [00:34:42] This is world class advice. You're right. It's not a change in the culture. So if it hit someone at the building site. I know it's a lot different if you hit your thumb in a legal office but it's sometimes not.

Mick Slatter: [00:34:53] the one you'll hear about the. But

Craig Markham: [00:34:55] When it comes to conflict and stuff like that, they've got to avoid it because **drama costs money doesn't it?**

Mick Slatter: [00:34:59] It does. **It does cost money and when you make things over complex with emotion, you stick to fact and keep emotion on the side.** You tend to resolve things a lot quicker.

Matt Jones: [00:35:08] It's that thing about taking that breath the gap. Rather than that initial response that knee jerk reaction, you can go away. What's going to be best for me long term? Is it best to really go off, fly off the handle and have a go at this person or take a breath and sort of collaborate, work through a scenario or a solution that will benefit you long term? I like even the situation, what you mentioned there, if you do get something a bit of a document you're not happy with. Call the consultant. Meet with a consultant too. It's up to that tradie to be educated to know. Just say, "Listen, I've got no idea what you're talking about. Can we have a coffee?" Rather than you the consultant actually driving that conversation. **It should be the tradie, I believe in terms of taking out ownership.**

Craig Markham: [00:35:48] You're 100% right.

Matt Jones: [00:35:49] The business owner.

Mick Slatter: [00:35:50] You mentioned it before when you were talking that responsibility is the responsibility of the business owner.

Matt Jones: [00:35:55] You need to know this. This is the game that you are playing. It's a big game.

Craig Markham: [00:36:00] One thing you teach and we talk about it often with members of my team. We share with friends that we know about. It's not just the ability to take ownership. Matt has a saying you know, "If they want to get better they need to actually get educated." I love that he said because some guys don't read the document there's a lot of guys out there. I was a document skimmer owner. I started out might my journey in law school and ended up a cleaner. You can imagine, there's no good coming to law school if you are a document skimmer. "Oh mate, I didn't read the brief but I read the Post at home. Guilty!"

Matt Jones: [00:36:32] Is the next one called The Rise and Rise?

Craig Markham: [00:36:35] Yes that's my waistline, that's my pamphlet on my waistline. We need to get back to, we can still be tradies, we can still have heaps of fun. We love our footy, our People magazine and all the things that are stereotypical with tradies. Do you know what we need to fall in love with? Just being a smart tradie and that's what this show is all about. It's why great guests like you who you haven't been making stupid decisions. You just made decisions, at the time, you thought were great. Looking back with your education, you can see where you took the other fork or you didn't make the emotional decisions and that's the lesson. It's what I love.

Mick Slatter: [00:37:09] I think to grab what you just said there about the decisions. It twigged

something in my brain that my father once said to me. I asked him if I'd made a mistake once. I can't remember what it was about and I was a young fella. He said to me, "Mick, there's one thing about life," the listeners may object to this either way, "but it's about the decision that you make at the time. You'll never have that instance again. You'll never be physically in that situation again." So retrospectively you might have made a different decision but the decision that you made is always going to be the right decision. **If you're acting from integrity and you're acting from what you know at the time it's the right decision.** At the time it gave me a sense of inner peace and I kind of reflect on that a little bit as well. There are times when I've sort of failed on things or done different things. Could have been different, I'll amend on it or you kind of really convict yourself. It can be really damaging. So for the listeners out there that have made errors. It's well and good to reflect and say but **don't condemn yourself because of it. Don't think of yourself as a failure because of it.** I stand here knowing at a 24.95 TER and not being on any honor board.

Craig Markham: [00:38:17] I'm glad you said it, it was the elephant in the room.

Mick Slatter: [00:38:21] It doesn't stand in the way like just because other people think you want to be something, you can't be something, doesn't mean that you can't. It just means that you've just got it somehow pushing out of the way and get what you want.

Craig Markham: [00:38:30] My old man consequently gave me advice. I think our tradie listeners love and it's true. He said to my brother, who is a plumber and I'm a cleaner. He said, "Boys there's two things that'll get you in trouble. I'm a lawyer and you don't have to be a lawyer." I said to him, "I don't go to law school." He said, "Good find what you love but be careful when you put your dick in your signature cause both will get you in massive trouble." It's a true story. True to the word, I've seen plenty of mates get in trouble with the first one and not so much get in trouble the second one including myself. It's the signature part.

Matt Jones: [00:39:03] Moving on from that. Thanks Bush. Just wrapping up Mick, I suppose we just sort of eluded to their best piece of advice but from a young tradie going forward and understanding the landscape the business owners are facing now, especially information age, litigation age, the cost of doing business is ever increasing, what would be your best piece of advice for let's say an apprentice for years whose ready to start my own business? What's that little pearl of wisdom you'd provide someone starting up?

Mick Slatter: [00:39:35] I think be self-aware. I think that's the biggest piece of advice for anything starting a venture. **You do it from the right motivation. You don't do it to escape. You don't do it to change the situation you're in for the better if there's a lot of pressure in your current situation.** You make better what you have and you take a level of self knowing into everything that you do. **Do work. You've got to do the work. Every opportunity that I've ever had has required me to either retrain, get another certificate or do something to push me further towards it.** No one will just be able to sit there. You're not going to get that phone call that says, "Mate I'm going to pay 180000. Come do this for me." Those phone calls are too far in between. Don't wait for them. Go out and grab them. **Make steps now to build your future. It's very easy to put the blinkers on and just look at what's in front of you. Look at that one and a half year contract you just think you're sweet. When that one and a half year contract ends then "I've got to hit the market now. I got to get out now. I'm going to do this and build." You should be constantly building whether it's reading on the way to a job.** You know it is critical for mine. The Amount of time domestic and commercial plumbers spend on the road that's not dead time. We don't need that pressure but it is time that you can use better. So it's about building.

Matt Jones: [00:40:58] Those are really great advice. It really comes back to improving yourself. It's about time to taking responsibility for yourself.

Mick Slatter: [00:41:00] Absolutely. If you want a great business then you as a leader need to be great. You need to improve. One of the things you alluded to there as well is that don't look for the easy option. If it's easy it's not going to last. We're talking about the long game where as a business owner it's not about 3s and about 5s, we're talking about investment you're making today, you'll get the rewards in 10, 15 or 20 years. If you're willing to play that long game and to invest in that then the world is your oyster. It's going to be lasting and it will have a positive impact on family.

Matt Jones: [00:41:34] Finishing up Bush any last words?

Craig Markham: [00:41:36] Yes, I just want to say mate for a school captain with a TER of 24.95 to get to the lowest of lows drive to the middle of that cricket pitch lying in the back of your car where you felt like you wanted to kill yourself then use really good friends, meet your man Chris, have an amazing wife and kids to claw you back to where you are today. It's amazing and it's so inspirational to our plumbers and our listeners. I just want to thank you for sharing your story on the Power Up Your Business podcast to Matt Jones and to myself.

Mick Slatter: [00:42:03] It's been a pleasure.

Matt Jones: [00:42:04] Yes and really appreciate the honesty and love the journey. I'm sure a lot of our listeners will definitely relate to that. So thank you very much.

Craig Markham: [00:42:12] You've been listening to the Power Up Your Business podcast with our host Matt Jones. Thanks so much to our guest Mick Slater. If you're looking for contracts admin assistance, don't forget to contact us at www.cubepformance.com.au and get a copy of the Power Up Your Tradie Business book. Keep fighting tradies. It's a tough world out there.