

THE MODEL **HEALTH** **SHOW**

EPISODE 602

How Past Experiences And Trauma Control Our Behavior And Our Health

With Guest Tana Amen

You are now listening to **The Model Health Show with Shawn Stevenson**. For more, visit themodelhealthshow.com.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Welcome to The Model Health Show. This is fitness and nutrition expert, Shawn Stevenson, and I'm so grateful for you tuning in with me today. What is actually controlling the decisions that you make? We tend to think that we're making our decisions on our own self-accord, on our own free will, but in reality, what's making our decisions are our very deeply embedded psychological programs. We might be thinking that we're making a decision on a food choice, for example, right now, in our adult pants as a big old grownup, but in reality, could be an expression from us or an experience based on something that happened in our childhood that's driving a decision that we're making right now, and oftentimes, we have no idea that this old self is making decisions for our new self.

Now, this is a wonderful field for us to examine because we have the ability to kind of zero in and change these patterns, to change the decisions that we're making right now, but it takes work. And this is why oftentimes decisions tend to be hard, and when we're trying to make a new decision for ourselves right now, our minds and our biology can kind of fight back, you know you're not really about that life, you know you don't really want to make this healthier choice. It might be easy the first time or two, but because our minds are hard-wired to replicate behavior patterns, it can be difficult to jump in there and to start to pull apart that nerve that's been firing that system, that pathway, that's just been recruiting so much myelin over months and years of firing the same way, making those same choices.

To kind of start to break down the pathway and to create new ones, we oftentimes have to do some internal work, some internal investigation and really zero in on what and how we're creating our decisions. And to do that work, oftentimes we have to get some outside input. We have to learn how this stuff works because for the vast majority of us, we're not exposed to this kind of information. And if you look at what's happening in our society at large, oftentimes we're making decisions for our health that are not advantageous. Why would we do things to hurt ourselves? That should be a huge red flag that's popping up that fundamental question: Why are we doing things that hurt ourselves and we know they're not good for us? And oftentimes, again, it's not based on logic, it's based on programming, it's based on our habitual patterns, especially those from earlier in life.

So, on today's episode, we're going to look at what's happening with our psychology, what's happening behind the scenes, so that we can start to use that information, use that empowerment, to make more positive decisions moving forward, but awareness is key, we always start with awareness because it's the first domino. And we've got one of the most remarkable people to help us to start to do this internal investigation, and I am so excited about this episode.

And also, our special guest is the vice president of one of the most renowned brain health companies in the world, Amen Clinics. They've done over 200,000 SPECT imaging scans, literally looking at the brain to see functionality, to see brain activity, and how certain lifestyle factors, certain experiences in life, certain nutritional implement, how this stuff really affects our brain in the real world, not just guessing, but actually looking at the brain.

So, in her specific field, she's an expert in nutrition, so we're going to be talking a little bit about that, and one of the things we're going to kick things off with is talking about olive oil, and researchers at Auburn University actually uncovered that oleocanthal-rich olive oil is able to help to reduce brain inflammation. And neuroinflammation, inflammation of the brain is one of the fastest growing epidemics in our world. Some of the offshoots, of course, are dementia and Alzheimer's, but what's largely not considered is the impact that it has on our metabolism when our brain is essentially on fire.

Now, research that was published in the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, the researchers uncovered that there's this really shocking occurrence taking place with neuroinflammation and nutritional diseases, namely, what they noted was that brain inflammation is a causative factor for obesity, and obesity is a causative factor for neuroinflammation. So, our growing waist size is creating inflammation in our brains, and our brains, with this heightened state of inflammation, is contributing to dysregulation with our metabolism, specifically, they noted, it was hypothalamic inflammation.

So, this is well noted to be the kind of master gland in the human brain, this hypothalamus, it has a huge regulating influence over our metabolism, over even our ability to assimilate calories from our food. There's this really interesting connection between our brain and our gut, and researchers at Yale University uncovered that the human brain, based on its assessment, not that it's factual, because of dysregulation, its assessment of your caloric needs, even if you might have 100 extra pounds on your body, because of this metabolic dysfunction, your brain could still be under the impression that you are lacking caloric intake and it can literally send signals to your gut to increase the assimilation of calories from the food that you're eating, or based on its assessment, decrease the assimilation of calories from the food that you're eating.

Again, this is some of the most prestigious universities in the world are doing this work and most people have no idea about this, they're just still in this calories in, calories out paradigm and not looking at what are the epigenetic influences, what are the controlling factors over what your body actually does with the calories you consume? This is a level above that. Again, epicaloric controllers; calories matter, absolutely. And if we're looking for weight loss, caloric

deficit, sure, but if we're not understanding how these systems actually work and what's controlling our body's regulation of calories, we're really missing the point.

So, knowing that inflammation in the brain is a causative agent in obesity, obviously doing things that help to reduce neuroinflammation is going to be one of the most important things for us to focus on. And again, researchers at Auburn University found that olive oil, extra virgin olive oil, oleocanthal-rich, high quality extra virgin olive oil, can help to reduce neuroinflammation, specifically, helping to heal... This is the crazy thing, helping to heal the blood-brain barrier.

There's some kind of remarkable intelligence in that food source. I don't have a dog in the fight. I don't care if the olive oil is wonderful or not. The data shows that there's something really special about it and more people should be aware of this information. But as we're going to talk about with our special guest, the quality matters. Another nutrition source that needs to get more attention in its benefit for our brains is spirulina. A study published in PLOS One, the Public Library of Science, show that spirulina has strong potential to prevent and even reduce inflammation in the brain. Something special about it.

Spirulina is the most dense source of protein ever discovered, gram for gram. It's a complete protein containing all nine essential amino acids, also a rich source of vitamins and minerals, like B vitamins, copper, and even rare compounds, like phycocyanin. A study funded by the National Institutes of Health, they've been in the news a lot lately, but there are some other stuffs that they've published that most people don't know about, they're not looking at what are some of the beneficial things out here, revealed that spirulina promotes stem cell genesis, the creation of new stem cells.

What are stem cells? What do they do? They become essentially any cell that you need. We need that seed cell in order to regenerate our tissues, whether it's for our brain or for our joints. There are very few foods that have this capacity and spirulina is one of them. Now you take spirulina and combine it with chlorella, which is another, one of the highest protein-dense foods ever discovered, it's about 50% protein by weight. Spirulina is about 71% protein by weight.

Chlorella contains lutein and zeaxanthin, these are two carotenoids that have been found to help to protect some of the offshoots of our nervous system and our brain, like our eyes. And also, it's a dense source of Omega-3s, just 3 grams of chlorella delivers about 100 milligrams of Omega-3s. It's a natural chelator as well, and by the way, chelation is a chemical process in which a substance is used to bind to molecules such as heavy metals and hold them tightly, and chelation has several uses in conventional medicine for treating things like lead poisoning.

A study published in the journal, International Immunopharmacology, affirm just that, that chlorella helps to reduce blood levels of lead. Alright? So, combining these two super foods together, spirulina, chlorella, these are two of my favorite ingredients and they're highlighted in the organifi Green Juice blend. It's a low temperature process to retain these key nutrients and also it tastes great, kid-tested, mother-approved, this is something that my family, my kids have all the time. Head over there, check 'em out, it's organifi.com/model, and you get 20% off their Green Juice blend.

That's O-R-G-A-N-I-F-I.com/model for 20% off. They also have an incredible Red Juice blend that has Acai, blueberry and pomegranate; lots of cool stuff there. Head over there, check them out. It's organifi.com/model. Now let's get to the Apple Podcast review of the week.

ITUNES REVIEW: Another five-star review titled "Brain Food by Red Gems". "I really love this show, its simplicity while including so much valuable information backed up with science is the food the brain needs. The variety of subjects is the cherry on top. Sometimes I get emotional on how easier life can be if we just acknowledge and tap into our own powers and this show reminds me that I can. Thank you, Shawn, this will always be the first podcast I recommend to everyone."

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow, that hit my heart, that's so powerful, and you just touched on as a summation of what we're diving into today. So really, really excited about this, thank you so much for leaving that review over on Apple Podcasts. And now, let's get to our special guest and topic of the day.

Our guest today is Tana Amen and she's a New York Times best-selling author, health and fitness expert, vice president of Amen Clinics, the world's leader in brain health, mentor, motivational speaker and former neurosurgical ICU trauma nurse. By providing science-based guidance, along with her authentic no-holds-barred approach, Tana has won the hearts of millions with her simple yet effective strategies to help people win the fight for a strong mind, body and spirit. Let's jump into this conversation with the amazing Tana Amen. I'm so happy you're here. I'm so happy to see you.

TANA AMEN: Oh, me too.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I was just telling my wife before I came in today, I feel like we've seen each other and hung out before because of virtual, but this is the first time I'm actually seeing you in person.

TANA AMEN: I know. It seems weird, right?

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's nuts, bananas.

TANA AMEN: I feel like I have this connection to you, I was telling my husband, I'm like, "We're going to trauma-bond."

SHAWN STEVENSON: Trauma-bond, yes. Yes, definitely. It's so amazing, looking at your story and where you come from and what you've accomplished, it's really remarkable. And I want to first start off by you just got back from Italy.

TANA AMEN: I did.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You've given me all the insights and the tips, it's some place that I want to go, for sure. And you're a nutritionist, you're a nurse, bestselling author. You've got 100 cookbooks that you've authored as well and... But you're still learning, and you are... This is one of the things I really admire about you, is just this curious nature. And while you were there, you had an experience with olive oils.

TANA AMEN: I did, yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That was pretty remarkable. Can you talk about that?

TANA AMEN: It was really fun. So, I had this amazing trip. I took my daughter; my husband wasn't able to go. He calls me a seeker though, to your point. And so, we went down to the wine country, into Tuscany, and one of the things, it was one of my favorite parts of the trip, was olive oil tasting. And so, they showed us how they obviously grow the oils, but they showed us from the time that they grow the olives to how they bottle them. And it was really amazing. I thought I knew about oils; I write about them, I write about cook points and which ones are best for eating and which ones are best for cooking and storing them, but I really didn't know about how they actually produce olive oil and what it really means.

And so, to actually see this, and we did a tasting of them, I was sort of mind blown. So extra virgin olive oil is not just extra virgin olive oil. So they're really not joking about their olive oil in Italy, and so it has to be cold-pressed, first pressed, and the best olive oil comes from one small farm, you can't get olives from all over, and yet most of the olive oils that we find are from all over the place, the olives come from all over, multiple farms, just from all over the EU, or even from all over the world. And so that is considered not as high quality.

And so, when we actually tasted them... Now I would challenge anyone listening to actually go taste the olive oil in your cabinet, they tend to have a very mild taste. That's considered low quality, even if it says extra virgin olive oil. When you taste a high-quality olive oil, and in a lot

of these places they grade the olive oil based on acidity and just many different things, but acidity being one of them, it's a very strong flavor. The higher the quality, the stronger the flavor, and it has this aftertaste that literally tastes like pepper, it tastes just like pepper.

And so I was really surprised, I've never really tasted olive oil like that, which means I'm not getting really great olive oil even when I think I am, but then there's a lot that goes into, which some of them I knew, storing it and shipping it, and you never want it to be heat-exposed and it should be in glass bottles, dark bottles, not big giant plastic bottles that you're keeping forever.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, oh my gosh.

TANA AMEN: So, all of these things. But I was really surprised at the grading of it, like how much thought goes into grading these oils and how serious they are about it. And it was really great.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, you had like an olive oil sommelier?

TANA AMEN: Yeah, it was awesome. It was so much fun.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's so cool. So, if you could, why are they so serious about olive oil in Italy?

TANA AMEN: I think the Italians are serious about everything they do, they are super proud about their heritage in general, so people who are from Rome are incredibly proud about being Roman, people from Florence are incredibly proud about being from Florence and the Tuscan area, people from Venice are incredibly proud of it, and they stay there for so long, so whatever it is that they do in those regions, they're really proud of, and it's really interesting how connected they are to their heritage, to their history, so I think that's one reason. But they're no joke, they're not joking about coffee, they're not joking about olive oil, wine, whatever it is they do, they really take... They're passionate about it. So, I can't tell you exactly why with the olive oil, but I think because it's just something that they have exported for so long, they're really serious about it and they're really serious about how they actually produce it. So, it's just really interesting to see how serious they take it and how much they love it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Wow. And I love that with basically the strength of it being, having more of a kick.

TANA AMEN: It has a kick.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's kind of like alcohol.

TANA AMEN: Yeah, it has a kick.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Like oh wow. Got you, got you. So, you being somebody that's an expert in wellness, and like you mentioned, you've written about olive oil, why for you is it such a great food or nutrition source?

TANA AMEN: Well, olive oil is actually really healthy for us, I think we've known for a long time, like the Mediterranean diet, it's very healthy for you to consume, it's an anti-inflammatory, this idea, the low-fat diets, I've not been a fan of low-fat diets since I was really young and bought... When I was young, I bought into that low fat fad. And by the way, I was like skinny fat, was never that healthy, I was fit, but I wasn't healthy. And as I learned, as we evolve and we learn, and I've never been attached to my message, I was always attached to learning. So, as I think science began to unfold and learn and the studies came out, we learned that low fat is not a good thing, healthy fats are actually really important for you; they're called essential fatty acids for a reason.

And so, I really began to dig in and try to understand which ones of these fats are important. Well, olive oil is one of those fats, so it's one of those fats that are really healthy for you, it's anti-inflammatory, but cooking with it at high temperatures is not; that does the opposite 'cause it's not stable. At low temperatures, it's fine, but not at high temperatures, and so a lot of people don't know that.

And oh, by the way, the olive oil that they use in restaurants, one of the things I learned, they're using the lowest quality, right? So that's actually not a great olive oil that they're using, if they say, "Oh, we cook with olive oil," they're probably cooking at high temperatures with low quality oil, so maybe not the best thing, but most restaurants don't cook with healthy oils anyways. So that's just something you have to be aware of. One of the reasons you don't want to cook with oils that have a low smoke point when you're cooking at high temperatures is because it breaks them down and they become inflammatory, so...

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's the opposite thing that we're trying to get.

TANA AMEN: Right, so putting it on a salad is very different.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Got it, got it. Well, I want to also circle back because you mentioned about how it's getting stored if it's done properly, why not put it into clear plastic bottles?

TANA AMEN: So, it's really important to put it into glass bottles, where it actually keeps it stable longer, so it helps to stabilize not just the temperature, but the actual oil itself. The plastic,

everything we know about BPA by now, most people know that plastic leaches and it's not really that great for you, but also with oils, in particular, it just tends to break down much faster. And one of the reasons they do that is because of cost, obviously, and they can put it in large containers. Well, that, by itself, isn't the best thing. Buying large amounts, people will go and they'll buy these huge containers of oil. Well, unless you are cooking a lot and you're going through that really quickly, it's best not to do that. Buy smaller amounts of oil in glass bottles that are dark, 'cause it stays stable and it controls the temperature a little better, it's not leaching the bad stuff in the plastic.

So, you want the oils to stay stable; glass, dark, and keep them in a cool cabinet. So that's one of the reasons you want to do that 'cause you don't want them breaking down. When they break down, they become inflammatory, which is one of the reasons people often ask me, why... 'Cause we always thought that the PUFA oils, the poly... The poly... Monosaccharides that are the unsaturated oils, we always thought those were the best oils for us. Sunflower, safflower, corn oil...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Canola.

TANA AMEN: Cotton... Canola...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Soy.

TANA AMEN: Soy...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh my gosh.

TANA AMEN: All of these oils that we thought were so good for so long, and they're in most processed foods, by the way, and they're what a lot of restaurants use to cook with. The problem with those is that they're unstable and they break down really fast and they become inflammatory, and so they're not good for you, they're just... They're not a great source of oil for you. So...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Those are really already just denatured...

TANA AMEN: Right, they are denatured.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Damaged structure of those...

TANA AMEN: Absolutely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Fats, so again those are instantly bringing into the body creating a pro-inflammatory environment.

TANA AMEN: Right. And so, what they thought was going to be a good thing turned out to not be a good thing.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But did they really think that?

TANA AMEN: Did they really? Just like... Well, we can get into a whole other thing, the big low-fat study that was done at Harvard, they were paid to say that fat was bad, and so we can get into a whole thing on that, but I'm not... That's not what this podcast is about.

SHAWN STEVENSON: It's so interesting because you lived through that era were again, I definitely... When I first was trying to get healthy, I was getting this low-fat, low-fat cheese, low fat this low fat that, and you might see some results by managing caloric intake all those things, but you're making your body out of really strange foods, and also just the way they go about it. As you mentioned, just looking at cultures with centenarians, the Blue Zones, all that stuff, they're not trying to cut out the fat out of a natural food, the higher fat content is actually what's prized.

TANA AMEN: It's super interesting. You just mention the Blue Zones. So, I did all of it, so I grew up super unhealthy, a very unhealthy environment, lots of trauma, lots of drama, and very poor, so I grew up eating really lousy food. I can't even say it was fast food, 'cause there was mostly cereal. Okay. It was just like the tiger, the leprechaun, the captain, they were my best friends. So that's just... My mom was working three jobs just to survive. And so, I was a latchkey kid. I just ate garbage. So then as I got older and I started to get into fitness, I got into fitness really young, but I didn't know what health was, and so I did all of the fad stuff. I was a really extreme vegan for a while, but I didn't understand that vegan didn't mean that I could eat French fries. So vegan and health are not synonymous. I didn't understand all of the stuff. I did all the extremes. I did the food pyramid, I've done caveman, I did all of it, trying to figure out what is... All the fads that came out, I did them, but one thing I did, my nursing experience, nursing school, and where I worked...

I worked at Loma Linda. Loma Linda is Seventh Day Adventist. It's a Blue Zone. And so, I was like, these people are super weird, they don't drink coffee and I can't do this. There's no meat on campus and there's no coffee on campus, there's no coffee anywhere, and I'm like, "Yeah, I'm not going to survive nursing school without coffee." So, I bring my big jug of coffee with me everywhere... Every day when I went to school, and I'm like, "This is just weird." But when I started working in the hospital, the craziest thing happened, I cherished that education I had, it was the greatest education, and where I worked. And I remember I worked in a level A trauma

unit that was a neurosurgical and a surgical and a trauma unit, and I remember getting some of the patients in, 98 years old, one 102 years old, and they'd come in and like, no wrinkles, and no medical history, and I'm like, "Okay, this is really trippy, this is like Twilight Zone for me. Why do these patients look so healthy and young, and they don't have a medical history until that point?" And it's that life of temperance...

They live that life. Now, I'm not Seventh Adventist, but I'm like, "There's got to be something to this. There must be something to this diet and really managing your stress and exercising," and they really believe in that biological, psychological, social, and spiritual. And you have to balance all of those.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh my gosh, that's the consistency across the board, is community and the social construct, which is kind of the opposite of what you experienced, and it's very similar to my story as well, hashtag trauma bond. But if you could, because your early experiences really helped you to kind of deconstruct what can be of service to others, because I don't think people realize how common it is, we tend to be like... Like I grew up in a dysfunctional home, is like get in line, pick a number, you're not alone, and you really brought forth for me, and I got to dig into this a little bit the past couple of days, this understanding of the ACEs score. So, can you talk about that and also how you got into this field in the first place?

TANA AMEN: So, I got really excited when I started learning about ACE scores, which is adverse childhood experiences. And they started studying this, I think it was back in the '80s or something, they started learning and really noticing that kids who grew up in trauma, in drama trauma, they were sicker, these kids are sicker, and they grew up sicker and they died earlier. And so, they started to categorize it and they wanted to understand why are kids who grow up in trauma not doing as well. And so, there was a clear connection to it, and so they started studying it, so they came up with a grading scale zero to 10, and kids who have a score of four or more, they actually are much sicker, and they tend to get seven of the 10 most common causes of illness, but kids who have a score of six or higher die 20 years earlier of preventable causes. Okay, so my score is an eight.

So, I thought this is really important to know, this is really important to know. And it explained my life, 'cause I was a really sick kid, I was sick all the time, I was one of those kids who was always in the hospital. I've had 10 medical surgeries, I had cancer in my 20s. That came back over and over and over again. I've been so depressed, I wanted to die, I couldn't figure out why I was wasting oxygen on the planet, and when I look back at my life, it was very chaotic, very traumatic, and there was a lot of unresolved trauma. But when I learned about this, I'm like, "Yeah, I'm not okay with that. I'm just not okay with this." So, I started doing a lot of work on myself, resolving some of that trauma, did a lot of therapy, as my husband calls me a seeker, and so doing a lot of that work because I thought I'm not okay with just accepting that.

And so, your history doesn't have to be your destiny. And it's really interesting how it explained why I was such a sick kid, but that's also why I went on my journey to help myself to heal myself, and that's why I wrote The Omni Diet, that's why I wrote The Brain Warrior's Way. It really came from this journey to help myself, this odyssey, if you will, and to break the cycle for the next generation. Now, my daughter is a one, on a scale of zero to 10 my daughter is a one, and that's the goal for me. So, from eight to one, and so... But food, how you live, your exercise, meditation, how you feed yourself and getting help for the past, it all matters, and you don't have to just accept it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, that's so powerful. And we'll put this study up for everybody to see, but a recent study was done, this is an animal study, but they were really kind of trying to see can trauma be passed down generationally, and they found that very conclusively, that it was passed down to future generations. And here's the rub. With that, it's kind of being in this dysfunctional environment, but in exposing the animals and us to enriching environments can help to fortify those traumas and stop the process from extending any further and kind of heal what's happening physically and psychologically, and that's what I want to ask you about because there's two aspects to this. And the implications with being a more... A sicker person, essentially, more propensity towards dysfunction, disease, same story here. I was in and out of the hospital with asthma and allergies, and when I was a kid really still, I was diagnosed with this so-called degenerative disc disease that's so-called incurable, and this is an advanced arthritic condition that's relegated to people that are much older. And I'm a kid, why Am I expressing this old man's inside? And little did I know, again, it wasn't just a practical application of changing what I was eating, but this is what I want to ask you about, there's two parts, one part is the internal chemistry, because experiencing this trauma, experiencing living in volatile conditions, our thoughts are creating chemistry in our bodies.

TANA AMEN: Always.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right, so let's talk a little bit about that, just what's happening internally that can kind of push us in to create the conditions like this fight or flight system for us to get sicker easier.

TANA AMEN: Well, that's part of why... You just sort of nailed it. That's part of why kids who grow up in trauma and drama are sick all the time, because they are... They get stuck. So, your brain, especially your brain, your brain is developing, when you're really young and your brain is developing when that happens and you're stuck in a constant flight or fight it, you're constantly releasing cortisol that actually changes the way your brain develops, and so lots of things happen, nothing good. When that's happening, when you get stuck in that flight or fight, it's not only affecting your body, we kind of know now that being stuck with that cortisol

turned on isn't good. It elevates your blood sugar; it does all kinds of things that are not healthy for your body. It also is affecting how your brain develops, so you're more likely to end up with things like depression and ADD and all these other problems, and so that's part of the issue. So, you just sort of nailed it when you said that you kind of get stuck with that cortisol turned on, those hormones get turned on, but it's hard to turn them off, and that's where we get into trouble, is that even when you're older, you have this tendency.

My natural tendency, I am always looking over my shoulder, like I am always looking over... Even at 15, because of the environment I grew up in, where I lived and how I grew up, I ended up in a situation where I was assaulted and drugged down an alley. So, when you grow up in certain neighborhoods and areas and whatever, that's what happens. To this day, I will look behind my back. I chose martial arts instead of dance. It's how you live; it's how you think. So, my natural tendency is to turn to that, so I have to control that, so I have to consciously control that, that's prayer, that's meditation. That's that daily practice. Love is a daily practice. Forgiveness is a practice. Happiness is a daily practice. I don't think of those as feelings, I think of those as a practice, something I have to do intentionally, if that makes sense.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Of course.

TANA AMEN: 'Cause otherwise those hormones are stuck on... My natural tendency is to do that, just like my natural tendency is still to want to reach for junk food. If I'm under stress, that's my first tendency. And it's like, "Okay, how do I override that?" Not that I don't sometimes do that, none of us are perfect, but if I 90% of the time do the right thing, I can counterbalance that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, this is essentially kind of making it so that's not controlling you...

TANA AMEN: Absolutely and...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because you can live in that.

TANA AMEN: You don't want to get stuck in shame and guilt either, 'cause then you just... Then that's self-sabotaging. You're like, "I can't do it perfectly, so I'm not going to do it at all." That's ridiculous. So, it's like, "Okay, I made a mistake today, alright, move on," or "I just chose to eat that, or I chose to do that." Move on. It's okay, that's, forgiveness is a daily practice, right?

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. I love that so much, but you transmuted your experience into growth by studying martial arts, for example, but if we are not doing those other things to nourish ourselves, to create some balance and some internal understanding and progress,

then you might just be looking for a fight all the time, you might be like, Uma Thurman's and Kill Bill sh*t and just trying to kick somebody's ass every turn.

TANA AMEN: And I think when I met my husband, Daniel, you know Daniel, he is the sweetest person, he's the sweetest, most grounded, most gentle. Like what you see when you talk to him as how he actually is, so when you see him on video, that's how he really is in life. And when I first met him, I'm like, "Yeah, there's nobody like that for real. He's trying to manipulate me. That dude is not real." Like I'm waiting for the other shoe to fall. I didn't trust it. And so, it took time. Fortunately, he's patient and he saw something in me I didn't even see, but that grounds me now. Now I actually do trust it, there are people like that, and so that helped me turn that off, and now I consciously turn that off and there's people... Like he soothes me. But you mentioned something important, and that's growth. So, there's post-traumatic stress, we know about post-traumatic stress, everyone knows about it, and a lot of people focus on it, but there's post-traumatic growth, and so... You are a perfect example of post-traumatic growth. I'm an example of post-traumatic growth. Why are other people in my family not?

I don't know, I don't know why they went down the other road, they're still stuck in their addictions, they're still stuck and not trying to make life better for themselves. I don't know why. But I just knew early on, I love my family, I don't want to be anything like them, and it's just that constant daily practice, and not doing it perfectly. I think you interviewed me for my book *The Relentless Courage of a Scared Child*, I definitely did not do it perfectly, but it's that overall, trying to make your life better on a consistent basis.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. So good, so powerful. So, we've got this internal chemistry, our thoughts create chemistry in our bodies instantaneously. Right now, we could be in this awesome place having a good time connecting, but you can have a stressful thought of fear, somebody that we love is in danger or whatever the case might be, and it's going to change, every cell in your body is going to be affected by that. Now, what if you're doing this just on repeat, habitually living in fear, living in constant stress and worry? And by the way, I pulled this up, I've mentioned this a couple of times through the years, but this was published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, so *Journal of the American Medical Association*, they denoted that upwards of 80% of all physician visits today are for stress-related illness.

TANA AMEN: Yeah, they're preventable.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, that's the big thing.

TANA AMEN: And you mentioned something... What did you say? You said if we're stuck in the cycle of fear, you mean like we have been for the last two and a half years as a society? Yeah, I think as a society, we've gotten stuck in it, and it almost becomes not just a way of life, it's

almost addictive, and so we have to notice it and choose to put a stop to it. I don't watch the news anymore. 'Cause I'm one of those people, I know I get triggered really easily, and I'm just one of those people who if I watch the news, I'm going to get irritated. And so, you have to choose to put a stop to certain things, I just... I noticed that when I go outside and watch my hummingbirds, I'm happy. I turn the news on, I'm instantly mad. Why? Why am I going to do that? Right? So, I try to stay informed, but not annoyed, and so we have to notice it... Before you can do anything, you have to ask yourself what you want, and you have to be aware of it and you have to take inventory and then take steps to put a stop to it.

And all of it matters, the food you eat, everything you put on the end of your fork matters because they also release chemicals. Right? They affect dopamine, they affect serotonin, they affect insulin, they affect cortisol. So, all of that matters, your thoughts matter, who you hang out with matters, 'cause people are contagious as we have seen in society, all of it matters, your spirituality matters.

SHAWN STEVENSON: This brings me to an important point. First of all, before we get to that, actually, I want to pinpoint this, you just said that we can become addicted to the fear, and this really speaks to the work that you and Daniel have done is looking at literally how our brains are wired up and how we can get kind of... The question would be, why would we get addicted to something negative?

TANA AMEN: So, you grow up in a chaotic environment, in trauma, I grew up in it. Now, I don't know for men if it's the same, but I can tell you, for me, if there's a sexual predator, if there's chaos, I had an uncle who was murdered from a drug deal gone wrong, those are some pretty heavy things. People who grow up in those types of environments, you're always looking for the tiger around the corner, and even when the tiger is not around the corner, you don't really trust that the tiger is not around the corner, right? When you finally figure out something that saves you, right, so I learned how to protect myself, well, I'm always going to use that method of protecting myself, I'm always looking for that tiger and I'm always ready to protect myself, so it doesn't just go away. You can control it. I'm not sure I want it to go away, but I do want to control it if that makes sense. And so, learning, I want to manage it, I don't want it to manage me, and so I don't want to just like if I'm walking... I'll give you a little funny example. My husband created a game on one of our...

It's on one of our apps, on one of the things that we do, and it's this happiness, it's to help you actually train your brain to be happier, and so it's these faces that go by and you notice the happy faces, and you have to let the unhappy or scary faces go by and there's faces of...

SHAWN STEVENSON: I took that quiz, and I have...

TANA AMEN: It annoyed me so badly.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I have a negativity bias...

TANA AMEN: Me too.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I had no idea.

TANA AMEN: People who grow up in trauma have a negativity...

SHAWN STEVENSON: I was like, "No, I don't!"

TANA AMEN: Oh, I got annoyed by it, I actually stopped taking it. I got annoyed and I dropped the phone. I'm like, "This is a dumbest game I've ever played. I'm not doing this." And he goes, "Why?" I go, "cause I don't care about the happy faces, I care about the terrorist, I care about the guy on the street that's going to drag me down an alley." I go, "I don't want... What do I care about someone smiling at me? I care about the guy that's a threat to me." He goes, "Wow!" And I realize that's how you get... I don't know if it's addicted or if it's just you have to learn how to manage it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes, yeah.

TANA AMEN: So now over time, obviously, I notice both, I want to notice both.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. But it's a learn thing.

TANA AMEN: I don't want the other to control me. Right, right. I want to be empowered to be able to see the happy faces, interact with people, but not ignore the one that might be...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

TANA AMEN: A problem.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, you want to be able to draw on that if the situation calls for it...

TANA AMEN: But not live there.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Exactly, exactly. And it can be a gift that can help you to help other people...

TANA AMEN: Absolutely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: In certain scenarios. But when I say a negativity bias, this means that I, in taking this test, I recognize negativity in faces a lot easier, a lot faster.

TANA AMEN: Because it saved your life. So, the reason you get addicted to it is because it saved your life.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I don't like it. You're in my head.

TANA AMEN: But it saved your life.

SHAWN STEVENSON: When I took this test. Yes. So crazy.

TANA AMEN: And it saved your life when you were little, and so that ends up setting a template. So, it actually affect your amygdala, and so the part of your brain that notices what's wrong got set really early.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah.

TANA AMEN: And it protected you. And that's why you get... I don't know if addiction is the right word, but you're always going to notice.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, yeah. So, what that did for me in my life, during this time when I was dealing with my health issues, I was very self-centered, just looking back on it. I didn't want to be, I didn't want to be self-centered, I didn't want to be looking out for myself first, but it's just kind of like the environment that I was in, I had to survive, I had to really take care of myself and make sure that I'm okay. Because a certain circumstance, a certain choice and I could die. And for people who don't live in that experience, for example, there are situations where a drive-by might happen.

TANA AMEN: Right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right? And a lot of folks, they just... You just go outside, you just go for a walk in your neighborhood, you go walk your little dog, all good. There were times when I lived in circumstances where literally, I've got to be careful of a situation like that taking place, and so being self-centered was just kind of like a safety mechanism.

TANA AMEN: Right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: But by getting myself healthier, and this is what I'm going to ask you about next, the craziest thing happened, I didn't really realize until years later, the way that I was being as far as being self-centered, it didn't fit anymore, when I got physically healthier and people started asking me to help them, I became much more other-centered. And you could swing to the other side of the spectrum also and lose yourself that way too, and I spent a lot of time in that because I was kind of trying to make amends unconsciously for living the way that I lived, and I wanted to help so many people and sacrifice myself, and so over time finding that balance. And so the question I want to ask you about is, so looking at this incredible science, really, with the ACES, and we understand what we're dealing with, our template, number one, why are we edging ourselves into chronic disease easier when we're higher on that score, the internal chemistry that we're creating, stress, just because you can't touch stress doesn't mean that it's not very real, it might be arguably the most destructive thing potentially for our bodies, but the other thing is having that experience in growing up in a traumatic environment, it also influences the choices that we make.

TANA AMEN: Yes.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, it's not just the internal chemistry, it's our perspective, it's our psychology, and it's the choices we make as a result. So, let's talk about that.

TANA AMEN: Yeah, 'cause your blueprint is different, so you're blueprint and how you see the world is... It's very, very different. Like I said, I didn't even trust my husband when I met him, 'cause he was too nice, so I almost passed him by. He says I tortured him for the first 18 months. It was really that I just didn't trust him. And so, I was broken internally, I wouldn't... Didn't see it that way, 'cause I looked really tough, but it was like, this guy was too nice, he just wasn't... He didn't fit my template of what a guy was supposed to be like. They were kind of jerks. Right? That's how they were supposed to be. And so, when he wasn't a jerk, I'm like, yeah, that's not trustworthy. It doesn't even make sense. And just hearing myself say it, it doesn't make sense. And so... And I remember a girlfriend saying to me, "Your problem isn't the guys you meet, it's the one you give you the number to." I was like, whoa. Like, whoa. And that just... It literally was like cold water in my face. So, the problem was me, it was my blueprint. To your point, it's the decisions we make when we grow up in certain environments, you're not stuck with that, you get to change it if you want to, but it takes work. No one said it was going to be easy. It's a choice.

So, I chose to do the work on that, and one of the reasons that I chose to do the work on that was when I had a little girl, I'm like, I am not raising her the same way with the same garbage and the same nonsense. If I have a choice, I'm going to break those cycles. I'm not going to do it perfectly, none of us do as parents, but I'm going to choose to break those cycles, whichever ones I can. And so, a big part of me getting healthy and breaking those cycles was for my

daughter, was to change the next generation, but how we see the world is shaped early on. And you mentioned something earlier about trauma can be passed on. It absolutely can. They did a study with mice, and they shocked the mouse and then they exposed them to the smell of cherry blossom, shocked the mice, exposed them to cherry blossoms, and then they exposed them to cherry blossoms and the mice were scared. Right? But their babies were scared too, and they never exposed them to the shock, they exposed them to the smell of cherry blossom, to the scent of cherry blossoms, and they were scared, even though they never experienced the shock.

So yes, trauma can be passed on. It's epigenetics, and my grandmother had gone through a war, she was from Lebanon, and she went through a war, and she went through a great famine, and to this day, like I'm a prepper, I'm one of those people, I had toilet paper when the pandemic came, 'cause I was like...

SHAWN STEVENSON: It was you?

TANA AMEN: But I've been storing food and water and supplies for 20 years. I never went through a famine, but that's just how I am because my family, it just... I don't even know why, it was just passed down, I don't know, but all of those things sort of shape our blueprints and how we see the world, and then how do you see the world and the decisions we make. Right? So, it's epigenetics. It's life experience. So, it's nature, it's nurture.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. So, to specifically zero in on a psychological impact of having a high ACES score, our choices with what we eat, for example, can definitely be influenced, and what we tend to do in our culture is blame the person, like why can't you just do this? Why can't you follow instructions? Why can't you just do what I say? And even we blame ourselves. Why can't I make the choices that are better for me? And negating the fact that the way that we grew up, the environment we grew up in, could be, very likely is controlling the decisions, are influencing the decisions that we're making for what we're putting in our bodies.

TANA AMEN: Yeah, and let's be fair. There's also a lot of factors, like awful food is cheap. Okay, so when you grow up poor, it is cheaper, so we need to fix that, we actually... And it's getting better, and there are ways, but it takes education to help people learn how to do that. So that's part of it. The other thing is, I didn't learn how to cook, my mom was busy working, I never learned how to cook, so reaching for foods that were processed and already cooked or... So-called foods, that was easier. That was, I didn't know how to cook, and when you're poor, you often don't learn those basic skills. My daughter is an amazing cook, she cooks every single day, but that was something that I broke. Now, it's still not natural for me to want to go in the kitchen and cook. I know how to cook, I've written eight cookbooks, but I didn't learn to cook until I was in my 30s, so those are some of the reasons I think when you grow up, like we did,

you have to... That's intentional, it takes a lot of work to get the education to make the decision to do that. It's not just natural to do those things if we don't make it intentional. So, yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I want to ask you about a specific term, because once we make the decision to eat healthier, especially if we grew up in this kind of ultra-processed food paradigm, by the way, because there's a distinction, you just came from Italy, there's processing, like olive oil is processed, it's coming from an olive, they're doing something, but that's very different from taking some oats and turning it into goddamn Lucky Charms. It's very different, right? And so, I want to make that distinction, ultra-processed foods is what we're talking about, and the average American, this study was from almost 10 years ago by the way, though a lot of people are kicking this around now, and I've been pushing this into culture recently: Approximately 60% of the average American's diet is ultra-processed foods.

So, this is... And again, we're not in the minority by any sense, but within that, there's this paradigm, once we start to get healthy, start eating higher quality food, we make this decision to take care of ourselves, but then we cheat. There is a cheat day or a cheat meal, or... What do you think about this terminology?

TANA AMEN: I don't even like the term. The word itself sets you up for failure. Why are we going to call it a cheat day? So, do I think that it's okay to have a meal or to have something? Like when I was in Italy, did I have gelato? You bet; I had some gelato. Right? I didn't feel bad about it at all; I looked forward to it. But I didn't set up a cheat, like a whole cheat vacation, right? Because that's not, the idea of doing that, when people set up cheat days, I know people when I was coaching people in nutrition, that would consume 4000 calories of garbage on a cheat day, 'cause they were trying to get it all into that one day, and they would take the six days that they worked so hard and did so well, and they would completely sabotage it with inflammatory foods and re-trigger all of their addictions because they just would cram everything into that one day. And I know some people believe, well, it's good to do that because it reminds you of why you're doing it. Well, no, it's like you just ruined... It takes a while to kick those addictions to those sugars and those processed foods, and it takes a while. You just re-triggered all of that and all that inflammation comes back, and you feel terrible for several more days. By the time you start to feel good, it all comes back.

Now, that's why I like more the idea of 90/10 or 95/5 just eat really well 90% of the time or 95% of the time. And if you have something, don't feel bad about it. So, for me, it's like if I know I'm going to eat something, we'll split a dessert and it's like, okay, I have a three-bite rule. I don't need to eat a giant piece of cake, I can have three bites of that cake and it's not going to do, it's not going to be any different, right, a couple of bites of something is fine, but I'm not going to re-trigger. I also tend to avoid something I know is... Like if you're an alcoholic, don't go on a binge with alcohol, right?

So, I know I'm a frosting freak, you'll find me in the corner licking frosting off of wax paper, it's like crack for me, so I try to avoid those foods that I know are just going to re-trigger it and send me down this wicked place, right? But I don't like the idea of a cheat day, it's like just have something and move on, and don't trip yourself up with feeling guilty about it and just like have it, move on. Have a thing, not a day.

SHAWN STEVENSON: I've never heard anybody say frosting freak before...

TANA AMEN: Oh, I'm a frosting freak. It's like crack. It's crazy. So...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Tana, what you doing?

TANA AMEN: Yeah, no. It's bad.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Oh my gosh, I love that. So, with this paradigm, I think it's really interesting how we label things.

TANA AMEN: Yeah.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Because again, you're not saying don't enjoy yourself, don't eat foods that you might have like a comfort food or a psychological connection to. It's just not making that the end all be all and controlling you. Again, like you're making the choice to have the thing, so you can still enjoy yourself, have a little bit of this and that little processed food, as you said in 90/10 rule, 90% real foods, 10%, whatever. Right?

TANA AMEN: I've not seen anyone do it perfect yet, so maybe there's someone out there who literally eats nothing ever that's not 100% perfect. I haven't seen it yet, so I think we almost create problems when we just tell people they have to do it perfectly, because then there's shame and guilt, and then they don't want to go back to do it, it's like forget it, I can't do it, I'm not good enough. So...

SHAWN STEVENSON: I love this so much because for me, I've been trying to get people in the realm of 70/30, 80/20 and working their way up, but you just mentioned what the real issue is, is that addictive nature of certain foods...

TANA AMEN: And inflammation.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Inflammation, that biochemistry, and then the residual effect of you binging for a day and then feeling not yourself, not well for the next day, two, three days, and

by the time you're back in the flow, then we got a cheat day again and there's nothing else in our culture really... And by the way, again, I want to reiterate this point, this doesn't mean that you can't enjoy yourself and have foods that you love, it's just when we frame it in this way, I'll put the stamp on it. We don't do anything else in our culture.

TANA AMEN: So, I'm doing something bad...

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. We attach the word cheat. Nothing else in our culture...

TANA AMEN: Language matters.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Is good when it comes to cheating.

TANA AMEN: Right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Except when it comes to our food.

TANA AMEN: Right. And language matters, right? Your subconscious does not have a sense of humor. It just does what you tell it. So, when you use certain words, I don't know, it just, it really affects how you see it and how you feel it in your body.

SHAWN STEVENSON: If you're happy, you don't have to cheat.

TANA AMEN: Right.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, it's the same thing again, cheating on a test, bad, cheating on your spouse, bad, cheating on your taxes, bad.

TANA AMEN: Subconsciously cheating with food is bad.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. So, what does it say about you? You're doing something bad. Are you a bad girl? Are you a frosting freak?

TANA AMEN: Yup.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, it creates this psychological weight for us that it's even more difficult for us to shake.

TANA AMEN: Exactly.

SHAWN STEVENSON: So, wow, it's so powerful. And again, it's just words have power, that's one of the biggest takeaways from today, truly. And you are somebody who knows this very, very well, and you know, how we label things. And I want to ask you about this because, again, our past experiences are determining the choices that we're making right now. Most people have no idea that this is what's happening in their life, they think that I'm this evolved adult, I'm making my decisions on my own free will, but in reality, you might be stuck in a pattern as a 10-year-old...

TANA AMEN: Absolutely.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Who experienced some kind of a crisis or a negative experience in your life, and you're making choices on what you do for your body from that place.

TANA AMEN: Yup. Or your relationship.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, that's exactly what I want to talk to you about, our relationships in that context, because our relationships also have a huge impact on our health. So, let's talk about that.

TANA AMEN: So, you said really important. So we learn things when we're really little, three, four years old, where you learn strategies, whether they were to save your life or they were just to get you out of trouble, maybe you learn to lie to get yourself out of trouble, or maybe you learn to hide to stay out of trouble if things were volatile in your house, whatever it is, you learn these strategies that when you were very young, and the strategy that works when you're four years old usually doesn't work when you're 40 years old, but very few people ever actually notice it or take the time to change those strategies or pay attention to the fact that they're using a four-year-old strategy in a 40-year-old relationship, right? And so that's where they end up sabotaging, because it actually takes some introspection, it takes a little bit of work to notice it, and you got to do the work to fix it, so you can actually... And there's some powerful techniques like EMDR for trauma to heal past trauma, I love NLP, love NLP for helping you really recognize those past strategies, but then change it to a strategy that's way more empowering for today.

So, something that's really going to empower my life as someone in my mid-50s is not going to be the same thing I did when I was five when I was hiding. It didn't even help me when I was 15 when I was sexually assaulted. Hiding did not help me. I had to learn how to speak up, I had to learn how to draw boundaries, I had to learn going forward how to use very different strategies, so it's really important to understand that strategies that worked at one point in your life are not going to be the same strategies you use at other times in your life. And it's

okay, it's okay to say, that saved my life. I'm proud of myself at that time, but I need to learn something new.

SHAWN STEVENSON: We've got a quick break coming up. We'll be right back.

Few people know that regularly drinking coffee has been shown to help prevent cognitive decline and reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. This attribute, referenced in the journal, *Practical Neurology*, is yet another reason why intelligent coffee consumption makes the list of best neuro-nutritious beverages. Another study featured in the journal, *Psychopharmacology*, uncovered that drinking coffee has some remarkable benefits on mental performance. The research has found that intelligent coffee intake leads to improvements in alertness, improve reaction times, and enhanced performance on cognitive vigilance task and tasks that involve deep concentration.

Now, why am I stressing intelligent coffee intake? This means acknowledging the true U-shaped curve of benefits and not going ham on caffeine. The data clearly shows that some coffee, a cup or two a day, and the accompanied caffeine is a great adjunct for improved mental performance. But going too far starts to lead to diminishing returns, so we want to make sure that we're getting an optimal intake of coffee, and again, not going overboard. But also, coffee is best if it's not coming along with pesticides, herbicides, rodenticides, fungicides. These chemical elements are clinically proven to destroy our microbiome terrain, so destroying the very microbiome that helps to regulate our metabolism, regulate our immune system. The list goes on and on.

Obviously you want to make sure that those things are not coming along with the high-quality coffee that we're trying to get these benefits from. And also, what if we can up-level the longevity and neurological benefits of the coffee by combining it with another clinically proven nutrient source? Well, that's what I do every day when I have the organic coffee combined with the dual extracted medicinal mushrooms from Four Sigmatic. And if we're talking about optimal cognitive performance and the health of our brain, the protection of our brain, there are few nutrient sources like Lion's Mane medicinal mushroom that pack these kinds of benefits. Researchers at the University of Malaya found that Lion's Mane has neuroprotective effects, literally being able to help to defend the brain against even traumatic brain injuries, it just makes the brain more healthy and robust.

So, again, this combination of medicinal mushrooms plus organic high-quality coffee is a match made in nutrient heaven. Go to foursigmatic.com/model, that's F-O-U-R-S-I-G-M-A-T-I-C.com/model to get 10% off their incredible mushroom elixirs, mushroom hot cocos and mushroom coffees. Again, that's foursigmatic.com/model. And now, back to the show.

You have a very great example of what a shift in relationships can do for your actions and how you function in the world, because I would imagine it's a lot easier for both you and Daniel to make healthy choices because you have each other. But for you coming into this situation, where again, for him is 18 months of torture to get through, break down these walls, and from there, in the work that he's doing as well, being able to peer into that and you guys can start to consciously create a healthier culture. So, I want to talk about the impact that our relationships have on our health and our choices overall.

TANA AMEN: We make a really great team, and our kids would say we're super weird. We are weird, but we get along so well and we just... We're a really great team. Even during COVID, we didn't mind being... When you're with the right person, it just... It was not that big of a deal. Did stuff going on outside of our house bother us? Sure. Were we concerned? A little. But we were fine, and we love that we make a difference together, and it's funny because a lot of our health and nutrition stuff has evolved together, which is great. We weren't eating all that healthy when we first met and we just... We really learned and evolved together, which is fantastic, and which is funny 'cause we're both medical people, we thought we knew a lot, go figure. But we learned that together and we love that we respect each other enough, that so many couples, they're together and it's like one person wants to get healthy, but the other one wants to sabotage it, that's really difficult. That's a really difficult relationship. For us, when one of us wants to do something, even if the other one doesn't want to do it...

I practice martial arts, he has no interest, he wants to do something else, but we respect each other, we support each other. Fortunately, when it comes to health, we're in that together, and we have this mission together to really help people and change their lives, and it really is special, it really is. But getting through life together and getting through problems and crises when you are bonded and you have the same overall goal, it's amazing. I always feel like it's just like, "That's my person, that's my..." It's, I'm home, I'm grounded. He's the Ying to my Yang. He's just like... It's just always very complete.

SHAWN STEVENSON: That's amazing, it's such a gift. But still, both of you, it's choices that you made to create that.

TANA AMEN: Oh, and we both made really bad choices before for us, they weren't healthy for us, so I think learning from that, again, not recognizing it and going, "Okay, you don't have to beat yourself up for it, learn from it, don't take that garbage with you into the next relationship," own that that was part of... A part of it was you and take responsibility. Not blame. Responsibility is one of my favorite words. It's the ability to respond, it's not taking blame, it's the ability to respond so that you break whatever patterns were your responsibility and don't take it with you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. That's literally one of my favorite words. Truly, truly.

TANA AMEN: Well, your life is a reflection of it. Your life is a reflection with all the stuff you've been through, including your physical ailments, look where you're at, that is the definition of responsibility.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Man, this is powerful. What's so interesting for me, again, from when I look at myself, I understand that there are some unique capacities that I have, but I see that in everybody, I think everybody has so much beauty and potential and capacity for so much, but it's a choice. And what was holding me back, truly, was placing blame, pointing the fingers on my environment, my parents, my this, or that. Why won't anybody help me? Why won't these physicians help me with the condition?

And I was pointing so much to the external world and was negating the power that I had to take responsibility, not again, to accept that all of this stuff is my fault, that the stuff that I went through in my life was my fault, I wasn't doing that. I was just accepting that I have the power now to decide what I do with all of it. And once I took responsibility... And here's the thing, what can happen is we'll take responsibility for some, but really, if you take 100% responsibility for your life, the power is completely within your hands now, but you can't leave that little bit of wiggle room, and even within that as a practice as well, a practice of responsibility. And I want to ask you about this because you've seen this firsthand as well, what happens when you choose to take responsibility for your life and you choose to invest in healthy relationships, investing in your health, investing in service to others, but you have people who maybe you grew up with or people who, or in your past, who maybe you're trying to bring along with you to this new life or you're making all of these changes, and for them, they're like, "No, I don't want to take responsibility. Matter of fact, I want to blame you."

TANA AMEN: Or I want you to take responsibility.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Or... Exactly, take responsibility for me as well, and these are grown ass people, these could be people who might even be your seniors. And what do you do in that situation? How do you operate or deal with people who want to fight you with growth, who want to fight against you, who've got a problem for every solution and they want to stay in that old life, how do you deal with that when you're trying to be progressive and to take responsibility and grow yourself?

TANA AMEN: That was actually one of the themes in my most recent book, 'cause it was a memoir and its family members that are stuck there.

Yeah, I'm a recovered people pleaser, I guess, but I don't do co-dependency very well, so boundaries, boundaries are huge, and if you... Responsibility, you said something super important about responsibility. I was actually really taught this lesson by the person who scared me most in my family, it was the uncle who was a heroin addict, he's the reason my other uncle was murdered, and that was very traumatic for me when I was four years old. But now fast forward, and he's taken responsibility for his life, and he's helped countless people. He became a coach and was doing all kinds of things and working in prisons, and he drew a circle and he said, "This is a circle. How much responsibility are you willing to take?" And I'm like, "For having cancer? Are you kidding me right now?" I was really angry at him, and he goes, "I didn't say how much blame, how much responsibility are you willing to take? If you cut the circle in half, and you said 50%, if you take 50% responsibility, the ability to respond, then someone else or something else still has control over the other 50%," which is what you just said.

And I was like, "Well, I don't want someone else having control over my life," and it was like this aha moment, and that's when I really learned how to take responsibility. But when I did that, to your point again, that's when everyone came forward and wanted me to help them, and I learned really quickly that if other people aren't willing to take responsibility for their lives, it's like they're going to try and pull you down. It's way easier to pull someone down than it is for you to pull someone up, so I'm willing to give handouts, I'm not willing to... Or hand ups, I'm not willing to give hand-outs in my family, and I had to be really good at drawing boundaries. So, there are some people simply are not ready or choose not to, for whatever reason, and I have to be okay with that. I will help you help yourself, but I will not enable you in your addictions, so that's just something I have to be okay with, and I have to be okay with not being popular, I was not put on this planet to be popular, and that's okay.

So, I had to be okay with drawing those boundaries, and sometimes I just have to say, "I love you and I will miss you. Call me when you're ready."

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Oh, man. How do you get to that place though, Tana, because I know a lot of people, just tired, I'm tired of your sh*t.

TANA AMEN: Because I made a promise to myself when I had my daughter that I would not... My mother was very co-dependent, and she exposed me to a lot of things because she felt like she had to fix everyone that was not fixable, and I was exposed to a lot because of that, and I made a promise to myself that I would not do that, that I would not, that I was going to draw boundaries for my daughter's sake and create a healthy environment for her to live in, and that was really my motivation, so every time I felt tempted to do that, I'm like, "I'm not doing it. They have to be healthy enough or at least wanted enough to take responsibility or I'm not doing it."

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, man, this is crazy, alright? We've kind of talked about this a little bit before we got started, just the similarities, but that is a huge justification for me because even psychologically, we have to figure out things for ourselves and creating those boundaries. For me, it was the safety of my kids, and just being able to truly, I can't... Prior to that, I would still hang out with, associate, go to certain places with people, and I know the danger is imminent and possible, but once my kids got to a certain age where I like, I can't let them hang out with his family member where literally they might get shot or they get attacked or... And then those things happen. Later on, years later, those things actually happen. And it's just like my kid could have been with you, and not understanding why do I want to draw back and protect my kids, and it's just... I think it's a very logical thing to do, it's not about... It's not a love-hate thing, it's just a logical thing to do to want to protect your kids, but at the same time, we still go through this psychological milieu of like...

"I don't want to leave people behind." I love people, especially coming from where I come from, it's just like, "You don't forget where you come from, you reach back to lift people up," but some people, you reach back to lift them up...

TANA AMEN: They'll pull you down.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah, they'll try, they'll throw their handcuff on you and try and do a little bit of a...

TANA AMEN: It's the same. We're not that different. And there's just some people, like I said, you have to say, "I love you and I will miss you. You're going to have to figure this out." Or "Call me when you're ready." There's just some people who are not going to be ready and you just have to be okay with that. It's so interesting, it's like when you finally get healthy... For me, it's like, "Oh, she's such a b*tch." Okay, you're not wrong. I'm okay with that. It's, I'm okay with that. It doesn't... What you think of me is none of my business. I'm okay with it, because I have to live with myself, my decisions, and what happens to my daughter and my family. I'm okay with it.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. 'Cause when people see you, they're just like, that's what they see like, "Oh, you've got it together." You're beautiful, you're amazing, you're successful. But they don't know where you come from, and the choices that you've had to make, the boundaries you've had to set, and how much you've had to do the work at the end of the day, and I think... And this is what I want to ask you about is, I think it's that challenge or courage that it takes to actually do the work yourself, and this leads into your latest book. So, what was the inspiration? Why did you feel drawn to write your memoir?

TANA AMEN: That was hard. My husband wanted me to write it for a while, and one of the reasons I held off was because my daughter was too young, there's stuff in there that I felt like she's not going to understand yet, my life was... And my book was still the PG-13 version, but there was just stuff I needed her to be old enough to understand 'cause my life was not pretty, and some of the... The trauma we experience when we're young, it's like, "Okay, that wasn't my fault," literally it wasn't my fault. You're a child, right? But some of the decisions you make when you're older, I think those are the hardest things to overcome because there's shame associated with that, there's guilt associated with that, and I've done the work on all that stuff, but I think our self-induced trauma in our 20s sometimes, that's the worst stuff. So, I was like, "I just need her to be old enough to understand some of the choices I made," and that's why I waited. Also, everyone, not everyone, but most of the people in my book are still alive. And that was really interesting to write some of that stuff.

So, I had to have some heavy talks with some of my family members, and what was fascinating to me is that the people in my book who had the hardest stories to tell, they were okay with it, they had done the work. The people who didn't really have much to worry about, they were like, didn't want their... I didn't do anything. I'm like, "Yeah, your story is not that bad." But they're still hiding from who they are. It's so interesting to me. So interesting. The people who really were... Like my uncle, the one who was a heroin addict, who was responsible for another uncle being murdered, he's like, "Yeah, you didn't really get that story right, it was way worse than that." I was like, "Whoa," 'cause he's done the work.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. That's really powerful. That's a really powerful insight. I think you just mentioned being in that place where I think they're closer to change or to having a better life and being that close because of our addiction to the drama and the trauma and all that stuff, it's just like... It's right there versus when you're so far gone, and life is so difficult and... Because for me, I think that I was in that place, I really, I was by myself, not to only lose your health and I'm hanging on by a thread in college, I went from a full credit load to just one class multiple semesters, I was embarrassed, and I just didn't have anybody, I didn't have anybody looking out for me, and I was going through that by myself, it was a really, really dark time. But because of hitting truly like a rock bottom, I don't even know if I'm going to be able to pay my rent the next month, all the things, financially, health-wise, relationship-wise, psychologically, it was just a total mess, and also just where I come from, all the stuff that I've been through, truly, and you just said it too...

There can be two different versions of this, to be like, I'm tired, it could be I'm tired of the drama and I'm putting an end it, or also literally, I'm just tired, so I'm giving up. And so I had kind of reached that place where I was tired, but I had a choice of what kind of tired that was going to be, and I look at the situation where things were truly, truly rocky for me, really, really messed up, and I had the ability to see that this path that I'm on right now, is just going to end

in something very, very bad, and I've got to make a change. I had a choice to make versus things are kind of messed up, I've been through some stuff, I had some problems, there's some crazy stuff in my life, things could get better, it's just kind of because of the... You can kind of see the new life. I was so far removed from that new life, I didn't know that a lot of this stuff was even possible, I'm damn sure I didn't know what it was like to feel good, I didn't know what it was like to not look over my shoulder.

I didn't know what it was like to trust someone. All these things, I just didn't know what it was like. But for me to get to that place, I had to work on myself. And so, meeting my wife, it wasn't that she came along and sprinkled some magic fairy dust on me to make me fall in love with her and trust her and all the things, it was the work that I was doing on myself. I got myself physically healthy and I dedicated my life to service, and I was so dedicated to growth and all the things, now I could see that this person is trustworthy and amazing and loving and all the things.

TANA AMEN: You changed your glasses.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yes.

TANA AMEN: You were seeing life through new lenses. It's really... So, like you, I went through a really dark time when I had cancer; I actually lost a Playboy deal. So, I was tested for Playboy, was accepted by Playboy and found out I had cancer in the same month. And it was crazy, so I was like really living life in the fast lane and then screeching halt. And everyone I knew didn't want to be a part of that life, so they were gone. And I thought I had the world by the tail and then it was just gone. And so, I went through this wicked depression. Within a few months, I had to quit my job, dropped out of school, filed for bankruptcy, my mom had brain surgery at the same time, it was just a really horrible time in my life. I went into a wicked depression and wanted to die, and so... But to your point, what you just said, I love what you just said, it was really dark for a while. It was really dark, I really thought I was wasting oxygen on the planet; I had no idea what I was going to do with my life.

I had no idea that all of that darkness that I was going through, that was like to this day, it's the worst thing I've ever been through. I couldn't crawl out of my skin. It was worse than having cancer, the depression was. And I just couldn't get away from it. I had no idea that everything that I went through during that horrible time would be my purpose today. And so, sometimes those dark times are your... If you learn from them, if you can turn that pain into purpose like you did, you turned your pain into purpose, if you can use that pain, that became my platform for helping people. I didn't know that at the time. If anyone would have told me that back then, I'd have probably punched him in the face.

I'm like, "Shut up." I don't want to do this.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And I'm trained to punch said person in the face.

TANA AMEN: Right. I don't want to be here right now. This is not what I want to do, but here I am, and that's the purpose in my life, is that pain to purpose. So, for anybody listening, it's been a really dark time for a lot of people, and you just don't know what this can be used for in the future.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. Thank you for saying that, thank you for saying that. I don't think that that's been said even close to enough, because for people who are just like, "A lot of these things shouldn't have even transpired this way," and we're just spiraling out of control, this can also be the catalyst for change...

TANA AMEN: What's next.

SHAWN STEVENSON: And for transformation, and for a wellness revolution. Because I think that we miss out on the fact that things were already just declining as far as the epidemic rates of depression, everything was already skyrocketing, depression and anxiety and schizophrenia and ADHD and obesity and diabetes and cancer and the list goes on and on. Everything is up, and we're just allowing it to happen. We have our little nooks and crannies, our little circles where we're focusing on getting people well, we've got our little communities, but at large, our society is just kind of on a bullet train to hell in a handbasket. This shook everything up, and this could be the catalyst for real change. Because even though we had our little universes that we're creating, our little, small universes, I think we could be disillusioned to the fact that the whole was hurting a lot. And so, this can get our attention on that, and I know it did for me, for sure.

And I want to ask you about this, and this is a big part of why I do what I do. And also, this is the work that you do and focus on, which is how taking care of our physical health, specifically our nutrition, eating well, how that can have amazing trickle-down effects into other areas of our lives. For you, why was it food? Why did you focus on nutrition as a big part of your work in which you're helping other people?

TANA AMEN: So, I've gotten really sick again. So, for whatever reason, I had a type of cancer that was supposed to be "one of the safer cancers to get" because it's slow growing, but it kept coming back and kept coming back. And so, I had multiple surgeries, radiation treatments, experimental treatments, and it was bizarre. So, at one point, I was on nine medications, some of them to treat the side effects of other medications, and yet if you looked at me on the outside, you'd have been like, "She's really fit." It was super weird. So, I felt miserable. I was

wired and tired and exhausted and I couldn't sleep at night. It was so bizarre, and they had me on heart medication 'cause my heart rate was so high. And I'm like, "This can't be right." And they told me I couldn't practice martial arts anymore. They told me I couldn't really lift weights anymore or run or do anything like that 'cause my heart rate was really high. And I'm like, "This cannot be right. I'm a medical professional, this cannot be right." I was going through another treatment, and my doctor said something to me, he said, "You should be grateful." And I literally, again, wanted to punch him in the face.

There's a theme here. But anyways, I was like, "What do you mean I should be grateful?" He's like, "You should be grateful for the medications, that they even exist, that you have them." And I thought to myself, "This is ridiculous that this is what we do to people." Basically, they want to put me out to pasture, put me on a bunch of medications, tell me not to live the life I want to live. What's the point? And so, I took it as a sign that I was supposed to take responsibility and figure it out for myself. And I went and took 300 hours at A4M, which is the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine, and I took 300 hours in metabolic medicine. I'm like, "I'm going to figure out what this is." Is it hormones that I need to be focusing on? I'd already... Was working out like a crazy person, so it wasn't that. Was it food? What was it? Well, it was all of it. It was hormones, food, exercise, meditation, it was all of it. So, when people ask me, "What's the one thing you can do?" I'm like, "All of it."

But I went and learned. And what I really, really was sort of mind-blown about was how much food played a part. I always knew food was important from the time I became a nurse and into fitness and all that, but I didn't really know what and how much and the specifics. And I was just so surprised. And that was the journey. And when I went on that journey to heal myself, everything you put on the end of your fork matters, because it's either making you better or it's making you worse. It's affecting your hormones, minutes and minutes. It's affecting your blood sugar, which is affecting the decisions you make. It's affecting your mood every single day. And that's when I really began to understand. And so, I didn't leave it up to them anymore. Now, I'm grateful for the doctors I have, I'm grateful for the medication that I will take for the rest of my life. I just don't want to take nine of them. I don't want to indiscriminately take them. I want to take the ones I need. So, I just don't leave it in anybody's hands anymore. And food is medicine, or it is poison.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Pretty simple.

TANA AMEN: And most of us aren't eating food. We're eating food-like substances.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. I struggle to call it food as well.

TANA AMEN: Right. It's not food. Because it's designed by scientists to keep you addicted, literally. It's designed by scientists where they remove the fiber, they add flavors. They know the right chewiness, they know the right flavors, they know the right... It's crazy what they know about food to literally affect your brain to make it more addictive than cocaine. It affects the nucleus accumbent to make it addictive so that you choose their brand over someone else's. And "Oh, by the way," they put it on the bottom shelves in the grocery stores. Why? Because your children will throw temper tantrums if you don't buy it for them. So, they're hooking your kids. And as soon as I learned that, that it's about food science, it's not about food, I'm like, "I'm not going to let someone else manipulate me into buying something."

SHAWN STEVENSON: When I hear something like this, and you think about, for example, more addictive than cocaine. Really?

TANA AMEN: Yep. No, the studies show that some of these foods are more addictive than cocaine. There are multiple studies on that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Multiple. Yeah.

TANA AMEN: Yeah. With sugar, and they did one on Oreos, it's crazy. Because this combination of the sugar and the cheap fats and the highly processed foods, they were more addictive than cocaine. They put cocaine out, then they put the sugar out, and then they gave the mice a choice, and they went for the cocaine.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Right. Even mice that were addicted to cocaine.

TANA AMEN: Yep. Went for the sugar instead.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Went for sugar once it became an option, they slowly became addicted to that instead. And it's so crazy. It's just like, first of all, who's getting mice high on cocaine by the way, getting... Rick James-ing these mice...

TANA AMEN: Right. But they know the meltiness, the crunchiness, the smell. It's crazy.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. So now the question again would come up is that, look at how people act in the world as far as, people aren't getting arrested for trafficking sugar. But you know what I mean? But to answer this question, because I've thought about this a lot, people are not here selling their furniture or selling their body to get a hit of some Twinkies or whatever, but it's because they don't have to. We are immersed, we're flooded with this. Cocaine, not so much. The accessibility, all those things with sugar. And again, for me, I'm a results person, look at the results of our society. Just look at the results.

TANA AMEN: Well, and one might be more acute than the other, the effect might be more acute than the other, but you also can't minimize the effect of how many of these foods, and not just the foods, but the things we're putting into the air and into our foods and into so many things are hormone disruptors, and so that's a whole another discussion. But a lot of these foods now and the ingredients they're putting into them are hormone disruptors, and that's a whole 'nother level of changing how we think, how we function, how we feel, and so... But that, over time, that's over time that's affecting, it's affecting the next generation, when we have children.

SHAWN STEVENSON: You've got so many great resources as well for this, we've danced around to a lot of different subjects today, but this is one of the great things about what you're doing and what Daniel is doing, is making health more accessible, making education more accessible, from literally the best people in the world. And if you could, can you share where people can get more information, learn about Amen Clinics, and also just even follow you and just zero in on your universe too.

TANA AMEN: Oh, absolutely, thank you. So amenclinics.com, you can actually find a lot about what we do at Amen Clinics where we do brain scans and we connect brain and behavior, we hate the term mental illness, we want mental health, and we think that a lot of it is brain health. And then you can follow me @tanaamen, so @tanaamen on Instagram or tanaamen.com, and then my husband Doc Amen, so, @docamen.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. And also, where can people pick up your book?

TANA AMEN: So, it's on Amazon or anywhere you can buy books. So, *The Relentless Courage of a Scared Child* is my most current book, and that's my memoir, and it really talks a lot about my journey and how I got here. And yeah, so thank you for that.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Yeah. No, thank you for sharing your story. Because even hearing you in the writing process and thinking about your consideration of other people's stories who've had an influence on your story, but it is your story, this is your story, it's your truth, and you have the right to share it, but you also have to have the courage and audacity to do it, and that's one of the things that's really standing out about you now, especially just being in the room with you. Like you're badass, you're a very, very strong person, but you've worked on yourself to have that balance of peace and understanding, and to even have the consideration for other people in the process, is just really, really remarkable. But I'm just grateful you're sharing your story because it's one that so many people can resonate with and to know truly, and this is one of the things I see for myself, when you hear people say this, it doesn't usually sound right, like, "If I can do it, you can do it," for real, to see where you've come from and

where you are, and your success leaves clues and you're out here just sharing so much and it's really special. So, thank you for that.

TANA AMEN: Thank you. And I feel this genuine connection with you, Shawn. It's interesting, and I didn't know your story, but when I... I think when someone meets you, authenticity is what comes to mind, and I think that that's, if you can do it, anyone can do it too.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Facts, let's go. I appreciate you so much for hanging out with me.

TANA AMEN: Thank you.

SHAWN STEVENSON: Awesome. Tana Amen, everybody. Thank you so much for tuning into the show today. I hope you got a lot of value out of this. It's such an important conversation, an important insight, because we have the capacity within us to create the life that we want, to create the choices that we want and thus the results that we want, but we've got to do the internal work necessary, and we've got to be able to tap into resources that we have access to today to learn how to do these things, because oftentimes we can try to carve our own path and make the process more arduous and complex than it needs to be. That's why I'm so grateful for Tana and for Dr. Daniel Amen for providing access to understanding our internal world, our internal psychology, to be able to use technology to actually look at our brains is such a great gift that we have access to today. But at the same time, we don't need to do all that stuff, we can do our own homework, we can do our own internal investigation. Just pick up some tools from our trusted advisors here and there, but the bottom line is that we've got to do the inner work.

And that was one of the things that I mentioned during the episode, is that it can be intimidating, it takes courage to do that, especially when we can see the potential for better right around the corner, right over that fence. It's like the grass is greener on the other side, on the other side of that fence. But the truth is, grass is greener where you water it, it's greener where you take care of it, it's not about getting to the other side and everything is going to be so much better, it's right now you have the capacity and the tools, whether you realize it or not within you to create that life, where you don't have to constantly be looking at the other side, what's happening over there, those people have this stuff figured out.

We have it within us, you have everything you need within you, you have an entire universe within you, within that amazing mind and body of yours, and your capacity is really limitless. But we're in a society right now that can tell you otherwise, that can inundate you with a belief that you're not enough, that you're not capable, that you don't have what it takes. But man, there's nothing that can be further from the truth. But again, it doesn't matter if you hear this from me or if you hear this from some external voice, you have to find this out yourself, you

have to acknowledge this within yourself. And hopefully episodes like this and conversations like this help you to direct you back to you and spark that empowerment and that memory, really, remembering. Because that's what it's really about, it's about remembering how powerful you are, because I know you've had instances throughout your life where you've seen yourself rise to the occasion, where you've seen what you're capable of, and it's just remembering that.

So, I appreciate you so much for tuning into the show today, and we've got some epic shows coming your way to stack conditions to make that remembering process more automatic to where you're living in that flow, you're living in that empowerment, and of course, sharing that with the people around you, because that's how we create real change. I appreciate you so much for tuning into the show. Again, we've got some epic shows coming your way very soon, some powerful master classes, some powerful interviews with world leading experts, so make sure to stay tuned. Take care, have an amazing day, and I'll talk to you soon.

And for more after the show, make sure to head over to TheModelHealthShow.com, that's where you can find all of the show notes, you could find transcriptions, videos for each episode, and if you got a comment, you can leave me a comment there as well, and please make sure to head over to iTunes and leave us a rating to let everybody know that the show is awesome, and I appreciate that so much. And take care. I promise to keep giving you more powerful, empowering, great content to help you transform your life. Thanks for tuning in.