

Ep #358: Jim Sheils - Making the Most of Your 18 Summers



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Welcome to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint, a podcast about freedom—freedom from expectations of society and the traditional path to success that has been ingrained in us from our early years, I'm joined by mavericks, renegades, and non-conformers to discuss an anti-traditional path to financial freedom, freedom of time, relationships, health, and ultimately freedom of purpose. My name is Dr. David Phelps. Let's get started.

David Phelps: Good day, everyone. This is Dr. David Phelps of the Freedom Founders Mastermind Community and Dentist Freedom Blueprint podcast. Today I've the honor and privilege to visit with one of my really good friends, become a good friend in the last several years, and that's Mr. Jim Sheils. Jim, good morning. How are you, sir?

Jim Sheils: Good, David. Good to see you.

David Phelps: Jim, there's so many subjects that you and I can talk about, that we do converse about. And I think everybody who's listening to the podcast today knows that I'm about freedom and how we build freedom in our lives. And typically that's about in our businesses and our investments. And we want to reach a financial number that will provide security and stability for our families. Boy, that's right up there at the top shelf of what we as drivers and entrepreneurs want to do. We want that. We want that for our families and we think by working hard and grinding it out, that's serving our families really, really well. I mean, Jim, my story's there. I was there doing that very thing until I had one of my wake up calls, which kind of jolted me into thinking, "Maybe this isn't the actual path I need to be on. Maybe there's a better way."

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And so we can talk about a lot of stuff about business and marketing and real estate, which we love. But today, Jim, I want to focus on really the core of who you are. For you I know, business, the real estate that you do so well, has all always been a vehicle. It's a vehicle. It's not the primary driver. And 18 Summers, and I'm going to give you the website because you're going to want to go there. It's 18, the number 18, 18summers.com, is what we're going to talk about this morning with Jim Sheils. So Jim, let's jump in. We're all busy. As I said, we're all driving and trying to crush it out there in the marketplace today. Where did 18 Summers come from? Why? Why does it exist? What is the motive behind what you do with your beautiful bride, Jamie?

Jim Sheils: Yeah. 18 Summers came out of a need. In the same way you kind of felt a need, I felt a need that I was my own test subject. And this happened over a decade ago. And you and I have similar catalysts. I know between the experience with your daughter and the experience that I went through with my family, because over 10 years ago now, there was a catalyst that all happened at once. And that catalyst was I was reviving a real estate business that had come through near scraping of the brakes of the '08 meltdown, but we survived, protected our investors. It was not easy. At that same time, I was in the process of adopting my two oldest sons, and you know some of my story with my wife Jamie, and we've gone on to have more children. And I was also at that same time, David, just been approved to donate a kidney to my father.

And when those things hit it once, as you know there's a shift, and you cannot go back. And I just started to look at family life differently. And what I said is I do not want to be

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successful in business and a failure at home. I want to be someone where I look back that I stood strong in my family life. And there's a word that I've really been starting to use, David. I wanted to be a better advocate for my family. Advocacy is so important today, whether it's our health, our wealth, our relationships. And to hand off and delegate yourself out as the busy business owner or entrepreneur, to a spouse, to a grandparent, to a nanny, to a babysitter, to delegate yourself out of family life, you're missing out on half the magic, and it doesn't have to be that way. So I started 18 Summers because I needed to make sure that I stayed grounded in family life and I started to try some very simple rhythms that worked and I would share them at business events and people would go, "Why aren't you talking about this more?"

So it all started very organically from my needs.

David Phelps: I think that's where some of the best, I don't want to use the word program, but the best mentorships, the best experiences, that can be extrapolated and provided to other people is what would go through in our own lives. Because if we do have a shift, as you said, some shift and we are forced to dig in and figure out and make some changes, then what we figure out, and really, I think it's the permission that we give ourselves because, gosh darn it, Jim, the world out there, society says if you're not showing the lifestyle and you're not able to talk about top line revenue and numbers, because everybody else is, there's something wrong with you.

And it's almost when some of us go to some of the meetings, there's all kinds of meetings about marketing and business metrics, that's all fine and good. But what I

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love are the meetings where I get to be with people like you, where, yes, we can talk about business, that's fine. But where we really enjoy the in the corner discussions, at mealtime. What do we really like to talk about? Yeah, it's our families, and the permission to do that.

And I think there's a big part of that is just finding people that have your same values and none of us have it figured out. We're always trying to get better in this regard. So 18 Summers, now I know what that means and you know what it means, but it might not be totally apparent to people. I've thrown that out a little bit. What's the 18 Summers actually about just so we're all together on what that means, Jim?

Jim Sheils: Yeah. It's a simple math equation a mentor of mine taught to me. And when it was told to me, again, it's that, it hit me, and it's never left me, from the day that he said it to me. Now, remember my oldest sons, we have four children now, we're in the process of adopting a fifth, but they came into my life when they were seven and five. So I adopted at a very odd age. But when I started to talk about family life and share the experiences we were having, a mentor said, "Just remember, you got 18 summers." And yes, they're their kids. This guy was in his 70s, had a great family life. He said, "I'm just telling you, it's different once they leave the nest." And statistics show, the average person will spend almost 85% of the time they ever have with their children by the end of the 18th summer.

And when that hit me and I started to do that math, I'm like, "Okay, my oldest was seven, 18 minus seven, 11 summers. That's it? That doesn't sound like very much."

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And, and a mutual friend of ours, I think, David Box said, "Jim, the years are not all equal." And that stuck with me. So 18 Summers was basically a way to make the most of the time we have, so that if we do that, once they leave the nest, they're still going to want to be around. Because people would say, "Oh, well, my kids are already 20,25."

I say, "Look, if you take some conscious action steps, I don't think you only have 15% of the time you ever spent with them left. I think you can expand that to 20, 25, 30, 35% more time, if you're focused, if you actually give it conscious attention." So 18 Summers, that math equation is the wake up for people to say, "Wow, time is limited. How do I make the most with my family? How do I do that?" And we try to provide simple rhythms and strategies alongside with your business to make that happen.

David Phelps: We're going to talk about some of those because they're really, really strong. I love what you said David Box said, "The years are not all equal." So true. And again, too often, we live our lives, and with some regrets. We get to those later years, we look back and that time is gone. So the intentionality, the focus of making those connections with our family when we have the greatest opportunity. You talk about that one of the most important meetings is not a business meeting, but a family board meeting. Could you talk a little about the family board meeting? Actually you have a book. I think it's right behind you.

Jim Sheils: Yeah, it's on the wall there.

David Phelps: Actually right there. Which can be-

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Jim Sheils: Yeah, that's one of my sons, jumping off a pier in Puerto Rico.

David Phelps: Puerto Rico, okay.

Jim Sheils: Yes. It's an old pier in Puerto Rico. So Mom taking some adventure with Alden and that's what it was about. When I first came into this situation of an instant family, David, the family board meeting was I wanted to have an important meeting with each one of my new sons, because I'm running two businesses. It's a little awkward. We really liked each other, but I need to get to know them. And then they had to overcome some real challenges that they went through before I was here, no fault to my wife, but other things outside the control. So I started this quality time coupon. I gave it to them the first Christmas we were together, we made these little coupons. And they said, "What is this?"

I said, "Look, I don't want to lose time with you. And I want to make sure I make time with you. Take these coupons and every quarter they're going to cash one in." They're like, "What's a quarter?" Seven and five, they don't know what a quarter is. I said, "Every 90 days. We'll help you track. You're going to cash this in and we're going to spend a day together. My phone's going off. You're going to plan the day. I'm going all in. We're just going to have fun together."

And that's how it started. And once a quarter, one-on-one, no phone, at least four hours, a fun activity with them building out the day and me being fully present and having some conversation at the end. David, that one simple thing revolutionized our relationship. My oldest son who suffered from, he'd been diagnosed at school with

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autism, he had been having night terrors every night. He was failing at school. Within a year all that was gone. He got the most improved student. They retracted the diagnosis of autism, and his night terrors within a year were gone. And there was no therapy or medication involved with that. There's a time and a place for those, I'm not saying that. But these days that I spent together, I think as a male role model and being able to communicate with him and overcome some stuff and give him feeling of safety and fun and worse, we saw a revolutionary change.

And when I started to share this and write it in the book, it's had a chain reaction where now it's a bestseller. It hit bestseller in three categories. And it's a short book, as you know, but this simple strategy now is being shared by thousands and thousands of entrepreneurs, business owners, executives, not only parents, but grandparents now, where they're taking a half a day a quarter to spend one-on-one time with each of their children or grandchildren. And it's bringing us below the surface and strengthening relationships.

David Phelps: For a lot of us who want to do this, but we haven't, but we're listening. We're realizing that the years go by quickly, the frameworks are simple yet they're important because I can just see people listening right now and saying, "Boy, I want that." But it's like a foreign language, really? It's like, "I sort of get it. Yeah, spending time with each of my children. But right now it's really foreign because right now of the way we do things, it's all as a family. And we go to Disney or whatever." But that's not the connecting we're talking about. So this is one-on-one, which, look, let's just say it as it is, Jim, for some of us

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that can be almost scary because we haven't gone there yet.

So I know it's all in the book and the book is, as you said, simple read, so I definitely recommend people get the book because this is what's going to give you the direction and remove the fear factor from starting this. But break that down a little bit for us too, because I know people are thinking, "God, sounds great, but, boy, I can't even talk to my kid right now. They're always on their device or I'm having trouble entering their world." So get me started here, Jim.

Jim Sheils: Yeah. Yeah. Let's talk about a few principles, David, real quick. There's three principles that can guide you in not just a relationship with your children, but I think with your spouse as well. And first off, let's remove a little bit of the anxiety of people who are going, "How am I going to do this?" It is not as hard as you think if you follow this simple motto. That which we schedule gets done.

David Phelps: Yep.

Jim Sheils: When I'm coming to a Freedom Founders event, David, it is on my calendar. If Freedom Founders people are coming to visit me, it's on my calendar. If you're going to one of your other events to speak or represent Freedom Founders, it's on your calendar. I put these meetings on my calendar with my children and with my spouse as if they're non-negotiable, this is my most important investors, team members, whatever you want to call it. And when you schedule it, it seems to happen. If you don't, then of course, you're rushing behind. If all of a sudden I'm going, "Oh, wait, next week I have to be in Dallas for Freedom Founders and I didn't plan it?" Well,

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I'm we not going to get there, right? Not because I don't like Freedom Founders or, or you, or Candace, but I didn't plan it. So if you plan it, it can happen.

And then putting these principles, again, the solution doesn't have to be as complicated as we've made the problem. These three simple principles that our whole framework is built off is very easy to understand. And the first one is one-to-one. The one-to-one principle is by far the most potent, effective, relationship building tool out there but it's the most overlooked. It's too simple. And what it is is you got to separate the parts to strengthen the whole.

And I know you've heard me say, David, I come from an Irish Catholic family, which means I have like 7,000 cousins, and big family gatherings are great, but getting up beneath the surface on having the hard conversations, I've found on one-on-one time. So this principal was taught to me years ago. I started to do it with my spouse and my children. Now every Wednesday night, 5:30 to 8:30, I'm not available. I'm going on a date with Jamie, every Wednesday. And then every quarter I spend a day with each one of my children, one-on-one. One-on-one takes away sibling rivalry, takes away distractions. It puts the magnifying glass on the relationship in a positive way, but it rarely happens. We're always have a spouse along, a sibling along, a friend along, a work associate along. And that's great, but that is not the most powerful building block for relationships. One-on-one time, it takes away all distractions. You got to separate the parts to strengthen the whole.

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And if you start to put this into your life, especially with your spouse and your children, you will see a profound difference. Even if your children are grown now and you can't see them once a quarter, but you spend one day, one day, a year, one-on-one with your child, it will change the relationship. We've had thousands of reports now just putting this one simple principle to work. So any questions on that? And I'll go into the second one, which I know you'll definitely.

David Phelps: No, I think that's really good. So yeah, just reiterate, what you schedule actually gets done. Totally agree. We're very quick to put all of our business activities on a schedule. Those tend to always take priority. Turn it around. I've learned, as you espouse here, especially for for my spouse, I give Candace the calendar first. And then my daughter, Jenna, same thing. I mean, Lindsey, my assistant, knows that I have certain days and she knows those are blocked, just as you do, your Wednesdays for date night or the quarterly one-on-ones that you have with your family, your children, those are blocked. So if you don't do that, it's never going to happen.

The one-on-one, you're right. We don't think about it that way. We think about family time. If we go do something as a family, we go to the festival or something. I mean, yeah, it's great and fine, but the connection isn't happening there. So I just want to reiterate those two core principles, those points so far. So let's go to the next one.

Jim Sheils: Yeah. The next one is about, we've all heard, David, from the health perspective about intermittent fasting. Intermittent fasting helps revitalize organs, weight

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maintenance, muscle. There's lots of good things that are being shown with this intermittent fasting. And that doesn't mean you gave up eating, right?

David Phelps: Right.

Jim Sheils: It means you're only disciplined to eat between this time and this time.

David Phelps: Right.

Jim Sheils: And then it allows the body to rest and purify and clean out. What we use as principle number two, for most of my most important relationship meetings, is intermittent tech fasting. So intermittent tech fasting is a very powerful thing. When I'm spending a half day or a day with one of my children, one-on-one in their fun activities, you can't get me. My phone's on airplane mode. I might keep it on to snap a picture or two.

David Phelps: Right.

Jim Sheils: But you're not getting me. My laptop's not open. Their phone is not on. Because we all know if you get that one text, even if you don't even look at and you hear, ding.

David Phelps: Right.

Jim Sheils: Your mind is going, "What's that? Oh man, I hope nothing happened with this." You've now left the building. You're not where you're supposed to be. So we've learned my date nights, date nights didn't go too well, David, in the beginning when I would take a call or a text or an email or God forbid a useless Facebook thread that you don't even need to be looking at when you're with the most important person. So my phone is not with me. It's not welcome on

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these important times. And we found as a family, we even do this on a daily basis, 5:30 to 7:30 normally is no tech time.

We give lateral movement to our teens on their phones and certain parameters, but that's our time, and what it does, it takes away that distraction, that block of human connection. And I found you're not asking yourself or your children to give up technology. You're just using it during certain times. So during a board meeting, during date night, during evening meal time, no one has their phone on. We're we're just not in touch. And what that's done is open up more conversation, more things around our core values, like planning adventures, and you're still using technology. You're just putting it in its place.

David Phelps: I love that. Tech fasting. really, really good. All right. What's the third principle?

Jim Sheils: Third principle is a fun activity with focused reflection. Now this is huge with children and I think we're all kids to the end. But what I found is with my boys when I first started this, is we entrepreneurs are pushy. We think we know everything. "Oh, well, this is what they want to do." And we'll plan a day and we'll say, "All right, David, we're going to go to the Cowboys game," and be all proud and give ourselves a punch in the arm and say, "Isn't it great we bonded." Well, what if our kids don't like football.

David Phelps: Right.

Jim Sheils: They didn't want to go to the football game. We liked football. This is where you get to see them shine, if you let them plan the day. So fun activities with focused reflection, by the way, is the shortest definition out there

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for experiential education. I'm a very, very huge cheer section for alternative education. I think it's not used enough. Experiential education through all sorts of things I've done is definitely the most potent in the world, I believe. And it's not used, but now you're using it to build a relationship with your children or grandchildren or spouse or people close to you. If you let your kids plan the day and go all in, this could be from age three to 33. You go all in, first of all, it creates something called decompression. You've just spent the day together. You're one-on-one, your phone has not been dinging so there's been no distractions. There creates a decompression. You're having fun together. The guard starts to go down and then after a few hours, you're literally in a different mindset.

You're sitting across from a different mindset and you might be having a meal and the opportunity for deeper conversation is abundant, at that time. You've had fun together, probably breaking bread, and then discussion happens. And like I've told you about it's normally in this time, I'll give a sincere apology or a genuine compliment. I'm always due to give some sincere apologies, because I'm always messing up, David. And I never wanted to be the parent to just brush it on the side like it didn't happen or to be the overlord that says, "Well, that's the way it goes."

David Phelps: Right.

Jim Sheils: But I also wanted to make sure I was giving sincere compliments. Stop and think for a minute, what have they been working hard in? What have they done that has inspired me? And when you put this to action, with your

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spouse, possibly at a weekly date night and you give a sincere apology or a genuine compliment, with your child if you're getting together with him one day a quarter to really have fun, the time in between is going to be better. It's going to be more connected. It's going to be more safe. And that's what we all want from family life.

David Phelps: Oh, it's so true. Jim, do you ask your spouse, do you ask your kids when you're having the one-on-one time, a date night, do you ever ask the question, "How could I be a better husband? How could I be a better father?" I mean, does that ever come up? I'm I'm just curious. Or you've been doing this long enough where you've broken through that and your conversations are deep now? Or what do you find from other people who are just starting this? Because you mentioned apologies, and what I'm saying is that our kids want to know us who we really are. And I think it's wise for us to show that we, as the adults in the room, we make, have made, and will continue to make mistakes. So, give me a little bit of that context.

Jim Sheils: Yeah. So first and foremost, I absolutely have to ask. David, I'm still learning. And the biggest reminder I can give anyone listening this, there is no perfect family. I have not met them. I've done this for 12 years, worked with thousands of families, some very influential and well known, and irregardless of that, there's no perfect family. It's not supposed to be perfect. We're bridging imperfections and making the most of the time we have together. So when you take that pressure of perfection off, you're never going to get to be perfect. You can get better but you're not going to be perfect.

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And so I do ask those questions. I do want to know, "What's something I have to work on?" That's a common question. "What's one thing I need to work on?" That's a really powerful one to ask, and you have to, because as you know, David, we have our dukes up, we're in the entrepreneur ring. With your children, your spouse, you got to learn to lower these things. Not take offense, not being ready to counter punch. Hear what they have to say and that's not always easy, because you might hear things you will, providing does not give us permanent alibi. Meaning sometimes we go, "Damn it. But I've been working so hard. How can you say that?"

David Phelps: Yeah.

Jim Sheils: Or we think that, but we don't get immunity. We don't get immunity for providing. And I think we don't want it, really. It wouldn't make for the best relationship. So if you just listen. so I'm always learning on this. What Jamie and I actually do, and we're wanting to get them to Freedom Founders people. I was actually, a guy out of Dallas bought us out of our last few hundred and there's now a backup on all of this material out there, but we actually did date cards, David.

So we have a deck of cards that we do about every year where we compile questions. And on date night, we actually call our date nights, date night with a question. So we go out, we'll usually have a walk or dinner or something. We pull out the deck of cards and we shuffle and there's a powerful question that comes up. So we'll have different questions and it could be, "Name a time over the last month that I have not shown up for you? And how I could have done it better?" There could be really

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good memory ones of saying, "Was there a moment you knew you were in love with me?" And bring us back to that. It could be, "What was the top five vacations we ever took? If we could be doing anything in five years, what would it be? Tell me who your favorite teacher as a child was and why? How did they inspire you? How did they support you?"

So we go into a deep question. Now, when you have a question, and, again, I can get this for Freedom Founders people, or at least a list. And if you ask one powerful question on a date night, David, instead of, "How's the weather? Where are we traveling to next week?" It brings it below the surface, which is where we all want to get when we're having these one-on-one moments. So I know this kind of went on a little bit of a tangent, but I think the important thing to know is nobody's perfect. I'm not.

So yes, I am asking and I give them the space to be able to do that. Some of us need to question ourselves and I'll be the first to say, I probably didn't give that space to Jamie, to my sons, to now my daughter, my youngest, where I've been too guarded or even too proud to say, "Well, deal with it. I'm providing. How much I'm working." You have to be open to this constructive feedback. And if you are, that's when you can really start to improve, really feel close, really shine.

David Phelps: Our families want to know that they are seen and heard. And I think the safety component, you mentioned it with your oldest son and what he had to deal with early on and how that one-on-one time alleviated his night terrors and the things he was dealing with. I think, and again, I'm not a psychologist. You're much deeper than I am, but I

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think just the provision of, "I'm in a safe place with parents who actually see and hear me and can have the conversations that typically in our busy lives are just surface." Like you said, "How's the weather? How was your day?" It's like, "No, come on, come on." There's something deeper inside but our kids just have learned, unfortunately by our actions just to kind of show up and put the chin up and, "No one wants to hear about my stuff because Mom and Dad, they're too busy dealing with their world and it's sounds like it's complicated."

And that's the other thing is, I think we have to be careful about those conversations, because our world is complicated, but if we make it so complicated, our kids see that and go, "I don't want to touch that. In fact, if I get in the way, someone's going to swat me because I'm not that important." Right?

Jim Sheils: For sure. For sure. And there is a, a badge of honor that's been out there for a long time of, "Man. I am crazy busy. I am super busy." If we put that signal out to our kids, exactly what you said, David, or our spouse, and they love us. They love us. They care about us. "Gosh, they already have so much on their plate. I'm struggling with this, but who I am to tell them this problem or lay this on them or put this on them." And that causes some real, real deep, fundamental issues. It can really propel some problems that, look, there could be a problem solved in 10 minutes or it can go on for four years. And we all know if you catch a, a little spot of, and I'm not a doctor, but I know if I catch a little spot of cancer on my arm in the first four weeks and they cut it off and I'm doing the things, that's good. Now I let it go and it goes for four years? Whew. Same thing with these relationship things.

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So I think you bring up a really important point, David. I encourage everyone out there, don't keep saying to your kids, "Man, I'm so busy. We have this going." Don't. I don't like to say that at all. In fact, my teens have said, "Why are you always around?" And that's what I want. I'm like, "That's what I wanted to get to." Because they know that they can talk to me. And that's super important. Actually, there's something else that I've been doing, David, and you've been a part of it, so you know. The book's right over your shoulder. I refused to push real estate investing on my sons. Just won't do it. I won't do it. I wanted the curiosity to build in them to come to me. And they've started to do that over the last two years.

So every Tuesday night we're talking about real estate. I'm showing them diagrams of the deals that I'm working on. Own Your Freedom, that and another, my original real estate book, Real Estate Riches is Dolf de Roos, we're going through right now. We play a financial game. But I spend this time with them every Tuesday night. Tuesday night is teen night. We let our little ones watch a movie, which we don't give a lot of TV but they get a movie. Me, Jamie, and the older boys are talking about business. I'm starting to let them be involved in my CFO meetings because I want them to hear our numbers. Our family financials are confidential, but I want them to understand them. I want them to see how I think. Not that they have to think the same way, but this is in the trenches. So these are the things that are going to break down walls too if you involve them.

David Phelps: Yeah. So good Jim. So 18summers.com, 18summers.com. And then the book The Family Board Meeting can be purchased on Amazon. Is, is there

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another place or place where other resources could be available besides 18 Summers or the book if people want to do a little bit deeper dive with?

Jim Sheils: Website's the best way to get in touch with us.

David Phelps: Okay.

Jim Sheils: Or the book. There's some different things on the website that they can download to get them started with some simple family rhythms and strategies. Again, you might not be as far away from a solid, grounded, happy, functioning family life than you think. The same way with, as you taught me, David, with financial stability. You might not be as far away as you think. And I've seen the same thing with family life. So there's some simple strategies there that won't get you all the way there, but maybe 80%.

David Phelps: Yeah. Beautiful, Jim. I love our conversations. You're a role model for so many and again, none of us are perfect, but you are definitely a trailblazer in this respect and from that, I and many other people respect you for the values that you have incorporated into your life, with your family and the people you care about. So thank you so much for the conversation this morning. I hope people will follow up and really take the intentionality and the focus that you so well stated is so important. And to do it now. This is not a someday when I get this and that fixed or this and this with my business. No, no, no, no, because that'll never happen. You've got to be intentional now. Take the initial steps. Like everything in life, Jim, it's just take some baby steps. Start the process. You won't be perfect, but get into it. Your family will love you for it.

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Jim Sheils: Yes, yes. And it's never too late. So if anyone's going, "Well, I'm too late." That's not true.

David Phelps: Yeah. Beautiful. Jim Sheils, I appreciate you, sir. Thank you so much.

Jim Sheils: Thanks David.

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