

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His
Father, and a Paper Route



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. David Phelps

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

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 back with one of my really good friends, a mentor, someone who's a mentor and a leader, definitely an influencer in our space in the dental industry, but has his fingers in the mix, I would say gladly and willingly interfering in people's lives all across the board, and in a good way. When I say interfering, this is a good thing.

Steven Anderson: Is that what I do, David, I interfere?

David Phelps: That's what you do, you interfere in people's lives, but it's good. It's Mr. Steven J. Anderson. Steven, so glad to have you back.

Steven Anderson: Thank you, David. It's always a pleasure to be with you, love speaking with you, so thank you.

David Phelps: Well, for the few who don't know you, or don't know you well, let's just make sure we give a little bit of your backstory. So I've got your brief bio here, let me just give some of the highlights. So Steven J. Anderson is a business strategist, entrepreneur, philanthropist, author,

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

and in demand speaker, he is known for his innovative data driven systems of communication to create profitable, positive service focused organizations, many in leading healthcare practices and Allied companies. He has founded more than a dozen growing and diversifying businesses, including the Total Patient Service Institute, Keystone Dental Management, and Crown Council. He has propelled clients to the highest levels of performed and workplace morale. The Smiles for Life Foundation, a nonprofit at Steve co-founded, has raised nearly 50 million supporting healthcare and humanitarian initiatives worldwide.

He is the founder of Eagle University, a week long leadership program of mentoring that gives high school and college students a head start on their careers. A portion of sales of his new book, The Bicycle Book, which we'll talk about today, will support needs based scholarships for the Eagle University program, and I was so honored, so privileged and blessed to be able to be a part of that last year. Again, you're interfering in such a good way in people's lives, I love that.

But Steve, we're about the book today, and I was talking to you before we started this actual interview podcast today, and just telling you how relevant the stories in this book were to me, and so many connections to the way we both grew up, and I think a lot of the people who will read this book will find many similarities. So let's dive in. The title of the book is The Bicycle Book: The Story of a Boy, His Father, a Paper Route and 12 Secrets of Serving Others in Business and Life. And I told you that the paper route, the Schwinn bike, yours is purple, mine was red. It wasn't actually the bike I threw through the paper route

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

on, but anyway, not to go without saying. Let's dig into it, where did this come from, the idea?

Steven Anderson: So the idea was multifaceted. I had a great relationship with my dad. I had an unusual upbringing in that I've always said that I went to business school at age 12 because of the education I got from him. So he was really good, David, about sitting around the dining room table every night for dinner, and we had dinner religiously every night. It was—

David Phelps: Same time, while mom was putting together?

Steven Anderson: Same time of night, very consistent. And there's some interesting data around that, just as a side note. Columbia University's done a study and they found that children who have dinner with the family five nights a week or more have a 40% better chance of getting A's and B's, a 60% better chance of never smoking, a 65% better chance of never smoking pot, except in Colorado, and their verbal development is a lot more rapid. So there's some data around that, but I digress. But he was just really good about sharing business ideas, and just what he was doing. He led the largest ad agency in the Western United States his whole career, and so I was on a steady diet just from kid on up of just marketing and sales and advertising and customer service, and the whole deal.

So he had a unique way of sharing that around the dinner table, and then combining that with the experience in one of my first jobs, which was a paper route, which is a thing that really no longer exists anywhere. Back in the day you got your news in print on your front doorstep every day, that or either on the radio or TV, and the delivery, the

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

distribution method, was young men on bicycles throwing papers, that's how you got your news. And David, as you know, because you did this, it was an amazing learning experience because you were in business for yourself. This was a deal where the paper boy basically bought the papers from the newspapers company, and then went and had to collect from each of the customers, so if you didn't collect-

David Phelps: Yeah, which means you had to actually deliver a service, for which people would happily pay, which was a learning experience. And then yes, you had to collect it and be responsible for the receipts, and then getting those back to what you owed on the papers. But I want to get a little more context here is you're the youngest in a family of six other siblings.

Steven Anderson: I'm the last of seven.

David Phelps: You're the last of seven, so this, for the boys, the males in your family, this was a bit of a rite of passage. Turning 12, as you state in book, was something was going to happen here, so I want people to get that context. And sometimes in families it seems the eldest, which I happen to be the eldest in my family, so people say, well, the oldest always has to be the one to be the forerunner, and takes all the hits, his mom and dad are figuring out things, and as it goes down to pipeline to the younger, they get away with everything. Now it doesn't seem like that happened in your family, am I correct?

Steven Anderson: Actually I think in our family the stakes went up the further you get down the line because there's so many things, we had what I now call non-negotiables. So the non-negotiables were piano, everybody played the piano.

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

It didn't have anything to do with music, it had to do with discipline and accountability, so everybody played the piano. All the boys did scouting, and the rule was Eagle Scout first and then you get your driver's license, in that order. None of us ever dared test that. And then the other non-negotiable was the paper route. And so by the time it got to me, I'm the end of the line and these are now well established, they're not even traditions, this is what we do. Nobody's bucking the system here.

And they were all good, they all had a purpose and they were all good. So some of the very first lessons I learned in business came from the experience and the mentoring, and what I've found fascinating, and the reason, David, that I wrote The Bicycle Book, is when I reflect back, these lessons, and there's 12 of them that are in the book, these lessons I've gone back to, I realize that I've gone back to these over and over and over. In every business that I've been involved in, it seems they go back to these core principle things, you got to do these, these are non-negotiables in a business, that you just got to do.

And so part of the purpose here was to put this in a format that is fun for teams. I mean, it's good for individuals, but fun for a team to read, there is a storyline here. We call it an autobiographical business novel, which is a little bit of an oxymoron, but it is all based on fact and true people. And of course I couldn't go back, and I didn't have transcripts of all these dinner table conversations, so those have been recreated, but the whole purpose was to give teams an opportunity to experience something together, reading this is an experience, but to experience the story. And then at the end of every chapter there's very clear, hard hitting, this is what you do, this is how

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

you apply it in your business, and that basically come from how we've applied these over the years, these same principles in different businesses. So that's its whole objective, so its whole purpose is to help businesses and business people really take this proposition, this whole service proposition, to a much, much higher level.

David Phelps: I think book studies for teams is one of the best ways to codify what your vision purpose values are, I think it's a great way because the discussions you have really solidify those, and this book, as you said, is a great template for having those discussions, because it's fun to read, it's very relevant. Anybody, whether you're male or female, you understand, well for most of us, you understand the paper route thing, but as you said, that's gone by the wayside, but the lessons were there. Let me ask you this, your dad had a unique way of mentoring, I think this is so good. I mean, obviously tremendous wisdom that your father had, not just in his own business, but in the way that he was head of your family, and in helping your mother raised the family with principles. Talk a little bit about how that worked at the table, and I think you actually state in the book that you sometimes got a little bit annoyed and wished he would just come out and just blurt out and just tell you what to go do, but he didn't do that.

Steven Anderson: Yeah. David, I can count on one hand the times that he told me what to do. He was a master at asking questions and leading the process of self discovery, and then allowing us the freedom to choose and figure out the path that we go. And there were a couple of times, there were some very poignant moments in my life when he stepped up and said, "This is what you will do." But they

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

were few and far between, and they were critical moments, they were really turning point moments in my life, when he did that, but everything else was very much questioning, drawing out the lessons instead of trying to poke them in, and leading me on a process.

So these dinner table conversations, and I talk in the bicycle book, I talk about the round table, and there's great significance in this. I didn't realize the significance of it until probably about 15 years ago, we moved, we had some amazing people that bought the house we were living in, and in the process of that we swapped tables. They wanted to keep our dining room table because it fit and they go, "Hey, why don't you come look at ours, and if you like it let's just swap." And so we ended up acquiring their table, and in contrast to the one we had, the one we had was rectangular, the one they had was round. And I didn't think anything of it at the moment, and then when we put it in the house the first meal we had around that round table, it was like, what just happened?

And the dynamic was different. It was just because it's round, everybody's on equal footing, and the conversation went on longer, the kids hung around longer, and that's when it dawned on me, I'll be darned, we had a round table growing up. And it was around that round table that we had all these lessons, these discussions. They weren't lectures, they were questions. He'd ask me about different things, and lead me on this process of self-discovery so that I could figure it out for myself. And so those were invaluable times around the table. The paper route in and of itself would've been a great experience, but combined with the mentoring that went along with it, it was, now in retrospect, I didn't realize it at the time, but in retrospect I

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

now realize wow, what an amazing learning experience. It was my first business school experience.

David Phelps: One of the chapters, I think I'm looking in chapter three, when priorities collide. So this was very interesting. You have now got a run rate with your job of servicing people by throwing their paper every day, and yet also in the lineage of your family's hierarchy is Scouting. As you said, you're not going to have a Utah driver's license unless you get in the Scouting arena, and you went to your first Scout meeting and the Scoutmaster talked about what this means, and every month there's going to be a camping trip.

Steven Anderson: Every month.

David Phelps: Yep, every month, and you head out Friday-

Steven Anderson: Rain or shine, oh yeah.

David Phelps: Whatever, whatever.

Steven Anderson: I mean David, you grew up in Colorado, I grew up in Utah, so you can relate to this, but we went camping 12 months a year. It didn't matter, I've got one of my favorite pictures camping is the camping trip we took up in the High Uinta Mountains in Utah, and there was at least six, seven feet of snow pack, and I dug all the way down to the ground to set up my tent. So I got this picture, you can barely see me because the snow pack is way up here, but it was an amazing experience. And so yeah, so here's these non-negotiables, and this was just an invaluable lesson, so the paper route was a non-negotiable, Scouting and Eagle Scout was a non-negotiable, so both

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

of these introduced at about the same time, and then I find out that once a month this camp out's mandatory.

So as a young person I'm thinking, well, I can't do both. How can I do a paper out and do Scouting? There's no way I can do it. So in my young mind it's like, well, something's got to give, I've got to give up one of these, because I can't do it all. Now in retrospect this is pretty common sense, but at the moment it was a really valuable lesson that I think any business needs to train everybody in the organization, but here was the lesson, was there's a difference between a job responsibility and an accountability. A lot of times we get this really mixed up, responsibilities versus accountability. So my job, the job that I signed up for, was I'm going to deliver newspapers. The result that I really had, the result that I was really accountable for was, was the paper on the porch at a certain time every day, 6:00 was the service standard, but I naively thought that that meant every day I had to go out and it was my responsibility to do that.

And that's when he taught me the difference between the job and the accountability. The job was get the papers out. The accountability was the end result. And again, common sense, but so often we get tunnel vision thinking, I just can't do everything. It's the accountability for the result versus the job that actually needs to be done, and they are two different things. And so obviously the solution to this was common sense and easy, which is I had a bunch of my friends that were on call that I hired to get the end results on the days that I was not present so I could do both, but I still owned the accountability for the result. And there's a difference between getting the job done and who owns the accountability.

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

So simple lesson, oftentimes I think we get that confused in organizations, accountability versus the different tasks that need to be done, but that was invaluable to me to then say, okay, I own the accountability for the result, and there's a lot of different ways that I can get that result. And sometimes you got to pivot and you got to enlist the help of other people, you got to go about it in a different way and still have the accountability for the end result. So it was a valuable lesson.

David Phelps: Again, what the lesson does, it opens up the discussions for teams to have these and delineate who maybe could delegate the job, but still have the ownership of the accountability that it gets done and met by the standards that have been set by the company, correct?

Steven Anderson: Can I give you a dental example?

David Phelps: Absolutely.

Steven Anderson: Because this was remarkable to me. Today I was going over some results, as you know we work with a lot of dental practices through our Total Patient Service education and practice management company, and so we were looking at conversion results of calls to schedule appointments, and we were comparing offices, and there was one in particular that just head and shoulders, their conversion rates were just amazing, double everybody else's. So when you drill down what you find out is this principle, which is the lead business assistant has the accountability to convert calls to scheduled appointments, she owns that result, and she's done a beautiful job of enlisting the entire team to be responsible. Okay, so here's the fun little twist, accountability is you are willing to

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

give account for the end result. Responsibility means you will respond, you're response-able.

So she is enlisted the entire hire team that in the moments when she's otherwise occupied, or there's a busy front office area, that everybody is on call and aware that man, if they hear that phone ringing, everybody's on it. And so everybody is responsible for answering the phone, as a result of that their conversion rate is a lot higher because everybody's on it. But that's just a practical example of the difference between responsibility and accountability, and what a difference it makes when everybody in the organization understands that.

David Phelps: That's very powerful, Steve. There was another incident where you had initially, with your dad's help, of course, opened the checking account you needed to have at the bank because, again, you'll be collecting monies that you had to keep in a safe place, and then return those back, your obligation to the newspaper. And when you first went in with your father to open the account you got that red carpet service and you just felt like, wow, I'm a somebody, man, I'm a businessman.

Steven Anderson: Oh yeah/.

David Phelps: And then you tell the story and oh, I think the other key piece I don't want to leave out is the motto, the slogan, the tagline of this particular bank is where people mean everything. Did I get that right? Yeah, where people mean everything.

Steven Anderson: Yeah, and keep in mind who coined that phrase.

David Phelps: Your dad.

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](#) with Dr. David Phelps

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

Steven Anderson: So my dad is the advertising guy, he was the one who came up with the bank slogan, where people mean everything. It was all about customer service, and they used that slogan, David, for over 30 years. They hung their hat on that whole image of being the place where customer service is everything. Yeah, so naturally we go in there, we walk in the bank, in walks the guy who coined the phrase, everybody's going to bow and scrape and salute the dude who's created the entire bank image, for sure. And I'll tell you, that whole slogan, huge impact on me and our family and the whole thing, and it's a big centerpiece of The Bicycle Book, it's a big part of the whole message.

But one of the moments that I will never forget in our little business school experience was the day I walked into the bank alone, and this is the story you're referring to, I walked in alone as it's 12 year old, on a cold day, doing the paper route, and I'm sure in my mind I'm larger than life. I'm the business owner, I got it all going on. And what they saw when I walked in was a 12 year old kid with a parka on that's got newsprint smudge all over it, I'm sure I had some on my face. It was cold outside, I'm sure I had the winter cap in, I probably came in with a bunch of snow on my feet, and that's what they saw, just a 12 year old kid, and I walked in with a stack of checks.

Yeah, I mean, somebody looking at that at face value is going to go, where did this kid get the checks? So what happened, that particular incident, it was like the inquisition. I mean, automatically they're assuming I stole the checks, where did I get them? The bank manager gets called over, I mean, it was horrible. It marked me for life in terms of I'll never forget that experience. And I got

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

smoke coming out my ears because I'm thinking to myself, I'm in the place where people mean everything, and I just got treated like less than a people. And so believe me, we had a dinner table conversation about that.

And so we sat it down that night for dinner and there was no questioning that started the conversation, the first thing I said after we got done with the prayer, we said, "Amen," and I turned to my dad and I said, "Well, I went to the bank where people mean everything today, and I got treated like less than a people, and I was hot." And he handled it well, like he did everything, he listened, and then this little piece of wisdom, if I can share this, because I'm going to quote this directly from the book, here's what he said, he said, "You know, if that's the customer experience," meaning my experience, he goes, "If that's the customer experience, they might be better off without the slogan."

David Phelps: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steven Anderson: And I'm thinking, that was the last thing that I expected him to say, and then here comes this amazing piece of wisdom, "Sometimes no marketing, no advertising, no promotion is better than the most creative high impact campaign. Sometimes doing nothing is better." And I'm sitting there going, wait, what? And then he goes on to say, he says, "When the experience falls short and a business does not live up to its words and the image it projects, the damage can be more serious than any amount of advertising can repair." In fact, he said word of mouth travel 13 times faster than positive word of mouth, which I know is not a news flash, but it is

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

fascinating to me that you never have to ask for a negative online review today. Have you ever noticed that? Somehow they figure out how to do that all by themselves, but they can't out how to leave the positive one, you got to coach them through it and guide them through it and show them how to do it. Yeah, the negative subject, because we get so fired up we want to tell everybody about our horrible experience.

And that moment, when I look back in retrospect, David, that experience and that moment explains a lot as to now, I think, in retrospect I can see why I chose to do what I do in my career, which is we get the experience dialed in. I mean, everything we do in Total Patient Service and Crown Council, it's all about the culture and the patient experience, and getting all that dialed in so that you do have something to talk about, and patients have something to talk about. So that whole piece of sometimes doing nothing, sometimes no marketing is better than the best marketing. If you don't have it dialed in on the inside, man, you better put the brakes on and get it organized and get it right.

David Phelps: Yeah, don't put it out there unless you can live up to the standard. And I think for all of us who are in business, and we're focused on customer service and deliverables and value, it's very easy for us, I noticed for me and I noticed for you too, wherever I am interfacing with other companies that I am doing business with, or potentially doing business with where I need services or vendors, or I'm in a restaurant, or a hotel, or wherever, in the back of my mind I'm always, at least subconsciously, feeling an experience of some kind. And my critical nature, because I want to think I have very high standards, I want to

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

believe I have high standards, we all want to believe we have high standards, and so I'm consciously taking notes. And not just the critical ones, I think it's important to go out of our way, particularly when someone's really over-delivering, or we believe it's superior, to let them know we appreciate that, because as you said, the critical one star reviews are always there, why can't we be better?

But back to my point, is we want to think we're delivering high standards. It's easy to be critical of others, how do we go back and assess our experience, because not to point any fingers at the bank, but obviously somebody missed the boat there. Even though you were a 12 year old with snow on your shoes, still you were a customer and you were coming in. What do people do with their own companies to self-assess how we're doing with delivering on the value and the experience that we promise?

Steven Anderson: Yeah, so there is another piece of the wisdom. So one of the areas that is a real focus of The Bicycle Book is what we call the three Rs. And we all know the three Rs as reading, writing, and arithmetic, right? Well, that's not what this is. So this is what he called a service standard. So there is what we call the service promise, so the where people mean everything, that's a service promise, this is the value, this is the value we place on it. But the service standard gets more granular to say, this is the standard that we're going to hold ourselves to when we're interacting with our customers. So we call them the three Rs because at least in this example it was right product, right place, right time.

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

So it was the right product, which seems like well, it was a newspaper. Yeah, well there was a lot of moving parts to that. As you remember, David, there was newspaper stuffers with the ads, so you had to make sure you had everything that was supposed to be there, so the right product. The right place, which is in this case the service standard was it lands in the middle of the front porch where it's easy to, not to the side, not in the bushes, not out on the front walk, it is in the middle of the front porch so that it's easy to find. And then right time, the service standard was delivery before 6:00 PM.

So those were the three Rs in that case, and so one of the challenges that I give in The Bicycle Book is to determine what your Rs are, what is your right, right, right for your business, every business has a little different scenario, but what are the rights, your service standard that you'll commit to, that then everybody can measure their own performance against to say, did I deliver? Did I meet the service standard in that interaction, or in what I'm doing, so there's personal accountability, but there's also organizational accountability because now we have a way to measure what we're doing, and if we're actually delivering on the promise and the standards. They both go together.

David Phelps: Oh good. We've touched on just a few of the lessons and the stories that are inside the book. It's a great book, The Bicycle Book, Steven J. Anderson. And you also have opportunities for people to pick this up, because I think that's the idea, this is how we're going to use it on our teams. Steven, I love the book, we're going to use it same way, so people can pick it up in bulk, we'll put those links

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

here for people. Any contact points you'd like to give us, again, for you, for ToPS, for the book?

Steven Anderson: Yeah.

David Phelps: Best place for people to interact with you?

Steven Anderson: Yeah, so my website, Steven J. Anderson, so it's a Steven with a V-E-N, so S-T-E-V-E-N, the letter J. There's a lot of Steve Andersons out there, right? So Steven J. Anderson with an O-N.com. The Bicycle Book is there, and all links to all the different formats, hard back, paperback, audio format, digital. I was going to do the braille version, haven't gotten there yet.

David Phelps: Not there.

Steven Anderson: But your preferred format, I'm a big fan of different learning types, so it's all there. And then all the links to our other organizations that we have. So my whole goal in doing The Bicycle Book, here's what I envisioned, David, especially in the context of those that are listening is this is a business book, and I envision teams, like we already talked about sitting down, reading a book of the month, book of the year, whatever you want to call it, and reading the story together. It is literally going on a ride, I mean, there's a storyline, and then discussing what we call the get pedaling section at the end of every chapter to say, okay, how does this apply to us? And how can we incorporate the principles than to make our own business even better? That's the goal.

So I hope those that are listening and watching that, you'll use it to that effect, get your team involved. Read the story, and then apply the lessons, because there are

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

some amazing lessons that, again, I've gone back to over and over and over again that are constants, no matter the year, no matter the time, they're truth, they're foundational to making any business work.

David Phelps: Well Steve, I know that you are making a difference in so many people's lives, in the people that, again, you touch or interfere with, the legacy that you are leaving for your dad. To me this is so significant that you put this together, and I know you've been thinking about it for a few years, but what a great tribute to both your parents to put it in this book form, and I know all of your siblings and the rest of your family also have to think very highly of what you've done here, because you've encapsulated all those lessons that all of you went through, and now can teach to your kids and to your grandkids and anybody else whose lives you get to touch. That's where I think the real significance comes from here.

Steven Anderson: And there is a piece of that in there for sure, David, as one of the objectives, and without giving away the punchline, the whole real meaning of the book is in the last chapter. And it is an event, it is an experience that I had that I will never forget that really, there are some concepts that you intellectually recognize, and then something happens where you emotionally embrace it. And the last chapter is where we talk about this one moment where everything that he had taught around that dinner table came home in just one event that taught me volumes. So I won't give that away, you can read it in the book, but it was a very, very powerful moment, so hopefully a good read, and learn the lessons from it.

Ep #366: Steven Anderson - Lessons From a Boy, His Father, and a Paper Route

David Phelps: I can't wait to get there, to that chapter, which I will certainly do. Steven, thank you so much, always appreciate your wisdom and insights.

Steven Anderson: Thank you.

You've been listening to the Dentist Freedom Blueprint Podcast. If you're tired of trading time for dollars and you want to create more freedom in your life, I encourage you to visit my week blog, freedomfounders.com/blog. I post weekly hard-hitting videos about creating more freedom in your life. Check out my latest book on Amazon, *What's Your Next?: The Blueprint for Creating Your Freedom Lifestyle*, or visit freedomfounders.com to learn more about how we help high income earners create the freedom to buy back their time and create more impact.