

TASMANIAN

BE TASMANIAN PODCAST

Episode Six: Can we get Shirley?

(Be Tasmanian Podcast Theme Music)

Welcome to Be Tasmanian, a podcast about an impossible mission in a small state at the bottom of the world. It's about uncovering a hidden story that unites people and using that story to inspire community action.

It's about place-branding, destination marketing, and economic development, but it's really about culture. It's about who we are, why we live where we live, what all that means and what we ought to do about it.

This is the final episode, episode 6.

(Be Tasmanian Podcast Theme Music)

If you've ever moved, as a working adult, from one city to another, from one country to another, you know what it feels like: a mixture of adventure, excitement and pure terror.

You're leaving your friends and family behind. If you have kids, it's more complicated. They don't want to sever ties with the most important people in the world to them: their best friends forever. You can tell them they'll meet other kids who will get their jokes, but they've seen all the movies.

New kids get bullied.

Then there's your career. You're leaving comfort—even mastery—for the unknown. You could end up working for, or with, a narcissistic psychopath. If podcasts have taught us anything it's that those guys are everywhere.

And, sure, relocating is a chance to start over and leave a whole bunch of regretful nonsense behind but... what if these new people... don't like you?

If you're moving to a new country, there's language and culture to contend with. To some, your accent will sound like fingernails screeching across the chalkboard. You won't understand the local slang. People won't understand you. You'll say "scallop" and they won't have a goddamn clue what you're talking about.

"Todd, we say scallop... it's scallop!"

And even though it might seem like nothing, you'll be leaving small delights, and rituals you took for granted: your favourite pub and free health care and that Latin American grocery store. Central heating. Yes: you might even miss central heating.

Your mom will probably think this is a bad idea. Your dog may go into quarantine. Your stuff might be smashed in transit. In the madness before moving, you might get rid of 75 per cent of your books in a state of absolute insanity and then regret it so instantly and powerfully on your way home that you will cry in your car. In the rain. In heavy traffic.

Yes. Some of this might be about me. But I'm not unique.

Moving to a new place is hard. Really hard. Even if it's a place that seems, on paper, even on video, to be perfect. It's a massive, life-changing decision. For you and your family.

But recruiting talented people to your city, your state, or your country is the ultimate goal of every place-branding and

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economic development strategy. There is a continuum of commitment:

The first Level: we taste Tasmanian wine or cheese or cider or abalone. We buy a Tasmanian-crafted knife or boat.

Then, we visit Tasmania. We visit again, and again.

Level three: we encourage our children to study here.

Number four: we see what's special about this place. We understand that in an increasingly loud, dirty, beige, and exhausting world this place is what more and more people are looking for, and we invest in Tasmania. With money, or with an office.

Then... the final, ultimate commitment. What if we load our lives into a container and move to Tasmania, with our kids and our dog, our talent, our ideas, our experience, our small but growing business?

This is a huge decision.

What does it take to get someone to make the leap? From Sydney or Melbourne? London or Auckland? From Hong Kong or Singapore or Delhi or Vancouver?

Every employer understands the value of talented and experienced people. The recruitment industry is worth 200 billion dollars annually.

We spend all of that money to get the right people into the right jobs...and we fuss over the words we use to describe the position, but let's be honest: by the time we approach the peaks of our careers, we understand our job intimately.

The job is the job and the salary the salary. Teaching is teaching, doctoring is doctoring, welding is welding, and coding is coding.

The difference is everything that surrounds the job. The culture of the place, the community, the people who will be your co-workers and friends, the food and drink, the evening and weekend arts and entertainment, the role of nature and the consolations of the wilderness, the view from your front window, the opportunities for your partner and your children.

As much as the authors of leadership books might pretend, a lot of this is, almost all of it, is out of the hands of the CEO and the vice-president of human resources.

In business school we all learn the Peter Drucker quotation "Culture eats strategy for breakfast". Then we mostly forget it. Even if we do remember—that's corporate culture. Then there's culture, culture.

In the recruitment game, we spend very little—in money and in time—on the place. We rely on its image and reputation, but most of us can't rest on Monocle Magazine saying our city is one of the most liveable in the world.

We tend to make generic videos to convince people to choose our place. Cincinnati came up with a campaign called "We do what we Love..."

:09 "Here, we do what we love" to :30 "... and baseball."

1:03 "... biking along the river" to 1:10 "... do what we love."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=30&v=KJfcfn21lg&feature=emb_logo

"Here, we do what we love. In 1869 we made a professional baseball team, the first one. So, the only one at the time. We did it because we love playing the game. We don't only make businesses, we make industries, brands. We innovate stuff like: fire departments, and baseball, biking along the river, farmer's markets in the morning, and eating waffles in our pyjamas. It's just so easy to do what we love!"

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That last “do what we love” was a family, though they weren’t eating waffles, or wearing their pyjamas, which was a letdown.

These videos tend to be more or less the same: we’re youthful and innovative and diverse. Families like it here.

A small city in Canada, called Okotoks made international headlines a few years ago by just... giving up and embracing blandness. They launched a campaign called: “There are a number of things to do in Okotoks.” Someone else put together a series of hilariously repetitive, sad pictures of Regina and set it to a hilariously repetitive, sad song. You really do have to experience Regina if you haven’t had the pleasure.

A classic of this genre, is a video by Mike Polk, a comedian from Cleveland (Ohio), who makes fun of this whole enterprise.

0:28 “Here’s the place where there used to be industry” to 0:44 “... yeah!”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysmLA5TqbIY>

In sum: this is really **hard**.

In the past, it’s been really hard to sell Tasmania to the wildly ambitious. It’s an island state with 520,000 people—not a massive city.

And again: this place is not for everyone. Moving here is not like moving to a thumping global megalopolis. It’s different here.

And this different-ness has to be the heart of our strategy: to tell a story so compelling, and so honest, that we find and seduce the people who are deeply Tasmanian and don’t know it yet.

For the last year I’ve been running an experiment on a friend from Canada: Shirley. I’ve known Shirley for most of my life, and since we were teenagers it was obvious: she was not normal. She was smarter, more driven, more determined, and more serious than the rest of us. At the same time, she’s fun and funny, and self-deprecating and charming.

Today she’s the vice-dean of medicine at one of Canada’s top universities. She’s also the president of the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

Shirley is on a path. I called her up, and she spoke from her lovely back garden—you should see her back garden—with the birds singing.

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1:55 “People who are doing” to... 2:15 “... somewhere in North America.”

“People who are doing the jobs that I’m doing right now would really need to stay in an inner city in a context in which they know me well, which would be Canada, or North America, and, umm, eventually become Dean of a large health sciences faculty, or some sort of medical school, somewhere in North America”.

Think Toronto or Montreal or New York.

My experiment has been... can I get Shirley to think about deviating from that delicious path to power and riches? Can I get Shirley to consider giving it all up to be Tasmanian?

When Shirley first heard of Tasmania, years ago, she admits—like me—she thought it might be a place in Africa. Then she worked with a Tasmanian medical student.

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6:47 “She struck me as though...” to 7:12 “That’s pretty cool.”

“She struck me as somebody who, although she had chosen a career as a physician could easily have lived in a camper beside the beach for the rest of her life with her dog scrounging clams, or I don’t know. You know, was just carefree and lovely to talk to and adaptable and flexible and yeah just sort of, and I thought okay, I can see her from there, that’s pretty cool”.

Four years ago, when the Tasmanian Government launched its plan to evolve the state’s brand strategy, it was to solve a problem: we need more people.

Ambitious and productive people, ideally with kids or plans to have kids.

Tourism is an important part of the Tasmanian economy. Trade is crucial. We need investors and we want to attract students to this place: where you can learn the skills and the culture of small, artisanal enterprise no matter what you study.

But the foundation of a powerful and enduring economic development strategy is talented people, who want to be here. The previous brand work had been focused on product and place. This is where “clean and green” Comes from. Some people, perhaps, will give up everything to chase clean and green. But if 160 places around the world say it’s their competitive advantage, how do we convince them to choose this *particular* clean and green place?

Something was missing—people, and what they do. Why they do it here, all that stuff that eats strategy for breakfast.

But the global tourism industry has been devastated by COVID-19. In the midst of it, some Australian states and New Zealand began discussing a bubble. Tasmania, at the time, had zero new cases. New Zealand had close to zero cases. Perhaps Tasmanians and New Zealanders, fellow travellers in cleanliness and greenness, could visit one another.

This hit the news, and the editor of a New Zealand media outlet named Tim posted a snotty Tweet about it.

Tim wrote... “*But... who’s ever wanted to fly to Hobart?*”

Translation. I’m from New Zealand. Why would I ever want to go to Tasmania? What Tim from Auckland meant, of course, is that if the attraction to these places is natural beauty: mountains, beaches, misty valleys and haunting forests... the colour green... yeah, New Zealand has all that. A boastful New Zealander like Tim might even say New Zealand’s natural assets and shade of green are even better.

Lots of people argued with Auckland Tim on Twitter, but the ultimate argument is: dear editor, you should come to Tasmania because of what you *can’t find* in New Zealand. Tasmanians and what they do and make: the different sort of museum, whisky, wine, restaurant, knife.

Tasmanian-ness.

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13:06 “looking at my lifestyle...” to 13:38 “pursue adventure.”

14:28 “the quiet is enticing...” to 15:05 “... a natural draw.”

“Looking at my lifestyle, for what I want now, for the next twenty years. Is it really to become Dean? Is it really to move up? If I’m not willing to move locations in my Provence that I’m in right now, would I really think about is going somewhere larger with even more responsibility? I don’t know. And there’s not a lot of places in Canada that fulfil all of the things that I’d be looking for, honestly. There are a few, but there’s not a lot, so would I pick up and move to one of those places, or would.”

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I consider a complete sea change and do something exciting and pursue adventure? The quiet is enticing and not that all parts of Tasmania that we visited, even the bustling cities, they're not all quiet. They're full of energy and people and culture and things that I like, but you know certainly more quiet in the lifestyle and traffic and large cities, for sure. So, I'm drawn to that a lot. I would prefer to be kind of quiet and on my own and alone where I feel more recharged than to be with people, so maybe that's just a natural draw."

I have mentioned previously in this podcast that the word brand has a brand problem. This has gotten in the way of our success, here at Brand Tasmania. A brand is a logo, to a lot of people, or a slogan or an advertising campaign. To others it's just a bunch of abstract nonsense—adults with colouring books, getting in the way of the real work.

And there's a certain irony in a foreigner being the CEO of an organisation called Brand Tasmania: that's just too much for some people. And we're in the midst of a pandemic and historic economic downturn that will have severe social consequences. Yeah, let's care about brands when things are going well again.

And there is a normal way to do all of this work: trade promotion, tourism campaigns, investment attraction. It's paint by numbers. Everyone does it the same way. Universities fight to get in the top-100 of some ranking. The 200 billion dollar recruitment industry can just keep saying the same words over and over again, hoping to get people to come: innovative, resilient, diverse, sustainable, world-class.

Ironically, this would not only be easier for our team at Brand Tasmania. It would be more comfortable for everyone: politicians and our colleagues in and out of government. Our private sector partners would understand sunny videos with pop music and good looking young people clicking wine glasses and cavorting with kangaroos. Members of the elite who recognise economic development strategies from hundreds of other best places to live, work, and play might say: yeah, that looks about right.

We don't think our output is a traditional campaign, even if we could afford it. And we can't. But without campaigns how can we reach Tasmanians, and those who might want to be Tasmanian? I can just call up Shirley, but not all the Shirley's we're going to need in the next twenty years: I can't call all the customers, tourists, students, investors, artists, entrepreneurs, and doctors.

A few thousand years ago there was a war between the Greeks and the Trojans. The Greeks tried everything, for ten years, to break into Troy. And then one of them had an idea. They built a massive wooden horse and filled it with their soldiers, including a gent you might have heard of: Odysseus. Then the rest of the army pretended to sail away. Bye, Troy! We give up!

The Trojans brought the horse inside the gates, and that night when everyone was asleep, or drunk, the Greeks jumped out, opened the doors, and the rest of the Greek army—who had sailed back—ran screaming and slaughtering into Troy. It ended the war. Today, we use the phrase, Trojan Horse, as a metaphor.

We are in the infiltration and influence business, here at Brand Tasmania. All we can do, to unify Tasmanian efforts, are small things that carry a big idea. Someone just like you did it and you can do it too. Our job is to invite and encourage you to do it, and to make sure it's not only possible but an expression of *who we are*.

In the first Be Tasmanian podcast I told you about Austin, and the beautiful-accidental way it told its story and wrapped a strategy around it. The South by Southwest festival was its Trojan Horse. You don't like weird? Fine, don't come. You want to launch something weird out into the world, come do it here for ten days every March. Hell: we're open for weirdness all year. Dye your hair pink. The barbecue is on.

Everything we are doing, in Tasmania, is a Trojan Horse—a small, measurable way to encourage more Tasmanian enterprise by making a core strength of Tasmanian culture. We don't have a budget for any of this but instead of complaining we partner with people who do—people who share our ambitions.

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We can bring this story and strategy to life in specific ways, with projects, across our trade sectors. Across talent and investment and student attraction. And broadly across the community, in education and in local council areas—helping Launceston and Queenstown and Burnie and Huonville be Tasmanian in distinctly local ways. There are plenty of companies who claim to measure the health of a place-brand, through sentiment research. Sadly, it's superficial and unreliable.

Breaking it down by sectors and projects is the only legitimate way to measure our success: to tie our efforts and ambitions to the efforts and ambitions of our partners. If the brand helps them succeed, the brand succeeds.

As a team we use the Tasmanian story every day. When we hit an obstacle, or when someone tells us it's impossible, when it seems everyone is too busy to notice us here at the bottom of the world, when something happens in the media that makes Tasmania seem deeply un-Tasmanian, we just... work harder.

Before we do or say anything we go back to the story, to unify our efforts—to tap into our audiences' emotions. We ask ourselves: is this Tasmanian or not? And at the same time, we have to make sure the product is ready for our audiences and our customers, Tasmanians and those who might like to be Tasmanian. If we're saying to Shirley, and thousands like her, "You can do it too!" we have to make sure... it's true. That they can.

And ultimately, all of this comes down to Shirley—all the Shirley's around the world. It isn't enough to entertain her, to show her pretty pictures and ask her to share them. Moving her family across the world is scary and hard. Either we can convince Shirley, or not.

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17:57 *"I'd probably actually be just as satisfied..."* to 18:30 *"Is a huge draw."*

"I'd probably actually be just as satisfied, working in somewhere that's literally smaller, with fewer people than I am right now. And using those same skills that I've built. And, clearly I like doing what I'm doing because of the activities that I do, not necessarily the context in which I'm in, or the large city that I'm in and so the opportunity to do something like that, in a place like Tasmania, with adventure and more quiet and being able to explore a totally new place is a huge draw."

This week Shirley sent me a text with a property listing. It's a former religious camp, near a beach with enough living space for two families and guests. *"Maybe we could have our jobs and, in our spare time, renovate the place, train up the kids, and make it into an artist's retreat, or something, with goat yoga?"*

Listeners: I think we've got her!

We have come to the end of the first series of Be Tasmanian. Please join us a partner at www.tasmanian.com.au and follow us on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter.

Thank you to my team mates and editors: Jess Radford and Christie Sweeting and first listeners: Fransina Kennedy and Nell Streets. I've learned so much from podcast guru, Caleb Miller who recorded Be Tasmanian, composed the lovely music and lent his voice to episode one and six.

We know this is a profoundly nerdy subject, so thank you for coming along with us. Please share it with similarly nerdy friends and give us a review. It would be un-Tasmanian to ask for a five-star review, so I won't. But let me say listeners, how smart and good looking you are.

We do have plans for a second series, interviewing others around the world who are on these impossible missions in place-branding and economic development and we'd love to hear your ideas and suggestions for guests at welcome@brandtasmania.com.au and of course we hope to see you here in Tasmania as soon as you can come.