

# Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Leah Badertscher

The Art School Podcast with Leah Badertscher

Sandra: But the women who are most influential in my life were my grandmothers. And they, the two of them, brought me up on story. These were two women, both of them, never went to school. So, neither one of them knew how to read or write. But the one thing that they did have was story. And so, they would tell me stories. That's how they would teach me life and life school, for lack of a better way to put it. They would tell me all of these stories. And both of them, in their own different ways, told me stories about my life. In fact, I could say that they spoke into me the potential.

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That was a clip from a wonderful conversation I had earlier this summer, June 2022, with Sandra Chuma. Sandra Chuma is an entrepreneur, speaker, coach, podcast host, and award-winning documentary filmmaker. She is the founder and Chief Creative Officer of Worthy, which is a platform focused on helping women stop procrastinating on their dream and take confident action towards creating a life they love without overwhelm.

Raised in a tiny mud hut in Zimbabwe with no running water or electricity, Sandra has never been one to let circumstances define her. Through hard work and support from her village, she became a management consultant, advising major global companies. She then went on to build two successful companies.

Now, there is even more to Sandra's biography and we are going to get to those things in this episode, including the story of how she went back to school to get a master's degree in journalism, storytelling, and documentary filmmaking from Columbia.

For now, though, let me just say, of the countless reasons I could be overthe-moon enthusiastic about having Sandra on the podcast, there was something that she said during a mastermind call we were both on that

blew me away. Something that she said she had learned after building both seven and then eight-figure businesses.

It is a story of creation and shifting paradigms that I know will be of great interest and is of incredible value to those of you listening. And that's just one of the many elements we'll be talking about during this interview. So, get ready, grab a journal. Get ready to take notes. Get ready to relisten and just back in the transformative power of her storytelling energy and wisdom.

Also, be thinking about what stories do you want to tell to yourself about yourself. What potential do you want to speak into your own life and the lives of others?

You are listening to *The Art School Podcast*; a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Hello, everyone, and welcome to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. As I record this for you, outside my window, I can see into the woods, the trees are turning. The wind is blowing. And I'm thinking of a letter recently sent out by a mentor of mine where she's writing about how this being the time of year when the hunter moon, or the blood moon, rises.

It's large. It's magnificent. It's glorious in the sky. And she references something astrologer Urvi Shrimanker says that, "This is the time of year when we prepare for big changes to bring our desires to life."

I don't know about you, but I am feeling that energy. I am just coming off our Art School Mastermind retreat and I can only use few words right now

because millions of words would not be enough. But let me just say, that wild, untamed, vast creative energy was definitely at play. Big changes, incredible seismic shifts were definitely underfoot, desires coming to life, yes, to say the least.

And so, I will attempt to do a podcast episode in the future that does a better job doing justice to the experience of being with those women over that period of days. And in the meantime, I also am channeling that energy to you, channeling that energy to you as you prepare, perhaps, for big changes, to bring your own desires to life.

And I do also know that this episode will be very supportive and instructive, if that's something that you are sensing is on your horizon. Tremendous shifts, new evolutions, tapping into a more vast version of yourself, a more sacred, powerful version of yourself.

It also feels like divine timing to share this conversation with Sandra Chuma today, after the Art School Mastermind. Because again and again, you will hear her talk about the power, the significance of the stories we choose to tell ourselves about who we are and who we are becoming.

She'll talk about the importance of living a life that is aligned for you, and how to go about doing that. That was so much of the work and the magic that unfolded this past weekend and I'm very excited to continue to channel that energy and pass that thread on to you, dear listeners, wherever you are.

I shared a little of Sandra's bio in the intro. And if you can believe it, that was only a fraction. So, let me go on to say that despite all of this professional success, including having built two successful companies, she knew she wasn't walking her purpose. So, she made the decision to go back to school in 2015, and then that's when she got her master's degree

in journalism, storytelling, and documentary filmmaking from Columbia University.

It's now through the power of story and leveraging her experience as a management consultant that Sandra has made it her mission to help others create the best versions of themselves.

She is building brands focused on providing inspiration, tools, and community. She is also the founder of Ndini, which is a platform focused on telling the often-untold stories of inspiring, trailblazing Women of African Descent.

So, yes, I'm sure you can see there are countless reasons why I'm excited to have Sandra on the podcast. And there is also this other bit of backstory which I alluded to in the intro, that during our time in the mastermind, she said something on one call that blew me away.

She was speaking about what she most wants to speak on now, what she's most impassioned about, the stories that are yearning to be told through her. And she said it came from the place where she had built a seven-figure company, an eight-figure company, and had been so burnt out, that now what was lighting her up was a desire and a drive to speak on the importance of creating from the divine feminine, and what a vastly different paradigm that is than from the place of hustle and grind and force and exhaustion and eventually burnt out.

And I thought, if someone who has had the level of success that she has had can know this to be so important on a deep level that now it's part of her purpose to speak on it, then that is someone whose story that I want to share with you.

And that is only one of the stories that she shares in this conversation. It was such a juicy, packed interview that I decided to spread it out over two parts. And even then, even though I have spread it over two parts, you'll hear at the end of part two of this conversation, we touch briefly on another mutual joy, area of fascination and interest for both of us that we are going to have to reconvene for a future episode on.

I loved this conversation and am so excited to introduce the Art School audience to Sandra Chuma.

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Leah: Thank you so much for being here because I love the phrase about how information is wonderful, but we need more stories to have faith in. And you are the archetypical storyteller. You embody storytelling. So, thank you for joining us.

Sandra: Thank you for having me. Thank you for being open to hear me and hear my stories. I am so grateful for this opportunity to have this conversation.

Leah: We were speaking a little bit before and about storytelling. And I also know that you have a professional background in storytelling, in journalism. You also have storytelling in your bones. Can you speak a little bit about the trajectory of your life, from your home, from your roots, and then what brought you to journalism, and then fast forward to this new story just before, this new story that we can tell one another so we can have faith that there is a paradigm for women and artists and creatives to thrive in, and it looks very different than the mythology of the past, the mythology of h wot be successful, how to be a fully actualized, expressive, creative, thriving human.

There was a mythology that guided in the past and so many people have been frustrated. And then I think tragically not expressed their potential, have not felt they can trust themselves and believe in themselves because they don't see a way to succeed in that paradigm.

And so, I feel like the story, one of the very powerful things about your story and the message you're sharing is that there is this other way. There is another way of thriving, of deep and profound success. And it's not about burnout.

Sandra: That's so true. And you know, I love that you led with storytelling. And when I think about, how do I describe myself? I struggle. You know, like, "What do you do?" that proverbial question, I never know what to tell people. But what has been a consistent, a thread of my life has been the power of story.

And why I say that is, as I've shared with you before, I'm from Zimbabwe. So, I was literally born in a mud hut with no running water and no electricity. And when I look back at the most powerful influences in my life, they were my parents, of course, and also my grandmother in particular.

My grandfather, on my father's side, I never knew because he passed away before my father was even born. And then, my grandfather on my mother's side, I knew him too, but he was a more reserved man.

But the women who are most influential in my life were my grandmothers. And they, the two of them, brought me up on story. These were two women, both of them, never went to school. So, neither one of them knew how to read or write. But the one thing that they did have was story. And so, they would tell me stories. That's how they would teach me life and life school, for lack of a better way to put it. They would tell me all of these

stories. And both of them, in their own different ways, told me stories about my life. In fact, I could say that they spoke into me the potential.

My maternal grandmother, her name was Chengeto and she, as I said, never learned to read or write. And when I was born, at the time that I was raised in Zimbabwe, it was a segregated country, and so there were Whites-Only Neighborhoods and Blacks-Only Neighborhoods, and she worked as a housemaid for an upper-middle-class white family.

And sometimes, as a special treat on Saturdays, she worked a half-day and she would take me with her and we'd go on the bus. And as we're driving along on the bus, she would point out these beautiful homes that I'd never seen because, at that time, as Black People, we lived in townships or in rural villages which are very small, no gardens. And we'd go to this neighborhood that she worked in where there'd be these beautiful big houses with tree-lined streets and swimming pools.

And she would say to me, "Sandra, one day you're going to live in a house like that. One day, you're going to have a car. One day, you're going to go to school." And we would see planed flying – for her whole life, and this is one of my deepest regrets is she never, in her lifetime, got to go on an airplane. But she would see airplanes up in the sky and she'd say to me, "One day, you're going to go on an airplane and you're going to go overseas and get an education."

And so, for me, without knowing it, she was, I guess, my first motivational speaker. Because she told me that story, it became kind of my belief. I had no reason as a little girl to doubt what my grandmother was saying. And it really led, when I look back on my life, it really led my life because she'd instilled this belief in me about this was what my life was going to be.

And that, to me, when I look back now from the position of knowing the power of story, I realize how the stories we are told have the power to mold and shape us. I also realize that the stories we tell ourselves have the power to mold and shape us.

Our beliefs are really based on the things we tell ourselves repeatedly. And I think that's why, in my life, I have transitioned into, how can I use story and the power of story to help people envision new possibilities for themselves? And part of what you talked about was creating a new paradigm. You know, bless my grandmother, she gave me this belief and I then subscribed into the traditional model of, "Okay, I'll go to school. I'll work really hard. And then I'll get a job. And then I'll work really hard in that job. And then I'll be successful. And then I'll be happy."

And I think that's where so many of us get stuck is that we think that success is out there on the other side of something else. And we also live in this world where this paradigm that tells us that hustle, grind, go harder, go faster, the reason you don't have success in your life is because you are not working hard enough, you don't want it enough.

And so, we're literally burning ourselves out to achieve this vision of success that when we get there feels so empty, that when we get there, we keep chasing and chasing and chasing.

You know, for me, my vision of success was, "If I could just get to \$50,000 a year, if I could just get to \$100,000, if I could just get to a million. And each time I would hit each one of these, I would get there and not feel satisfied.

So, I really think that the new paradigm that we all want to step into, that we all should be stepping into is first of all, you define your own version of success. It's not a one-size-fits-all. But also that success is about you living

your life, living with joy, living with intention, living with purpose, that success isn't something that you will get to in the future and then be happy. It's about choosing to be happy now on the journey to whatever that greater version of yourself is.

Leah: Oh my goodness. I've told you before, I could listen to you speak forever. You speak like pure poetry. And you're also speaking the Art School language because the story that I'm hearing, the potential that you are speaking into this audience, into this community is one of a vastenough paradigm to hold what might seem like a paradox coming from an old paradigm.

You spoke of your grandmothers speaking potential into you, "They spoke into me the potential." And then you moved through life and realized, that potential is not on the other side of something. They gave you this expanded life vision and then also you lived into your life experience to discover, it's not on the other side of something only.

Yes, I can have the other side. Yes, I can have the vision. And then also, during the course of my life in this moment, success is joy in the present moment, or success is perhaps being present with non-joyful moments, but fully embodying that aspect.

And I also, what you said about when we are in this pattern of the and then, always postponing our joy, our sense of maybe fulfilment or satisfaction until we're on the other side of something and that being a recipe for burnout. Would you mind sharing some of your own life experiences with that?

Sandra: Yeah, as I kind of alluded to earlier, I was in corporate for many years, and that was very much – I was in information technology, which is the bastion of males and male energy. And so, it was always like for me to

be successful, I've got to out-hustle, I've got to out-grind. And oh, allow myself to be happy someday when I've achieved. And that goalpost was aways moving for me.

It was an amount. If I could earn this much. And also, if I could get to a position, then I'll be happy. And I didn't understand, at that time, that it's not about the destination. It's kind of like when you're a kid and like, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?"

And we all want to hurry to get to a destination that we think is where the joy is. But the joy is in the journey. The joy is in who you become as you go through that. And I know that sounds so cliché, you know, we hear it all the time, "The joy is in the journey." Yeah, but I just want to be there.

And I think how I got to that realization was I was in corporate and I had this continually moving goalpost about when I would be happy; when I was the perfect size, when I had the perfect amount of money, when, when, when.

And so, I had so many moments in my life where I couldn't allow myself to be present to the joy of that moment because I wasn't there yet. Like, that's great, or I would achieve milestones, but it's not the big milestone yet.

And so, I was constantly chasing. And it felt like – I don't know if you've ever seen, I used to live in the UK and in the UK they have these hare racing where it's these dogs that are racing around the track and they're chasing this hare. And when you think about it, that's how we are.

No matter how fast those dogs run, they will never catch the hare because that's how the game is set up. And we also live in a culture that tells us we're not enough, "You're not enough yet. You'll be enough when... You'll

be enough when you have this, when you have the house, when you have all of this."

And so, for me, I was always chasing. And I thought that, "Oh, okay, I've knocked off all of these milestones but I'm still not happy." The reason is because I work for somebody else. Let me create my own company, then I'll be happy.

I created that company and was like, "Okay, if I could just get to six figures, then I'll be happy." Crossed six figures, still wasn't happy, "If I could just get to seven figures, then I'll be happy." Hustled, ground, did the things, got to seven figures, "No, no, no, the issue is it's not eight figures." There are all these people out there who are talking about making eight figures and that's where the joy is. And so, I was constantly chasing, got to eight figures, and I can tell you that the first year I made eight figures in my business was the most miserable year of my life. The most miserable.

I was working harder than ever. I was stressed out. My relationship with my husband was literally on the rocks because I just wasn't giving it time. My body started to shut down. I was diagnosed with adrenal fatigue.

And I remember sitting in the doctor's office and she was looking at my results kind of, all these symptoms I'd been having. And she said to me, "Oh my gosh, I've never seen such numbers like this."

And the overachiever in me was like, "You know, I'd like to thank my mom and I'd like to than the Academy..." because I thought she was about to tell me that I was so good because I was hustling and grinding. And she was like, "No, you don't understand, you're the worst patient I've ever had. You have the highest stress response. You have the highest white cell blood count."

I had all these markers and she was like, "Literally, your body is shutting down. You need to change." And that for me, became a pivotal point of me realizing that, yes, on paper my life looked amazing. I lived in the dream house, drove the dream car, had the dream business. But I was utterly miserable. And it was the first time that I started to really reflect on what was the meaning of my life, what was the purpose of my life.

And I wish I could say the heavens opened, the angels sang, and the answer came to me. It didn't. But what I did get clarity on was that I wasn't living my purpose, and that purpose wouldn't come and joy wouldn't come and what I was craving in terms of feeling successful was not about a number. It wasn't a number in my bank account, it wasn't a number on the scale. That it ultimately was about me choosing to be happy. Me choosing the path that made me happy, that brought me joy.

I was in this corporate career that I thought was the key to success, but I had effectively sold my soul and sold myself out in terms of living my life purpose by following this path that was what had been sold to me. So if I had to have one message to somebody who's out there who's struggling with what do I do and I don't feel like I'm successful, success isn't ever going to come from a number. Success isn't ever going to come from anything that is outside of you.

The joy that you're looking for, the love, the peace, everything comes from within you, first of all. But second of all, it really comes from living the life that feels aligned for you. The life that brings you joy. Because all of these things that are external markers of success, they're not the key to joy.

Leah: What a powerful story. I'm sorry you had to experience that year of misery and...

Sandra: You know what, I used to think, for the longest time I used to be like, oh my gosh, it's so terrible. I actually think it was the greatest gift I was given because sometimes, I feel like life is a game that we're all in this giant game and for you to get to the next level, whatever that next level is, there are lessons that you have to learn.

And sometimes, the only way that you can learn them is through going through the things that are difficult. And I think we've also kind of as a society, I see this especially in the world of spirituality. It's all about love and light and good vibes only. And I think, "Gosh, what a terrible way to go through life where you only feel one thing."

The whole reason, if you think about, for example, light, if we're talking about love and light, the only way that you can know what light is is to have the absence of light, to know what darkness is. Then that's the only way you know there's light. For you to know what love is, you have to know the absence of love.

And so when we go through these challenges, rather than resisting them, because I'm sure you've heard the saying, "What you resist persists," rather than us resisting them, it's approaching them from the perspective of what are you here to teach me? What can I learn? And being able to live in this duality of and, to think that life is - I love this expression that I heard from Esther Hicks where she says that life is two ends of the stick.

This polarity where there's good and bad and joy and sadness. And the only way we get to experience those and to then appreciate the joy is if you've been through the sadness. Because otherwise, life is just grey.

So I truly would say to anybody who's going through a hardship, and sometimes hardships are - it's hard to say to someone, "Be grateful for what you're going through." My dad died very suddenly and unexpectedly

three years ago this month and I remember speaking to one of my mentors the day my dad died and saying, "My dad passed away. It was completely unexpected." And him saying, "What is the gratitude that you can find and what is the peace that you can find?"

And I remember thinking some four-letter words about do you understand what I just told you? My dad just died. Who the heck do you think you are to tell me find peace, find gratitude? And when I sat with that and really thought about, huh, okay, yes, I'm going through this terrible thing, it was incredibly challenging, I was very close to my dad. But what is the joy that I can find?

And I can tell you that my experience of my dad's passing was challenging of course, all the feelings, the sadness, the grief, all of it. But at the same time, because I had these words, which at the time really ticked me off when my mentor said it, but because I had those words playing, like, what is the gratitude that I could find? What is the peace that I can find?

I had a really different experience of his passing than maybe other people did because I was able to go through the process looking for those moments. It's not like every moment was - of course I cried. But if we can go through the hardships and appreciate that yes, this is hard, is there anything that I can learn, is there anything that I can be grateful for, just that perspective shift.

Sometimes there isn't anything that you can find. But when you're looking for it, you'll find it. Our brains have something that's called the reticular activating system and when you think about our brains are processing hundreds of thousands of pieces of data every single day, if not millions, our brains have to be told what's important.

So when you go through an experience, when you go through your day-today looking for the moments of gratitude, looking for the moments of peace, looking for the moments of joy, you've given your brain and your subconscious mind the instruction to look for it. And what you look for, you will find.

Leah: I mean, that's like a masterclass from a master storyteller too. I know we were talking about the stories - and when I say mythology, I mean the stories that can help guide and shape us, like the stories that speak potential into each of us collectively. And as you were speaking about being open to what is the peace, the gifts, also in adversity and hardship and sharing your story with your father, thank you for sharing that. What a beautiful story.

And also, what a beautiful gift of having a mentor who clearly loves you enough to say something very challenging, something that I'm sure they knew would not be easily met with, but would serve you at a high and deep level.

Sandra: That's so true. And as I said, I didn't receive it well in the moment. I wanted the, "Oh, poor you, this is so terrible." That's what I wanted. And so when he said this thing which felt like - when he was saying that, I'm thinking, "Did you just hear what I said to you? Did you just comprehend? I just lost my dad. Can we just pause on that?"

And he's like, "Yes, I get that. And now you get to choose. You get to choose how you go through that experience." A lot of the time we're going through life and just responding. Something happens, input, output, input. And yet, what's so powerful is where our power sits is in how we choose to respond, how we choose in any moment, how do I want to go through this? And being intentional about it.

We all have great intentions. This is what I want to achieve in life. But very few of us are actually intentional about how we go through our everyday. It's kind of like being a candle in the wind. The wind blows this way and the wind blows that way and we just kind of go with it.

Our power really sits within us and choosing. This is a hard thing that I'm going through, who do I choose to be as I'm going through this hard thing? This is a joyful thing that I'm going through, who do I choose to be to allow myself to be fully present, to remember these memories? All of that comes from being intentional.

We are every single day creating memories. I think sometimes we just think that, "Oh, memories happen." But it's about can we be intentional in creating memories? Can we be intentional about what are the memories we're choosing to anchor in? And can we choose - a powerful thing that another mentor of mine often says is that our competence comes from, our confidence comes from when we go through good things.

We feel confident because I did this thing and I achieved it. But our wisdom comes when we go through the difficulties. Because it's often through the difficult things that we learn. It's often through the difficult things that we grow. And I said earlier that if life is a game, sometimes it's the challenging things that are the ones that propel us to the next level, that allow us to realize our own power.

And if we go back full circle and take this back to storytelling, this is about the stories that we choose to tell ourselves. The stories we choose to tell ourselves about who we are, the stories we choose to tell ourselves about who we are becoming, the stories that we choose to tell ourselves about how we go through the experiences that we go through life. Everything.

You talked about Greek mythology and storytelling, that's why those stories have power that centuries later we're still reading Greek mythology, Shakespeare still is relevant. It's story. Because that's how our brains are wired to comprehend is through the power of story.

And so what we get to do is really for ourselves, often we're not intentional about the stories we tell ourselves. So really choosing to take back that power and tell ourselves stories that are empowering, that allow us to be powerful.

Now this brings me to the part of the podcast where I want you to do more than just listen. I want you to lean in and really work with me, coach with me. As Sandra was saying, stories are so powerful. The stories we tell ourselves shape our lives. And they have the power to change our lives.

Also, hearing others' stories have the power to change us and the power to change the world, especially if we give them the reverent space and attention. So that's what I want to do in this particular coach with me.

Spend reverent space and attention with the powerful stories that Sandra has shared. Imagine us all in a circle in a sacred space together and you have just heard this story. And now I'm inviting you to consider these prompts.

What story are you currently telling yourself? What is the narrative that's shaping and creating your life? What is the narrative that is shaping and creating you? And what is your narrative about who you are becoming? Also, what is a life that feels aligned to you?

I was just working with clients this morning and so many of the conversations centered around me really giving them prompts to think unconventionally. It can be hard to disrupt the systems that we're internalized in our minds for even how our day goes.

For instance, that a book has to be written a little bit every day. Why can't a book be written in a week? Why can't a book be written in a month? Why can't a book be written in six different long weekends? That's just one example.

But I want you to really be aware of where convention and thinking about, "Well, this is the way it has to be done," become aware of where you are immediately without considering it, limiting yourself by subscribing to conventional ideas about how something is created, and even how a life is lived.

So if you took all of those expectations and conventions off the table and nothing were unreasonable or unrealistic, what is the life that feels aligned to you? Here is another prompt that I want to pull from this conversation and highlight. To be intentional in creating memories.

What are memories you want to create? How can you be intentional in creating the kind of experiences in your life that nourish you in the moment and that will continue to enrich your life when you look back upon them, will continue to enrich your life because they changed the trajectory of your life?

For me, I've just been through a weekend of that. Definitely holding a retreat and holding it in exactly the manner in which I wanted to hold it, I was intentional about every aspect. The beauty of the home, the location, the private chef, the food, the gifts, the activities, the surprises, the

dynamic, the chemistry, the coaching, every element I wanted this to be a life-long memory and also something that left people changed.

So that might seem like a big thing, a retreat, and it is, but what are ways that you can use intention and use your creativity to create memories that are meaningful to you, that reflect your values and who you really are? And how does that maybe conflict with the stories you've told yourself about what life should look like, versus telling the story of what you really want or are making space in your life for the stories that truly want to unfold through you?

Thank you so much for listening to another episode of *The Art School Podcast.* Sandra and I were connecting before the episode on our mutual belief that it really does take a village. And then coincidentally, that theme came up again in the retreat this weekend.

Also, another beautiful connection, Sandra and I are mutual friends with Dr. Tererai Trent, who is someone who really taught me about the importance of village and that it takes a village. It's something that we can throw away, it's like a throwaway phrase, oh sure, we know that, but do we actually do that?

And again, this weekend, this past weekend in the retreat, that experience of being so interconnected and that all things really do feel possible when you realize you're not doing it on your own was one of the most precious aspects of that experience for me and something that the participants said transformative for them as well.

So if you want to experience the kind of alchemy, amplification, beauty, wonder, magic, and awe that it is to be in a constructive, creative community, I highly recommend that you look into any Art School offerings we have coming up.

I am profoundly grateful for the people that come to this work because it's really the individual souls that come into this container that make it what it is, and I do think it's unlike anything I've ever experienced before. And that being said, there is also this overflow effect where it's contagious and spilling out into so many other communities.

So whether it's through the Mastermind, applications are open, through an upcoming Art School, our classic Art School is back in 2023 and you can sign up for the waitlist for more information, whether it's through a free workshop, I would love to invite you into this space and give you an opportunity to explore where this is the village that really helps you make your dreams and your goals and your aligned life inevitable.

To close today, one more bonus coach with me because that part where Sandra is talking about her grandmother speaking into her, her potential, breathtaking. Just stopped my heart in the best of ways. So I wanted to wait until the close here of the episode to give that - seems like the crown jewel of many gems in this podcast.

But to give you a moment to contemplate and rest with that and reflect on that. Where in life are you able to see and believe in the potential of others and speak that into them, pour that into them? And where can you speak your potential into yourself? Have a beautiful week everyone and I look forward to talking with you next time.