

Taking an Empowered and Creative View Towards Technology by Tami Simon

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You're listening to Insights at the Edge. Today, my guest is Tiffany Shlain. Tiffany is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker, author, and public speaker. Regarded as an internet pioneer, Tiffany is the founder of the Webby Awards, and co-founder of the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. She has premiered four films at Sundance, and her recent film, 50/50: Rethinking the Past, Present, and Future of Women and Power premiered live at TEDWomen, at 27 TEDxes globally, and on Refinery29. It was the centerpiece film for the first annual 50/50 Day, which had over 11,000 screenings around the globe, all linked together in an online discussion about what it will take to move to a more gender-balanced world.

In this episode of Insights at the Edge, Tiffany and I spoke about her unusual approach of using short films as a centerpiece to a social change strategy and movement. We talked about her short film, The Science of Character, and also the social science and neuroscience behind character, how you can embody different virtues by working on developing specific character strengths.

We also talked about her discovery of the importance of a technology Shabbat, a 24-hour period that she takes once a week free from any screen time, and how this has been actually life-changing for her, and her view that we need to take an empowered view towards technology and recognize that it's an extension of who we are, not something separate from us.

We also talked about a new film by Tiffany and her team on gender equality and the 50/50 Day that accompanies this short film. It's April 26, 2018, and it's all dedicated, 50/50 Day, to a day when we can explore how women can have not just equal pay, but equal voice and leadership in society. Here's my conversation with Tiffany Shlain.

Tiffany, in familiarizing myself with your filmmaking, I had the thought, "Tiffany's an unusual kind of filmmaker. Some new breed of something like a social activist filmmaker or ..." What would be the language you would use for it?

Tiffany Shlain: Hmm. I like "social activist filmmaker." I think I really view... it's my way to process the world and what I'm wrestling with, and what I'm hoping we, as a species, evolve to this next level. That usually involves the film as the starting

point, and then I want to create a lot of resources, and usually a global day around it to help it forward. The film, to me, is always the starting point to something much larger.

Yes, so I think a social activist filmmaker works. I mean, I've never felt like I fit in. People say, "Oh, what kind of films do you do? Do you do documentaries?" Even if you've seen my documentaries, they're very experimental. I've never even felt like I fit in the documentary box. I've generally felt like an outsider, but I like that vantage point. It's a good perspective on things.

TS: Mm-hmm. [Yes.] Now, you made a short film, you packed a lot into it, called, The Science of Character. In keeping, Tiffany, with what you just described of linking a film to actually having a day of events, and creating a movement, you've created a film called The Science of Character. To begin here, can you tell our listeners about The Science of Character and the day that goes with it, and how this could possibly be a movement to improve our character.

TSh: Yes, so I made this eight-minute film with my team called The Science of Character, and it really tries to visualize and articulate the social science and the neuroscience about how we can develop and build who we are. We can cultivate our character. It's based on the Positive Psychology Movement and research, which I was very excited about when I first heard it. My mom's a psychologist, so you know I grew up with her getting her PhD, and learning all about analyzing what the problem is in someone and trying to help them fix it.

Of course, positive psychology came around, which was, instead of looking at what's wrong with you, let's look at what's right with you and try to build on it. Also, what are the common character strengths and virtues across all cultures throughout all of history? I was very excited to see these commonalities, and the 24 character strengths and the different virtues, and I wanted to share that far and wide, and visualize it.

Because it's very, you know, when you have a language for thinking about things, it helps you be able to understand it better. I put the character strengths in a periodic table, and we made all these visuals, then we invited the public all over the world on their cell phones to answer fundamental questions about who they wanted to be in life.

We made this eight-minute film. And I have to tell you my background, way back, my whole other part of my career was founding the Webby Awards, which honors the world's best website. I spent a big portion of my life looking that the potential of the web to, what is the potential of what the web can do. I've made many films, and they've premiered at Sundance, or in theaters, or on television, or whatever, all these different ways.

What I was really excited about is, could we premier a film on a global day? So let everyone around the world, they will premier the film. We'll say, "This film's never been shown. How about everybody show it on the same day?" Which was The Science of Character, a short film, "And then spend the rest of the time with materials that we made." We made posters for their event with this Periodic Table of Character Strengths, and discussion kits, and we'll have amazing speakers, like Marty Seligman.

Actually, a lot of people who have been on his show have been our speakers as well. It'll be like the dream Q & A. Could this be done? The first year, we called it Character Day, and we had 1,500 events all over the world. The next year, there was

93,000. Then this last September, it was over 133,000 groups all over the world, that for one day, on this same day, talked about, "What is good character? What is meaning and purpose? What is the latest research and science around it?"

It was so wonderful, and it's growing. The next one happens September 26. I think that we're also distracted these days talking about, perhaps not the best parts of humanity with the news. To have one day where we stop what we're doing. These events happen in such a variety of places, from schools, to companies, to community centers, to people's homes, where we say, "We don't care. Any size, any place, it's all free. We're going to give you the materials for free, but we just want to unify this conversation."

Because, as we know, there's nothing more powerful than being part of something larger than yourself, especially about such an important topic, which is, "Who are you? Who do you want to be? What makes life meaningful? What are the different theories about purpose?" These are such fundamental, core questions of humans.

It's very exciting to take it out of religion, also, and make it open to everyone, whether you believe or you don't, wherever you fall on the spectrum. Let's have this unifying conversation about something really deep, like character.

TS: How do you define character, Tiffany?

TSh: The things that make you who you are, and when the outside world interacts with you, the choices that you make. I'm a big believer that we are all works in progress. I mean, there's always things I'm working on, like everyone, and the more you're aware of, what are your strengths? What are the things you want to make stronger? What's the latest research? We want to unleash so much of the research so that you can have all the tools to develop who you are more.

TS: Now, Tiffany, you mentioned that there's both a social science aspect to understanding character, and a neuroscience aspect to understanding character. What's the neuroscience behind character?

TSh: Yes, I mean, there's so much research that proves what I think we intuitively know. But just like when we continue to do a practice, it strengthens, it makes it easier to do. I think when we show the science and the neuroscience behind that, it goes into people's brains more deeply, why it's good to do.

Usually in all of my films ... I also made a film called Brain Power that looks at early childhood brain development from birth to five years, and the importance of nurturing a child, and the effects that can happen if they're not. If they feel neglected, what long-term effects that can have. I'm always, in my films, trying to visualize and impress upon the science that we do know, again, to back up things that I feel like we intuitively know. But science is terrific that way.

Usually my films have a mix of the social science, the neuroscience available, so The Science of Character, it both talks about the social science about developing who you are, and then any research that we know. Where, if it's the research on gratitude, how much it makes you feel better, sleep better, all of those things that we have so much research on now.

TS: Now, in this short film, you identify 24 character strengths. Can you give our listeners

some examples of character strengths?

TSh: Yes, absolutely. This is based on the work of Marty Seligman and Christopher Peterson, so this is ... they identified 24 character strengths that are across cultures and history, that are universally valued, and they lead to universally valued virtues as well. There's everything from courage, creativity, curiosity, social intelligence. There's a list of 24, and the way that we have them on this poster that we give out to any event that has a global Character Day event.

They show our movie, they show this Periodic Table of Character Strengths. You see that if you want to work on a certain virtue, that what you do is you can work on the strengths that lead to that virtue. I don't know if I'm articulating it well for those that can't see the screen, where the image ... it's so clear in my mind. So I hope that answer was OK.

TS: Maybe you could give an example.

TSh: Oh, yes. Great. That's a good idea. We have this Periodic Table of Character Strengths because I loved putting the character strengths in a periodic table. For example, if you wanted to work on the virtue of wisdom, the character strengths that you would work on are creativity, curiosity, love of learning, and perspective. If you wanted to work on the virtue of courage, you would work on bravery, perseverance, honesty.

Each of the virtues, you kind of, the strengths roll up into them. We have this beautiful poster that breaks down each of the virtues. There's one, two, three, four, five, six. Six columns of virtues, and underneath them, the different strengths that you would work on if you wanted to aspire to that virtue.

TS: You know, I noticed just hearing the word "virtue," and also for me, the word "character," not quite to the same extent as the word virtue, but I have a feeling in my heart just when I hear those words, a feeling of goodness, and a "yes" about wanting this to be at the center of a conversation. I just want to say that.

TSh: Yes. I love that you said that. You're right. I think even the word "virtue" expresses a yearning. I love this about humans, that we're striving and yearning for something larger, and some greater understanding, and some greater level of evolvment as a person, and as a society. I feel like those words really express that.

We made a new film that premiered at last year's Character Day, called 30,000 Days. If you live the average life expectancy, which is around 82 years, that equals 30,000 days that you're here on this Earth. The film, it's another short film, it's 10 minutes, looks at the 3,000-year history of questions around meaning and purpose. I had a screening last night of the film, and someone said, "Why do you have so many mountain and sky shots in the film?"

I said, "Well, I think with meaning and purpose, and these words, virtue, they are about looking out at vistas, and we're all works-in-progress, and we're constantly changing. Our yearning and striving, and what those things mean to us change, and then the meaning themselves change with time and as you get older." So I felt like that was a great visual to express that kind of yearning for our higher self.

TS: You know, Tiffany, in one of your TED Talks, as you were talking about your life, and some of what's inspired you, you mentioned that there was a nine-month period in

your life that you spent focused on thinking about life and death, that this was an intensive time. Can you share with our listeners a little bit more about that time? What was happening in your life? Also, from thinking about life and death so intensely, what emerged for you in terms of what matters?

TSh: Yes, it was a very profound period. I was incredibly close to my father, who your listeners might know. He was an author. He wrote a book called Art & Physics, and he also wrote a book called The Alphabet Versus the Goddess. He was a great thinker, and he was also a surgeon, and wrote about the brain a lot, and culture, and many things.

He got diagnosed with brain cancer literally the same week I found out I was pregnant. And he was given a diagnosis of nine months to live. As I mentioned, we were so close. We talked about everything, including the meaning of life, a lot. Here I was this ... it was an exact nine-month period. I had a baby growing inside of me. I was losing one of my best friends in the world. Then, he died and my daughter was born within days of each other.

Yes, I thought about life and death all the time, and what are we doing here? What does it mean? It was a real change in my life. That was actually, right after my father died, my husband and I, we have two daughters, we decided to completely turn off all screens one day a week for what we call our "technology Shabbat". It was really after a lot of thinking about life and death, and time, and what are we doing here?

As much as I love technology, and my whole career has been embedded in technology, and the potential of it to bring people together, but I was also really, really worrying about how much time we were spending on screens when we were with people we loved. So it's been the most profound practice I've ever done. We're on our ninth year as a family. Now we have a teenage daughter, and every Friday night, we have Shabbat.

I should tell you, I'm not religious, but I love the traditions and the practices around Judaism, and a lot of the ideas. But every Friday night, we light the candles, we have people over, and all the screens go off for a whole day. That really stemmed from me thinking about life and death, and meaning, and purpose, and time, and what are we spending our attention on? I feel like, as a society, it's really off-kilter on how much time we're spending looking at those screens.

TS: Now, what's interesting to me is, that's a pretty simple act, simple but profound, having a "technology Shabbat". Meaning, you didn't sell all your possessions, and move somewhere.

TSh: Nuh-uh(negative).

TS: It's pretty simple. You decided, "We're going to not be on our screens for a 24-hour period once a week." Yet, you talk about it as such a huge lever of change.

TSh: So huge. You know, that's an instance where now, of course, there's all this research and studies coming out about how bad it is for people to be on social media too much, or technology too much. But that was an instance where I was trusting my intuitive instinct that it wasn't good. Because, you know, it was almost a decade ago. That was right after the iPhone came out, when screens were on all the time suddenly, and you could take them with you wherever you were.

You know, this is not about ... I see a lot of books out right now, you know, "Turn off screens during dinner." Well, yes, of course. Or these kind of detox info, like quick-fixes. I'm really talking much more about a whole lifestyle change. I'm actually working on a book about it because I feel like it's so urgent. I didn't intend to do that when I started it. I was just doing it for my own sense of balance, and for my family, and after coming off this really traumatic period.

But it is a way to coexist with technology. And the weekly-ness, and the whole-day-ness of it is really key. I mean, Shabbat is an incredibly beautiful and powerful ritual. I actually think it's the greatest gift of the Jews, if I really think about what it's saying. No matter what, take one day off, and put your mind in a different space, focus on what matters, be with family and friends, and reset.

We're now living in a culture that's so 24/7, and there's no moments of reflection. We don't have that embedded into our lives anymore. So bringing back this ritual, which is a very old, ancient ritual, and really beautiful, and updating it in these modern times, has been really powerful for my family. Now that I see my teenage daughter, who's lived with it, and she treats technology very differently than I see a lot of other teenagers. Because it's a part of her life that she gets off of it once a week.

TS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Have you ever felt, "OK, today's the day I'm going to cheat because X, Y, Z just launched 24 hours ago, and I'm getting all this feedback. I need to find out what's happening"?

TSh: Yes. Well, you know, there's always like four or five times a year that I am traveling to speak or something, or we're traveling, and we actually have to use devices to get to where we're going. Those are instances where it doesn't happen. You know, there was, I think around the election when I was really frazzled. We're only human. There are moments. But I would say on a whole, if you look at the whole decade, nearly decade of us doing it, I look forward to unplugging.

I feel like I suddenly have this protective layer around me where I'm not letting the outside world influence my every thought and mood, which is the way I think we've all become, is we're so influenced by every buzz notification. Another thing I've done, even for the other six days, and I did this after the election, there's no notifications on my phone. Only for voice mail, which is usually my family. But there's nothing telling me about a news alert, a tweet, a post, a nothing, an email.

I couldn't let that influence how I was existing. It really does carry on for me the other six days. It's this one beautiful ... I mean, what's the one day you want to feel long is Saturday anyways, because it's your day off usually. It's a really reflective day for me. I just love it. I don't know. I'm just very excited about it.

It's a lot about character. We're talking about practices that we know are good for developing who we are. I really gain perspective on those Saturdays. I usually do a lot of journaling then, and I get that perspective that I often don't have when I'm just constantly responding, in response mode all the time.

TS: One of the things, Tiffany, that was surprising to me about The Science of Character was that you talked about encouraging people to go with their character strengths, to focus even more on their strengths. That was surprising because I've been working on my character weaknesses.

TSh: Right.

TS: And here at Sounds True, we talk about it as developing your backhand, focusing on—just using a tennis metaphor—at work with other people, you always have this forehand, like I'm always leading the meeting, or doing this or that. But instead, I'm going to focus more on developing more of my listening skills, and et cetera. Why do you think it's good for people to focus on their strengths? And what about focusing on our weaknesses?

TSh: That's so great. It's so funny you just said that because I just was reading an article by the DIA Institute, which does a lot of work around character strengths, and they call it your signature character strengths, or like, your core ones. The subject header line was, "Should you focus on your signature character strengths?" So the thing, if you're really enthusiastic, or really creative, or really curious, those are your signature ones.

Say the ones you want to work on are patience, or kindness, or whatever they are. The article said, "Which are more important?" And it said, "Both are important, but your signature strengths are a little bit more important." I think it's just a flip of ... it's acknowledging the things you do have going for you, that those are your super powers.

First of all, when you acknowledge that is a great character strength, like enthusiasm. I'm a very ... my mother used to call me Miss Enthusi-usi-usi-asm when I was a kid, so I'm very enthusiastic. I thought, "OK, can I try to bring that enthusiasm ... I have it in my work, but could I try to bring it to my workout?" It's fun. What's interesting to try to do is take a strength and move it into another area into your life.

It's using your super power and spreading it further. Now, that's not to say that's working on something you want to. And for Character Day, when we have this big global day—and we have resources available all year—we show you how you can develop certain practices, tools, books, films, that help you develop strengths you want to. We have a whole website that shows you by strength what is out there.

Those are also important. Like, for me, patience has been one that I have been working on my whole life, because I'm very impatient, which is, I think, is a good quality for getting things done. But as I've gotten older, I've really wanted to cultivate patience. So I really try to sleep more, which really makes you more patient. When you haven't had enough sleep, you're more impatient and edgy. That was a simple way to try to strengthen something that was weak in me.

There's other things. Like my tech Shabbat, that has made me just more reflective and patient. I think they're both important, but I think the big reframe in thinking is, "Don't just focus on what's wrong with you." I think most people do that. They'll hear the one thing that's wrong with them instead of, if somebody gave them like five compliments, or things they loved about them, they'll focus on the negative.

So it's just reframing it to focus on the positive, which is why it's called the Positive Psychology Movement, I think. I don't know what the official reason is, but it's just reframing the whole thing to be more positive. I think about that in terms of the gender equality movement, too. We have another global day we do called 50/50 Day,

and I think in the Women's Movement, often we come from a place of scarcity, talking about "We're not this. We're only this percentage of this."

For 50/50 Day, both the film that I made, and the way we frame everything around the day, is coming from a place of power. We made a 20-minute film about the history of women in power that starts when women were goddesses, which was 10,000 years ago, but we were in a very powerful place in society. We're just getting back to where we rightfully ... a true balance.

I think most of my work, if you saw the through-line, it is about reframing to a more powerful, positive space.

TS: OK, let's talk about being positive as a character strength. That's one of the character strengths, yes?

TSh: I don't think it's an actual strength.

TS: Optimism. Optimism.

TSh: Optimism, right. OK, right. Right, right.

TS: So having an optimistic viewpoint.

TSh: Mmm-hmm(affirmative). Yes.

TS: I noticed that's not a character strength that comes naturally to me. I would love to know how to develop that more.

TSh: Mm. That's a great question. Well, my husband and I joke that we're optimists or skeptimysticists because, while I sound very optimistic, I'm also ... all of my films have a lot of history in them. I like to ground everything in history, which usually makes me a bit more skeptical, but I'm always hopeful. I think the reason is, is that at the core, I believe in humanity.

I was just part of this book that came out called The Good Fight, and it went through every major social issue in America, and it went back 100 years, and looked at where we were 100 hundred years ago, and where we were today. They had me write the chapter on women's rights, so gender equality. On every issue, whether you're gay, black, Jewish, a woman, disabled. We're much better off today than we were 100 years ago.

I think whenever you're feeling really pessimistic about where we are as a society around an issue, it's really good to have the perspective of, "Where were we 100 years ago?" Me being a Jewish woman, as a film director, running a film studio, I'm so grateful I'm alive today, that that's what I'm able to do. That I have a partner that's a participatory parent, and we share parenting.

You know, it's not all perfect, but wow. How much better than 100 years ago. So I think I do get optimism there, and when I look at history, I do feel like we are evolving. Ultimately, I believe in human desire and yearning to be better, and want a better future. That's where ... I think that's universal, and I think that's where I get hope from.

TS: Now, you mentioned that it's a very positive thing to admire character strengths in others. I can admire your skeptioptimism with an emphasis on the optimism, and that's going to help me. Why is this so helpful to admire the character strengths in others that you wish you had?"

TSh: It actually makes them stronger if you tell them. Not only should you recognize your own strengths, but you should verbally recognize the strengths in others. It will actually make the people around you stronger. It is like you are acknowledging and appreciating, and calling out that strength. "I love your curiosity. I love your optimism. I love your social intelligence." Whatever it is, with your partner, or your friends, or your family. It actually will make them feel stronger about that.

It has this ripple effect, and we're all part of an ecosystem. So no one's on an island. The more you can do that, and people around you can do that, the more you're going to strengthen everyone.

TS: Now, Tiffany, you mentioned that you have a new film, and that associated with this film is 50/50 Day, where you're focusing on creating gender parity and equality. This 50/50 Day is April 26, 2018.

TSh: Mm-hmm(affirmative).

TS: Talk a little bit, what happens on 50/50 Day?

TSh: 50/50 Day builds on the model that we built with Character Day, which, as I mentioned, our fourth annual Character Day was last fall, and we had over 130,000 groups sign up to host events. So it's very exciting, the scale of it, the sheer scale of that many groups showing the same film, talking about the importance of meaning and purpose.

We made this film, 50/50, which is a 20-minute film that looks at the 10,000-year history of women in power, and asks, "What is it going to take to get to a more equal and just world?" The film came out two weeks before the election, and then the election happened, and that was pretty hard. I remembered waking up the next day and thinking, "We're going to do a 50/50 Day." Because we have this model now for centralizing a global conversation about an important issue.

So last year, we had the first annual 50/50 Day. It happened in May, and we had everyone show our film 50/50. We made cool posters about all the intersecting issues involved, and discussion kits. We had amazing speakers, everyone from Ava DuVernay to the women presidents of Iceland and Malawi. It was an amazing, amazing array of speakers, and there was 11,000 events. This year, it's April 26. I encourage all your listeners to sign up. It's free.

They get to show the film, 50/50. We have a new film coming out this year called What If? and it asks what would the world look like if both elected officials, and companies, and media truly reflected the population? I'm always trying to say, "What could it look like? Where could we go?" And there'll be amazing speakers, and we already have, I think it's 23,000 groups signed up.

People can have it at their company, at their school, in their conference room at lunch, at their home. But we think there's real value to people around the world, on the same day, talking about the same subject. You can have it any time of day, but you'll be

able to tap into this live stream of amazing speakers, and it's a very exciting day to talk about an issue that, as we know right now, a lot of stuff is coming up around gender equality with the Me Too Movement, and it's a complicated issue, and we want to create a space for men and women.

We don't call it "Women's 50/50 Day." To us, it's an everyone issue. And we create a really exciting framework to have a really meaningful and important conversation. Our films have a lot of humor, and we try to make the issue as accessible and entertaining as possible because there are many parts to it. One of the most exciting things that happened this week is that the superintendent of all California Public Schools just sent an email to every principal who runs a school in California to do a 50/50 Day event, K-12, which is so huge for us because we know all of this should start so young, this kind of reframing and education. So we're really excited about that.

TS: I think that gender parity is an issue that's important to so many people. When you say, "Yes, we're a lot better off when it comes to women's empowerment in the world today than we were 100 years ago," people will say, "Yes. That's true, and we have a long way to go."

TSh: Absolutely. Yes.

TS: When you imagine that long way to go, and how individuals can make a difference in that, what is it that you see in your vision of what if?

TSh: Yes. A couple things, yes. I'm impatient, as I've told you. So yes, we've come a long way, but I'm very impatient for us to get here already. I look to countries like Iceland who made it a law that women are paid equally. I want that. I want that here. That means we need more women running, winning elections, and there's a lot of levels to what you just asked.

But what I guess what I will say is that, for 50/50 Day this year, a big part of it are, we have these action pledges we're asking everyone to make. We're making a really cool tool on the Web that you can ... we let you choose where you're coming in as, as an individual, I run a company, I'm a manager, I'm a stay-at-home mom, wherever you're coming in at. We're going to give you five specific things you can do. Because everyone can make a difference in this issue, from big to small.

If you run a company, you can say, "Yes, I'm going to have 50 percent women on my board." But there's so many smaller things that everyone can do, and we're going to list them out. We're going to have people make pledges, put them on social, and then we're going to follow up with people. So every three months, we're going to provide resources to help people achieve their pledge, and if they get stuck, resources to help them get through that.

Of course, will give us a lot of research on this, too. So yes, I agree with you. We've come ... I think I like to feel like we've come a long way, to feel that momentum at my back to give us the power and strength to take it all the way. I want gender parity, I want women to be paid the same. I want them to be valued the same way. I want equal representation in movies, making movies, on television. I want equal representation in the history books. I want it all.

If you see my film 50/50, you'll know how strongly I feel about it and the way that it

go through a 10,000-year history of this, and I got through each wave of feminism. The wave we're in right now, which is a lot about intersectionality, which is a subject I'm super interested in, which is interdependence and connectedness. All these issues are connected. How can we be aware of them and help move it all forward so we get to where we want to be? Which is a society where everyone is valued for what they contribute, and everyone has equal opportunities.

TS: What do you mean by intersectionality?

TSh: Well, it's a word being used a lot. It was introduced a while ago, but you'll hear it a lot if you're in the women's space. But it's about intersecting issues, the intersection of race, and gender, and all the issues that you really need to ... if you look at our poster, if you go to 50-50day.org, which is where you sign up, you'll see our poster with ... you know I told you about the 24 character strengths?

TS: Yes.

TSh: Well, we have about 24 circles that have to do with what it's going to take to get to gender equality that's better for everyone. A lot of people talk about pay equality, well that's one circle. The Me Too is talking about safety and violence. That's one circle. But if you go on there, we have five columns: economy, politics, identity, culture, and home. Within that there are all these intersecting issues from pay equality, to laws and justice, to political leadership, to media and technology, to safety and violence, to unpaid domestic work, to gender norms, to parenting.

There's so many parts to this. What's really exciting is people got these posters last year and they just keep them up in their coffee room all year round. I have one on my fridge, and it's just good to interface with thinking about the intersectionality of how many issues are connected to this larger issue about gender equality.

TS: How did the idea for the 50/50 Day and film, this being the issue that you wanted to focus on, how did that come to you, Tiffany?

TSh: Well, a couple things. I felt really fortunate, my mom, total feminist. She was writing her PhD when I was growing up on successful women and their female mentors. I grew up with her, then I grew up with a father that wrote about goddess culture and patriarchy, and how women are shifting back in power. I felt, being a woman, that I was incredibly powerful.

Then you go into the real world, and you realize how many women don't feel that way, and aren't treated that way. When I was running the Webby awards, I used to be one of the only women in tech, and I've never found that to be an issue, to be honest with you, but I felt a moral obligation to make space for more women to feel that way.

Then I was speaking at a conference, and I met a woman named Laura Liswood, and we were backstage, and I feel like I know my feminist theory, and I know my history around women's rights and everything. I asked her what she did for a living, and she said, "Well I convene women presidents and prime ministers through the United Nations." I was like, "Wow. That's amazing. How long have you been doing that?" And she said, "Around 20 years." I was like, "Well, how many were there 20 years ago?" thinking there had maybe been, I don't know, maybe a couple, thinking of Indira Gandhi and Thatcher. She said, "Oh, there was 15, 20 years ago." I was like, "Wow. How many are

there today?" Again, thinking that number wasn't that much greater. She said, "Oh, there's been 50." My mouth just fell to the ground. I couldn't believe there had been that many. Then I proceeded to ask every single person I knew that question, and no one came close to the answer.

We're talking about people that ran feminist organizations, CEOs of big companies. No one knew the answer. I thought, "Wow. We've been telling a story of scarcity for so long, maybe we need to retell a story of abundance." That sent me down this path to go 10,000 years ago, and rewrite the true narrative around women in power, and what it's going to take to a more gender-balanced world, so I made that film 50/50. I'd like to tell you now that that number is 70 elected presidents and prime ministers, even though we haven't had one in our country.

That inspired me to make the film, to kind of rethink what we know and what stories we're telling ourselves, and that we need to come from a place of strength more instead of scarcity. Like I said, the film came out a couple weeks before the election, and I was so frustrated with the election, I thought, "I'm going to channel my frustration into doing a global day about gender equality."

TS: What are the total number, if you know it, of presidents and prime ministers worldwide? If we're at 70 now. What's it going to take to get 50/50?

TSh: It's still like 15%. It's not 50/50 by far, but it's a lot more than I thought.

TS: Yes.

TSh: So I mean, no. That's always the good number. You want both. But the fact that no one even knew the first number.

TS: Sure. Sure.

TSh: No one did. I think it is about knowing our history, and a lot of history books don't talk about enough women, right? History books are usually written by men. So it's just rewriting the narrative in a bigger way. I'm very excited about this election. This is not a partisan issue for me. It is an every person issue. There's more women running than ever, and you get more women in office, and more people from underrepresented groups, you're going to get more diverse perspectives, you're going to get better solutions. And you're going to get more laws that support all these ideas about equality, like in Iceland.

TS: You've mentioned a couple of times the importance of looking back at our 10,000-year history, and a previous time when the goddess was worshiped, and where women were respected, and that we're—to use your words—we're coming back to where we were once 10,000 years ago. You know, I know some people don't believe that version of history. They're like, "Really? There was a time like that?"

TSh: Yes. Well, listen. I grew up with a father who wrote a lot about ... his big question was, he traveled all throughout Europe, and what started him writing the book, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*, was how was it that there was goddess cultures all over the world, and then what was the event that kept happening that switched it to patriarchy? What happened all throughout history? First, women were revered, and then it was patriarchy, and all male gods.

What he looked at throughout all of history was whenever literacy was introduced, that seemed to kind of rewire people's minds into sort of a left-brain—he knows that it's much more nuanced than left- and right-brain—but kind of rewiring society to be more patriarchal. Then, with the advent of images that we're seeing with electromagnetism, and with television, and film, and the internet, that women are rising once again.

He wrote a New York Times bestselling book about it called *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*. These are the stories I grew up with, so you could believe or not, but personally, there are definitely relics of goddesses. A lot of cultures, and in Native American cultures, there are still strong women at the advent stories. I personally think, I was raised with all these patriarchal stories. I much prefer thinking about women as goddesses, because I've always felt, like the stories in Judaism, personally, really turned me off because they were so patriarchal. I'm a cultural Jew, but those stories don't speak to me.

TS: One of the things I'm feeling in this conversation, and I want to admire your character strength here, is a character strength of tremendous creativity, Tiffany, that you have. Also, underneath it, the love that I feel for being of service. I would love it if you would talk to someone who feels that love, that desire to be of service, but hasn't figured out these very clever and creative ways that you have, putting together a movement on the internet, and being able to be a filmmaker. But they have this desire to serve our collective evolution in some way.

TSh: Mm. Well, there's a poster we made for the film, *30000 Days*, that I would recommend anyone listening, that's searching right now for their purpose, which is what I think you're talking about. There's a really exciting moment. We have the character strengths poster, which is based on the Positive Psychology Movement, so the 24 character strengths. In this film about finding meaning and purpose, on one part of the screen, we put the character strengths. On the other side of the screen, we put kind of a poster, if you will, of issues, whether it was the environment, or education, or justice, or whatever it is.

We put them so they're almost tilted towards the horizon. What we said is, "If you can match your strengths with the thing you're most passionate about, the issue that gets you most excited, that's how you're going to find your purpose." This visual, if you watch *30,000 Days*, it's right smack in the middle of the movie. It's a very exciting thing to look at. Because if you haven't found it, it's a great thing to meditate on, is to look at the strengths, identify your strengths, look at those issues, identify what you care most about, and figure out how you can make that string between them and link it.

It's really exciting when you see someone have that moment, or figure out how to make work not work, it's their passion, it doesn't feel like work. I feel very fortunate, I really do. I feel so grateful that I love what I do so much that I get excited to get out of bed in the morning, and I want to help people find that. That film was really my attempt... well, actually if it's a building block. The Science of Character is to really try to think about and break down who you are to identify those strengths and what you want to work on.

Then *30,000 Days* is really about, how do you mirror those strengths to issues you care about?

TS: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Beautiful. Now, finally, Tiffany, I want to talk a little bit about the future of technology from your positive lens. We hear so much about the negative ways that technology has turned us into an ADD culture, lowering our IQ, making us crazy. I think a lot of people can appreciate your technology Shabbat. At the same time, you hold, I think, a pretty positive vision of the potential for technology as a tool for our collective evolutions.

TSh: Here's the thing. I really subscribe to Marshall McLuhan's view of technology, that it's an extension of us. It's not this "other thing," it's what we've created. So technology is us, and we are good, bad and everything in between. But if we can continue to strive for our better selves, I ultimately believe that we will wrestle through this and it will be used for good purposes. There'll always be this struggle because that's the human struggle.

I'll tell you this one instance that happened to me recently that really made me just love technology all over again. My family story that we grew up with is that my grandfather's family, he was the only one who escaped out of Odessa, and the rest died in the Holocaust. That was our story. I actually went to the Soviet Union in 1988 to talk about personal computers and looking for parts of my family that I never found.

Then, cut to, my father passed away. This was his father, who I mentioned that was the only one that escaped. We get an email, my brother gets an email from someone in South Africa. I have an unusual last name. It's not common. It's Shlain without a C. We only know our own family of Shlains. Through the internet, through a LinkedIn note, my brother gets an email, "I think we're related."

So to make a very long and beautiful story short, I just got back from South Africa with my sister last week where we went to the 80th birthday of this fabulous new relative named Avroy Shlain. My dad would have been 80 this year. There's this incredible Shlain family we had never met. I'm hearing so many stories of people being connected through 23andMe, and Ancestry.com, that were disconnected through the Holocaust or whatever it was, and now are being reunited.

Also on 23andMe, I recently found out I have .001% Native American. I don't know how that's possible, but I loved knowing that. Every day, there's things that just make me pause and go, "Wow, look at what this tool that we, as humans, have created, is doing." Then on the same side, I'm going, "Look at what just happened with our election. Oh my gosh." We need to talk about it. We need to wrestle with it. We need to figure out practices that make it not overwhelm our lives. We need to do the necessary discussing and thinking about what is this thing that we've created? And how can we use it for good and not for ill?

TS: Well, it's interesting. When you make this comment, I think about it as a part of us. I notice that really changes the conversation, versus looking at the instruments, whether it's our iPhone, or computers, or whatever, as something outside of us. Oh, it's part of us.

TSh: Yes. It's us. Then, you stop ... it's actually much, you have more agency in it. When you say, "Oh, it's technology's doing something to us." It's like you're not responsible... something's doing something to you, versus, this is us. We're creating these tools. It's much more empowering for you to actually go, "Oh, I'm going to turn off my screens one day a week." Of, "This thing

doesn't own me. It's me. I can rise up and create boundaries, and know when it feels good and when it doesn't."

I think it really is, again, reframing to a more powerful place instead of this thing that's taking over us, and you know, my husband is a professor of robotics, and there's a lot of fear. There's all these articles, "Robots are going to take over humans. They're going to get rid of every job." He's the one voice saying, "Actually, no. That's not going to happen. I've been studying robotics for over 35 years. It's going to help amplify what we do, but nothing's going to replace being human."

The qualities, like empathy, and taking initiative, and cross-disciplinary thinking. We made a film together about it, called *The Adaptable Mind*. It was a 10-minute film that was shown for Character Day, which was a lot about that. There's so much fear about robots, which is really kind of an internal fear that we're not going to be needed. Again, if we remember how incredible humans are, and the skills that make us human, machines will never replace that.

TS: Tiffany, what questions are you asking now?

TSh: I was recently asked to think about my vision for the future, and I was thinking a lot about that we need more visions for the future. We need more "what-ifs." We need more showing us what the potential could be. I think we spend a lot of time tearing things down. I think about that. Then I do ask the question, I told you I'm working on a book around the tech Shabbat. I used to be a smoker. It's nothing I'm proud of, but I did it to rebel against my doctor family. I did it in my 20s. At the time that I smoked, everyone smoked.

Right around the time that I quit, it was the first time, at least in California, that the law made it so you couldn't smoke in bars, and that was one of the most fun aspects of smoking, was the social aspect. When I think about it now, you go around America, and hardly anyone smokes. That's a huge, that was a huge behavioral shift. I mean, doctors used to smoke. You could smoke on airplanes, and in movie theaters, and then now, it's really changed. So that does give me hope in terms of the screen use.

I'm comparing the behavioral aspect of it. Of course, technology is something that has great benefits for us. But it's about coexisting in a more healthy way. I do think about that a lot as I'm writing this book about shifting the way we do things, and can we rise up to create practices where we create boundaries around technology?

TS: OK, Tiffany. And for people who want to participate in 50/50 Day, or Character Day later in the year, how do they find out the details?

TSh: You can go to Letitriple.org, which is the name of my film studio in San Francisco, and there's links to both of those. It just takes a couple minutes to sign up, and you're suddenly part of our community where we have these two global days. It's very fun, and I would love for all of your listeners to be a part of it, because the more people that are a part of it, the more powerful it becomes.

TS: Letitriple.org. That's a beautiful name. Thank you so much for your beautiful heart and your great work.

TSh: Oh, thank you for having me, Tami. I love all the people that you talk to, and your

voice in the world. So, thank you so much for having me.

TS: Tiffany Shlain, she is an activist filmmaker. That's my description of her. She's created 50/50 Day coming up on April 26, 2018. Got to letitriple.org for more information.

Soundtrue.com: many voices, one journey. Thanks for listening.