



slack

VARIETY PACK

Episode 9: Wolf Pack

Announcer: You are listening to the Slack Variety Pack, a collection of stories about work, life, and everything in-between. Brought to you by Slack. If you don't know what Slack is, head over to slack.com and change your working life forever.

On this episode, we talk to David six years after 'David After Dentist.'

David DeVore Jr: Is this going to be forever?

Announcer: New York Times illustrator, Christoph Niemann, explains his creative process.

C. Niemann: I looked at it so long, until all of a sudden I saw a horse's behind in there.

Announcer: Science is proving that being a good person is good for you.

Tom Rath: What scientists are finding out is that the more you give and do things for others, that's probably the fastest way to increase your own well-being, even though you're not trying.

Announcer: But first, are you someone who uses the word 'algorithm' without knowing what it means?

Slack Variety Pack? Cool. Okay. Making work less work-y.

Reporter 1: There's a word that gets thrown around a lot these days, by people who don't know actually knows what it means, and that word is algorithm. I'm as guilty as anyone. I say things like, "There's something wrong with Netflix's algorithm. It keeps recommending Adam Sandler movies." Or "Amazon's algorithm must've figured out I have a baby, because they want to sell me a crib mattress."

Here's the thing: I don't know what an algorithm is, and I don't know what it does. I'm no Mark Zuckerberg or Bill Gates or Compaq Presario. I'm just a guy who uses words without knowing what they mean. I wonder if there's a word for that?

I know it's a math thing, and a programming thing, and it's the formula they write on the window in 'The Social Network.'

Jesse Eisenberg: I need you.

Andrew Garfield: I'm here for you.

Jesse Eisenberg: No, I need the algorithm you use to rank chess players.

Andrew Garfield: Are you okay?

Jesse Eisenberg: Yeah.

Reporter 1: But that thing could've been total nonsense. I wouldn't know.

Jesse Eisenberg: I need the algorithm.

Andrew Garfield: All right.

Jesse Eisenberg: I need the algorithm.

Reporter 1: Sure sounds important, though.

I guess the question is, do I, as a big dummy, phony-baloney, have the right to use this word?

Erin McKean: Yes, with two conditions.

Reporter 1: That's Erin McKean. She's the founder of wordnik.com, the world's biggest dictionary.

Erin McKean: I am a lexicographer most of the time. It doesn't turn off.

Reporter 1: What were those two conditions?

Erin McKean: The first condition is that you'd be absolutely, 100% okay with someone pulling a 'Princess Bride' on you, and saying-

Mandy Patinkin: You keep using that word. I don't think it means what you think it means.

Erin McKean: The other one is that you're doing it because you think it's the word that, in your system of language, fits the hole that you need it to fill, and you're not using it simply because it's a longer word than the word you originally thought of, and you wanted to sound smarter.

Every single word in the English language just means the kind of fuzzy set of how everyone uses it, because really, most people don't learn words well from dictionary-style definitions.

Reporter 1: Okay, that's great. I can talk about algorithms without feeling like I'm getting away with murder. I guess we're done here, but, I may live to regret this, suppose I wanted to know the dictionary definition of algorithm?

John Gruber: An algorithm is a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem solving operations, especially by a computer.

Reporter 1: Say hello to John Gruber. He writes about technology and design on daringfireball.net, and he apparently owns a dictionary. I guess that makes him some kind of big authority.

John Gruber: I do have a bachelor's degree in computer science, if somebody wants to see a certificate.

Reporter 1: I'm going to need to him to take that definition and dumb it down for me.

John Gruber: Let's say that you want to create a .zip file that is compressed mathematically.

Reporter 1: Dumber.

John Gruber: Think about this: Solving a Rubik's cube.

Reporter 1: Dumber.

John Gruber: How do you make scrambled eggs?

Reporter 1: Yeah, that's better.

John Gruber: You start with three eggs, you crack them open, you whip them in a bowl, you put a piece of butter in a pan on low heat, salt, pepper, you pour the eggs in, mix them around, then you stop. That's an algorithm. You start with these raw eggs and butter, and you end with a meal.

It's not that different than I think the layperson's understanding would be. It's a bunch of tedious rules, step-by-step.

Reporter 1: I think I get it, and it works the same for something like Facebook. They start with all this information I've given them, they input it into their top secret formula, which is presumably written on a window in an underground bunker, it follows a bunch of rules, and outputs a bunch of pictures of my high school classmates' babies, but I guess I have one more question.

Is there a word for a person who uses words without knowing what they mean?

Erin McKean: Oh, yeah. A writer or speaker who uses language pretentiously is a word monger, so, hey, we've got at least one. The general term for improper use of words is catachresis, so you could possibly say, someone who habitually misuses words is a catachresist.

Reporter 1: All right, I'm a catachresist, but I'm not going to go around bragging about it.

Announcer: Slack. It just works.

Channel Change: Creativity Channel.

C. Niemann: Hello, my name is Christoph Niemann. I'm an illustrator, and author, and artist. I draw, and write, and animate for the New York Times, for the New Yorker. I do books, and kid's apps.

Announcer: You may not know Christoph Niemann by name, but chances are you've seen his work. Your kids may have even played with the whimsical animals on his iOS app, Petting Zoo. In fact, much of Christoph's work is playful and humorous. He looks at the world by tilting his head, and the illustrated results are not just fun, they capture a simple elegance and joy of everyday things and experiences.

We talked to him on a busy New York street, and he shares his wisdom on something he calls creative pain.

C. Niemann: Creative pain, this is your constant companion, and I think what it is that, of course, the idea of creation means you're doing something that isn't there yet. You base it on your experience and on your routine, but ultimately, you have to create something out of thin air, more or less. That is always scary and daunting, and the more you rely on things you already know, the more boring the outcome. The more you can free yourself from your past experiences, the greater the chances that it's going to be something great, but it's a very scary process, and in these moments, there's a lot of failure, a lot of frustration, because a lot of things just don't work out. That's never fun.

Announcer: When it comes to the notion of failure, Christoph doesn't believe in sugarcoating.

C. Niemann: There's all this talk with failure's important and failure's good. Failure stinks. It's great when you then end up having that good idea at the end, but more often than not, you don't come up with a good idea. You come up with something second grade, and a failure is not necessarily an important step to go towards that. It's just failure.

Announcer: Besides his magazine cover illustrations, Christoph also does long-form storytelling through images and words, like his blog for the New York Times magazine called Abstract Sunday. There, he presents pictorial essays about modern society, politics, and culture using everyday objects, like candy or Lego, as the creative impetus for his drawings.

C. Niemann: The process for my Abstract Sunday sketching piece is to take an object, to look at it without any preconceived ideas. I'm not saying I'm going to do a brain, so I'm looking for broccoli, because I think that's going to look like it, but taking a piece of broccoli, and staring at it from such an odd angle until you actually see something in it that's not imaginable from the get go.

I did one thing with a tangerine. It was right after the holidays, and I was sitting there, I have to come up with something. I was staring at that thing, and all it is is big and orange or bloated, and it felt like, actually, I've eaten far too much

food. I looked at it, and made this guy sitting on a chair with his belly sticking out. Like breaking out of his pants with his belt open, being obviously exhausted from having had too many celebratory dinners.

I did another thing where I had this pair of bananas, and of course there are so many obvious things you can do with a banana, whether it's a moon or a smile or something, and I looked at it so long, until all of a sudden, I saw a horse's behind in there. It was, again, a very complicated drawing to make that worked. It's a very odd angle in these two bananas, but I guess it worked.

Announcer: One last piece of advice: How to be your most productive self.

C. Niemann: In my experience, the best thing you can do is having sustainable, five days a week, eight hour work day. If you manage to get six hours in one day of concentrated, real thinking, editing, drawing, coding ... Six hours for five days. This, I think, is more productive than 99.9% of all people. Not the emailing, not the checking Twitter or if you have any likes, but real, quality six hours. That's the best you can possibly hope for, and I think that only works if you're really trying to be steady about it, and being very alert of when you're having a good moment.

Announcer: Check out Abstract Sundays' Instagram page, or for his fuller portfolio, follow christophniemann on Tumblr.

Have a great story? Know someone who inspires you? Tweet us @SlackHQ and we'll tell your story on the Variety Pack.

Channel Change: YouTube Channel.

We hit the streets to ask people what their favorite YouTube videos are.

Man 1: Honestly, I'm a sucker for anything that involves a cute, young child doing something funny.

Charlie's bro: Charlie bit me.

Woman 1: The Myna bird speaking about different animal sounds, this woman who loves this Myna bird.

Bird: I'm a turkey talker.

Woman 1: I thought you said you were a duck.

Bird: I'm a little duck.

Man 2: Guilty dog is all these dogs that get caught, and get busted getting into the trash, or eating the kitty treats, and then you get to see how the dog's react. Guilty dog is very cute.

Denver's owner: Denver, you won't look at me. Did you do this?

Man 3: I'd have to say, one with a baby who's laughing, and then his mom sneezes and he freaks out, and then he goes right back to laughing, and she sneezes again, and he freaks out. It's really funny.

Baby: (Laughing)

Announcer: All these videos have a few things in common. They're all real life, gave us genuine laughs, and they all went viral.

We wanted to know what happen when ordinary people's lives get turned upside down, because they happen to capture a spontaneous moment and post that moment on YouTube, so we tracked down the people behind one of the all time classic viral videos.

David DeVore Jr: Is this real life?

David DeVore Sr: Yeah, this is real life.

David DeVore Jr: Only now I have two fingers.

My name is David DeVore, and I am David After Dentist. I'm 14, and I'm going into 9th grade.

David DeVore Sr: My name is David DeVore, and I'm the dad that videotaped David After Dentist.

Announcer: David After Dentist is one of YouTube's great hits, and one of the earliest examples of an internet video that went viral. With over 130,000,000 views, and counting, since 2009, it's not only a classic, it's timeless. You can watch it now, and still laugh out loud.

After six years, we were curious to know what was happening with the DeVore's, and what life as a viral sensation has been like, but first, let's find out how that video came to be.

David DeVore Sr: I actually recorded it in 2008, and that's when David was seven. I had just gotten a flip cam. I had always been the work from home dad, and take the kids to the doctor, dentist. When he came out, I had to guide him to the car. I got him strapped in, and made sure he was okay, and videotaped him reacting to the anesthesia.

I started sharing it with family and friends, and social media started to pick up. I uploaded it to YouTube, so I could get that link. I remember it distinctly, because it was Super Bowl weekend, uploaded it on a Friday, and forgot about it. Then Sunday, after the Super Bowl, looked at it, and we were shocked to see there was 10,000 views on it, and we were like, what is going on?

I had kind of known about viral videos and that was starting to become a buzz word. I was like, wow, maybe that's what this is happening, and then it was confirmed, because the next Wednesday or Thursday, we had three or four million views.

Announcer: Once a video goes viral, it takes on a life of its own, and suddenly you have all this attention you've never had before.

David DeVore Sr: In the course of the conversation, reading the comments, and talking to different people, that people loved David, and they loved the reaction they had. They thought it was funny, and they thought he was great. Maybe they had some problems with me posting it or whatever, but there was never anything directed at David, and we were fine with that.

David DeVore Jr: I watched the video a lot. I thought it was really funny, but I didn't know it was going to be as big of a deal as it is now. It's kind of weird, because you never expected to get famous off of a YouTube video.

Announcer: Viral video stardom does come with its perks.

David DeVore Jr: I got to go places, like New York and Brazil and LA. I wouldn't have gone to all those places, if the video hadn't happened.

David DeVore Sr: We went to MIT in Boston for a convention, called ROFLcon, which was a gathering of internet celebrities.

David DeVore Jr: Basically, everybody knows me there, but it's fun to go to those. The times that I've gone, at first, they don't really know, because I was just some little kid who walks in, and they don't think anything of it, just that you're coming to watch. When they find out that you are, then they're really nice to you and they treat you a lot different than everybody else.

Announcer: Despite the fans, the DeVore's don't let the whole thing take over their lives.

David DeVore Sr: We go out or open the front door and we just hear crickets, which we're perfectly fine with. For us, it's two separate things. We have our life, and David's school, and sports, and friends, and then we have this thing over there that's really cool, it's like a room that we go into. Somebody would like to talk to us about it, or an event we have to go to. For us, it's very separate.

Announcer: David Sr believes there was one key ingredient in the video that sent it over the top.

David DeVore Sr: If the scream wasn't in there, I don't think it would be half as popular as it is.

Stay in your seat.

David DeVore Jr: (Screams)

Announcer: As a senior in the viral video community, at the respectable age of 14, David Jr knows a thing or two about what works. Here's his advice.

David DeVore Jr: I tell them to do whatever they think they should do, but then keep it real, not make up stuff. Even though sometimes that works, most of the time it's real stuff that actually happened. Also, ours was an accident. That's why I keep it real. That's all we can say.

Why's this happening to me?

David DeVore Sr: It's okay, bud. It's just from the medicine. Okay?

David DeVore Jr: Is this going to be forever?

David DeVore Sr: No, it won't be forever.

Announcer: Slack: Your team's collective brain.

Here's a familiar situation: You've just watched a great video, and you're about to hit the share button. Before you do, you may want to consider these helpful tips.

Reporter 2: We all love viral videos, and we love to share them while at work. It can be tricky, though, to figure out which videos are worth spreading around, but the good news is, your workplace has adopted the system we call SHARE. S-H-A-R-E. A new set of video-sharing procedures to help you decide which videos are worth sharing with your coworkers.

The first step, S: Size it up. When considering the video you're going to share, make sure you watch it all the way through. You don't want to saddle your coworkers with a nine minute video of a family lip syncing in a car.

H: History. If you're watching a video that already has 45,000,000 views, you're not the first to share it. Be sure to preface that share with the word 'Classic.' If the video only has 301 views, congratulations. You've hitched your wagon to a future classic.

A: Audience. Know your audience. Remember, the videos you share with Aunt Cathy on Facebook aren't the ones you're going to share with your nasty boys on LinkedIn, which leads us to our next letter.

R: Reaction. Before you share, you better know what reaction you're trying to get. Do you want to inspire your coworkers? Make them cry? LOL? Or perhaps you want to make yourself seem like an intellectual powerhouse, like Ted, from the TED Talks.

E: Execution. You've considered all the factors, and it looks like you're actually going to go through with this. Before you share, remember, believe in yourself. You've put in the work, so go ahead. Caption that video with, 'The best thing you'll see all day.'

Congratulations. Using the SHARE system, you've gone from eye-roll to viral in five easy steps. Now it's time to swim in a sea of thumbs up and soar through a galaxy of fave stars, all thanks to the SHARE system.

Announcer: Pro-tip about SHARE. It's not just for video. Share this audio story with friends. Go to soundcloud.com/slackvarietypack.

Channel Change: Big Picture Channel.

Reporter 3: Tom Rath is a pretty remarkable guy. To start with, he's dealt with an unimaginable medical condition for over half his life.

Tom Rath: A lot of my work started with, and has been rooted in, a real rare genetic condition that I was diagnosed with when I was about 16 that essentially shuts off the body's most powerful tumor suppressor, and leads to uncontrolled cancerous growth over whatever lifetime that might be.

I currently do have kidney cancer and pancreatic cancer, and cancer in my spine, but having that pressure of knowing that my time's pretty limited, which, in reality, all of our time is somewhat limited, has served to focus my work on what are all the things that I can contribute to today that will live on long after I'm gone?

Reporter 3: Despite all this, Tom has already contributed a lot. He's a senior scientist and advisor at the renowned research and consulting firm, Gallop, where he specializes in employee engagement and well-being. His unique expertise has helped him sell over 6,000,000 copies of his six, New York Times bestselling books.

His book, StrengthsFinder 2.0 was the bestselling book of 2013, and 2014 worldwide on Amazon. His new book, Are You Fully Charged?, is about how to bring your best to work and life every single day. The first lesson is to make your health a priority.

Tom Rath: As I get more into the data on how we can ensure we have enough energy, just to be effective in our jobs and lives as spouses and parents and so-forth, I do think we have a lot of this backwards.

Reporter 3: His research shows that almost all of us need to do a better job of eating healthy foods that give us energy, building movement and activity into our days, and getting seven to eight hours of sleep every night.

Tom Rath: Even if you want to put everyone else's needs first, you need to have a full amount of energy and to be charged on a day-to-day basis. You need to put your own health first, even if it feels selfish to you.

Reporter 3: Once you take care of your health, your best route to well-being is actually to focus on contributing to others, and finding purpose in your work.

Tom Rath: What scientists are finding out is that the more you give and do things for others, that's probably the fastest way to increase your own well-being, even though you're not trying. Whereas people who constantly focus inward and say, "How can I pursue happiness for myself or make myself happier today," whether that's taking time off work or buying material goods, if you're focusing inward, that's a really good way to, potentially, take yourself downhill even more.

The first driver of daily well-being is doing a little bit of meaningful work. If I'm working in a call center, and someone calls in who's irate about what's going on with their service, and I simply get them back to a neutral point, where they don't go spread toxic emotions with their family members, and I don't take it and spread it to my colleagues, that is a small and meaningful win.

Just 20% of people said they did a lot of meaningful work yesterday, which is strikingly low to me. My hunch is that a majority of us are doing meaningful work on a day-to-day basis, we just need to figure out how do you connect those dots?

Reporter 3: Connecting the dots to find meaningfulness at work is easier than you think. Focus on the people your work is helping.

Tom Rath: Even radiologists, who'd think if you're reading scans of people that have cancer, you'd see some meaning in your work on a daily basis, but when researchers appended a photo of the patient to the radiographic record and scan, it increased their diagnostic accuracy versus a control group by 46%.

I think the most practical thing I've seen from a work standpoint is to start to draw some direct connections between point A, which is your effort, and point B, which is the influence it has on another human being. You need to see that everyday.

Reporter 3: To be able to contribute meaningfully, Tom's data suggests you should double down on what you're already good at.

Tom Rath: When you're considering a new job, or trying to figure out where in this world can you have the most influence, you got to start with the needs of the world, and then you need to align that with your natural talents, the things you naturally do better and faster than other people, and then what you're interested in also matters a lot. As you get into the moment by moment, what are you doing today, that's where you have to be able to see those small wins on a daily basis, even if you're in the right job, to ensure that it's sustainable and making a difference.

Reporter 3: To make a difference though, you need time to do the meaningful work. Tom says, "We need to learn to say, 'no,' much more often."

Tom Rath: What percent of your day and time are you spending simply responding to things coming at you versus initiating something new that might make a difference for someone? The things that you say 'no' to might end up being a lot more important, because they give you the time you need to double down, triple down, on your natural talents, and do some substantive things that make a contribution over time, things that give you energy, make a difference for others, and your community or your friends.

Reporter 3: Here's a recap of Tom's best advice, and a recipe for a great day everyday.

Start your day moving and get some exercise. Eat healthy foods that give you energy throughout the day. Focus your day on making a difference for others and creating meaning with your work. Turn off your phone and email for chunks of the day and create time to do what matters, and get eight hours of sleep, so you're ready to go again tomorrow.

If you do all these things, you're going to have more energy, you're going to feel better, and you'll be making the world around you a better place.

Tom Rath: It doesn't require some big, grand change or scale. It all starts with these small, little choices about the things you do to improve your physical health today. It starts with the choice to initiate a conversation with a loved one or a colleague to boost their day a little bit, and it starts by chipping away at a little bit of meaningful work each day.

Announcer: Channel Change: Dad Joke Channel.

You see them parked around the city. That fabulous alternative to lunchtime eats for every office worker: The food truck.

Do the names of your favorite food trucks stand out to you at all? There's one guy who always notices their names. Or rather, the names that they should be.

He sees the world through the lens of that groan-inducing dad joke, the pun, and celebrates the beautiful marriage that is food truck and pun name.

Let's take a moment to appreciate how pun-derful these food truck names are.

The Feast and the Furious. Pancakes One to Know One.

Mark Christian: My name is Mark Christian. I work on the web app team at Slack.

I came up with my first food truck pun by accident. I was watching Terminator II, and Arnold says, of course, "Hasta la vista, baby," and I'm like, "Boy, Pasta la vista, baby, would be a really good food truck name."

Arnold Schw.: Hasta la vista, baby.

Mark Christian: And then it snowballed onward. I started seeing puns everywhere. They come to me at the weirdest times.

Last week, I was walking along the waterfront in San Francisco, and I saw an ad for fresh Dungeness crab, and I was like, "Ah, Dungeness Liaisons," that would be a really classy food truck name.

Announcer: License to Grill. Kale Caesar. The Crepes of Wrath.

Mark Christian: I think pun-like names work for some places, but you probably don't want your dentist to have a pun. Funeral homes, probably not a great pun-growth business. It depends on whether the concept is inherently absurd. That's what makes a good pun is the absurdity of the situation, and getting pretty good food out of the back of a gross diesel truck is, inherently, a ridiculous situation.

Announcer: Faster, Pussycat! Grill! Grill! Stew-pendous! All stews, no soups. Marco Pollo.

Mark Christian: Puns are derided as being the lowest form of humor. I don't know why people call puns dad jokes. My dad has never made a pun in his life. Also, I am not a dad. It makes me a little bit sad when people say that they don't like puns. I think that just means they don't get it or they don't see why anyone would ever find it funny. Love the puns.

Announcer: Won Ton Destruction. Get Quicked Or Die Trying. No Scone Unturned. Tofu Think You Can Dance.

Mark Christian: I think puns use your brain in a creative way. They let you look at the world from two angles. You see what the person's actually saying, the you see also, oh it's funny, because it rhymes with this 80's movie that nobody's ever heard of, and I like that. I like the duality. It's deep thoughts on food trucks.

Announcer: What About Kabab? The Peas Corps, slogan: Give peas a chance. Entrée the Giant. I Pita the Fool.

Mark Christian: No food trucks, as far as I know, have used any of my suggestions, but I would be honored if they ever did.

Announcer: The Nonstop Naan-stop. That would be a 24/7 Indian food place.

Follow @shiny pb on twitter for more food truck pun names.

You've been listening to Episode 9 of the Slack Variety Pack.

Next episode: Meet the man on a mission to get rid of your boss.

Man 4: Look at the world around us, we live in neighborhoods where there's no boss neighbor telling the other neighbors what to do.

Announcer: What are your coworkers most annoying habits?

Man 5: Am I on speakerphone? Classic.

Announcer: High tech in farmer's fields.

Man 6: Drought? What is a drought? It's crazy.

Announcer: The details: One of the best things about the Slack Variety Pack? Each story is shareable. Go to soundcloud.com/slacksingleservings, and share with friends. To share the whole episode, go to soundcloud.com/slackvarietypack.

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