



slack

VARIETY PACK

Episode 22: Flip Pack

Intro/Break/Out: You are listening to the Slack Variety Pack, brought to you by Slack. All kinds of teams use Slack to do amazing things.

Host: Welcome to the Slack Variety Pack. We're really excited about this episode. Why? Renowned scholar, New York Times best selling author, public speaker, the legendary Brene Brown joins us for an extended interview. We talk to her about improving our teams by changing the way we think. Also in this episode, learn how to manage your time with tomatoes, and we talk with a team of four who beat out over two thousand job applicants to work in one of the remote offices on Earth. But first, part one of our conversation with Brene Brown.

Intro/Break/Out: Channel change, Brene Brown Channel.

Host: Doctor Brene Brown is a professor at the University of Houston who researches vulnerability, shame, and courage. She has one of the most popular TED Talks of all time, with over twenty-five million views, and she's written three New York Times best-sellers, including her latest, *Rising Strong*.

You know that voice in your head? Yeah, that one. The one that talks to you all day long. That chattery voice comes up for explanations for why your co-worker is grumpy, why your meeting got cancelled, or why your boss wants to meet with you. None of these explanations is actually based on facts. Rene explains how it's time to take control of that voice.

Before we dive in, there's a bit of salty language sprinkled into this podcast. So for those of you sensitive to that or listening with kids, you have been warned.

Reporter 1: So this is a story about the power of stories, and it's told by a world-class storyteller, but it's not about telling stories to other people. It's about the stories that we tell to ourselves, and we're going to start this story with the stories that Rene Brown and I are telling ourselves about the interview we're doing for this podcast. After, we're going to explain why we're doing this and how, I'm not exaggerating, it might just be a way to change your whole team, and your life in pretty remarkable ways.

So can I start by telling you the story that I'm telling myself about this interview?

Brene Brown: Sure.

Reporter 1: This is what's going on in my head right now. I can't believe I'm actually going to do this to start the interview. What if she hates this idea, or what if everybody does this when they talk to Brene? Now back to my actual conversation with Brene.

Okay, I'm really excited to be talking with you. I'd be lying if I didn't admit I feel a bit of pressure to impress you a bit. Everyone who found out I was talking to you was blown away and was like, "No way, you're interviewing Brene Brown? That's amazing!" You had one of the most popular TED Talks of all time, you're a best-

selling author, you're doing specials with Oprah, and this interview is for a podcast that you very kindly agreed to do, but you're probably not all that excited about, at least that's what I'm kind of telling myself.

Basically, for you, for my colleagues, for Slack, and everybody listening I will be really ashamed if I don't do a great job of this and do something kind of unique and memorable with you. So that's the story I'm telling myself, and I'm curious how that makes you feel?

Brene Brown: Okay, so first of all I think it's really brave, and you better not edit this out, because it is exactly what my work is about and I could never explain my work more profoundly than what you just did. I have to tell you this story I'm making up right now. I'm actually very nervous about this call, and excited about it because I am actually and have been for a long time a huge Slack fan. The story I make up is be cool Rene, don't sound like you just fell off the back of a truck at a rodeo. These are like the techy people. Get your south by south-west on. That's the kind of story that I make up.

I am excited about the podcast and I have to say that, and this is not a plug because you'll learn very quickly I'm kind of a nobleship person. Slack has completely changed my life, and the way that we work, and has helped so much in not just productivity but in communication and connecting. I was a little bit nervous about talking to you today to be honest with you.

Reporter 1: That's pretty nice to hear that from you at the start of a conversation.

This might actually be the best start to an interview I've ever had, and I'm pretty sure it's because both of us shared the stories we were telling ourselves.

Brene Brown: That whole idea of the story I'm telling myself, it really has revolutionized the way we work. It's revolutionized my marriage. My sixteen-year-old daughter and I both use it all the time, sometimes in really tough moments. I think the reason why it works, to be honest with you, I don't think there's any magic behind it. I think it's just honest and vulnerable.

Reporter 1: It is honest and it is vulnerable, but there's more to it than that. It's all about taking back control over those inaccurate stories we tell to ourselves all the time. As it turns out, our brain loves stories, but it's better at fiction than fact.

Brene Brown: Here's the bottom line. When something difficult happens, a crappy look from a colleague, a conflict at work which we just went through this yesterday, actually on my team. The way we are biologically wired is that emotion gets the first crack at understanding what's happening. Our brain recognizes the narrative pattern of beginning, middle, and end. We are literally hard-wired for story. When something hard happens, our brain looks for a story to make sense of what's happening. If we give our brain a story, it rewards us chemically. You know that feeling you get when something hard's happening and you're like, "Oh, yeah. I know what's going on"?

You almost feel like this wash of calm. That's a chemical reward.

The tricky part is that our brain rewards us regardless of the accuracy of the story. I'll give you an example. You and I come out of a meeting together, right? I look at you and I go, "Hey, great meeting, thanks," and you look at me and you roll your eyes and shrug your shoulders and walk into your office. Now everyone listening, who's got a beating heart, has to acknowledge at some point that if you had that interaction with someone, you're going to have some emotion come up around it like confusion, pissed off, questioning, worrying, whatever it is. You going to get steered by emotion.

The story I'd be telling myself is I pissed him off in the meeting, I said something he didn't think was smart or good, he didn't like the way I made the proposal about the new project, like I did something wrong. That's going to be my go-to, because that's my go-to.

I call that story the 'Shitty First Draft', based on a quote from writer Anne Lamott who says, "All great writers start with a shitty first draft." That story is really dangerous because what happens is we start acting and behaving and thinking off of that story.

The default would probably be you pick up the phone and say, "Chad, what's up with Steve? He was like a total jerk to me walking out of that meeting today. Do you know if something's going on?" Then you start this office gossip crap that is so detrimental to culture, right, or I could say, "Okay, what's going on?" I could go to your door, knock on your door, "Hey Steve. Do you have a second? We were walking out of the meeting today, and I said, 'Great meeting. Have a good day,' and you kind of rolled your eyes at me or you just kind of shrugged your shoulders. The story I'm making up is something is going on between us."

You look at me and you say ...

Reporter 1: "I'm so sorry you thought that. That's actually not accurate at all. I'm just training for a triathlon right now and my hip is killing me. I thought if we had to sit there for another five minutes I was going to die."

Brene Brown: Then I'm leaving your office and there is a ninety-five percent chance that you would respect me more for having come and made things clear and clean with you that had I been calling people we work with to see what's wrong with you.

Reporter 1: So I've tried this. I have paid attention to the explanations my brain has conjured up. I've asked myself, "What are the actual facts, and what is my brain just filling in?" Then I've started difficult conversations with the words, "This is the story I'm telling myself with my co-workers, my wife, and my kids," and almost every single time, the story I was telling myself wasn't actually true.

Brene Brown: You have no idea the difference it's made not only in my personal life, but on my

teams. It's a vulnerable way to say, "Here's what I'm making up about what's happening. Here's what I'm telling myself. Can we check in?"

You know, one of the things I'm really cautious about as a researcher is hyperbole. When I say like the story I'm making myself has changed my life, it's really changed my life.

Host: That's part one of our conversation with Brene Brown. Stay tuned for part two later in this episode. We find out how to make the shift from acknowledging the fictional stories we're telling ourselves, to becoming the conscious authors of our own endings. Plus, we've got some bonus Brene material at the end of the podcast that you can actually incorporate into your own Slack experience.

Intro/Break/Out: Channel change. Due South channel.

Host: When some people apply for a job, they're hoping for office perks like standing desks, fully stocked kitchens, or weekly in-office yoga classes. For these people, their work perks include cramped living quarters, little privacy, and smelly neighbors. They wouldn't have it any other way.

Adele Jackson: My name is Adele Jackson.

Rachel Morris: My name is Rachel Morris.

Host: Adele and Rachel are postal workers, but their postal root is far from ordinary. Their office is located on an island about the size of a soccer field and it's surrounded by glaciers. They work at Port Lockroy in Antarctica at the bottom of the world. We reached them by a sometimes spotty satellite phone. Here's Adele.

Adele Jackson: I said, "Glaciers boom as they crack and fall into the sea." It's like a muffled boom. It's almost like an explosion far away. I do feel a long, long way away from normal life and that feels kind of nice, to be honest. If I think about busy traffic and busy streets and telephones ringing and emails and the internet, it's quite nice to be at a different pace of life.

Host: The United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust runs Port Lockroy which was a British military and research base during world war two. That's who Adele and Rachel work for, along with their colleagues, Ian and Lora.

Besides their postal duties, the team maintains Port Lockroy's historic buildings and manages the living museum, as well as the gift shop. That's right. The port at the bottom of the world has a gift shop.

Rachel Morris: We usually send seventy thousand post cards during the season because it is a unique thing to be able to send a post card from the most lovely post office in the world.

Host: Even though the team works thousands of miles away from home, they're not exactly lonely. Port Lockroy is the most popular tourist destination in Antarctica. The team of four hosts two cruise ships everyday.

Adele, Rachel, Ian, and Lora went through a rigorous application process in order to secure their jobs. They beat out over two thousand other applicants. Each team member brings a unique set of skills to Port Lockroy: Adele is a photographer, Rachel is museum coordinator, Ian an archaeologist, and Lora is a geographer.

Adele Jackson: I think the thing of [inaudible 00:13:38] is everyone's different and there needs to be a recognition of that within a team and an appreciation of that to be able to make the most of what everybody brings to a team.

Host: The team is together during the summer months when temperatures are tolerable.

Adele Jackson: The only thing I was really worried about was having cold feet, literally cold feet, and I have cold feet from time to time, but it's absolutely bearable.

Host: In their downtime, they're usually hanging out. They share a common eating area, and they sleep in the same room.

Rachel Morris: We are together all of the time. That is challenging because very much live or work here and there isn't always separation between us in our free time and work.

Host: There is no television, no internet. They have to get inventive with their leisure time.

Adele Jackson: One of the favorite things that we like to do is when the sea is really calm, we like to go and see the rocks with our binoculars and maybe a gin and tonic with some glacier ice in there and we look out for whales in the distance swimming in the bay.

Host: They do have neighbors relatively close by. International research bases are scattered throughout the continent.

Rachel Morris: The closest research base to us is a Chilean station called the Arturo base. I believe they are about five miles away on the next island. They have come to visit us three times now, including one day when they came up on Christmas Day with some presents for us which was really nice.

Host: But the research bases aren't their only neighbors. Their closest companions are penguins, and they're everywhere.

Rachel Morris: Now my life very much revolves around penguins. As you can imagine there's a lot of guano on the island, so I think we all smell of penguin ourselves. They probably think we're one of them.

Adele Jackson: We have the penguins, and they call at night and it sounds a little bit like a donkey

and a little bit like a cat purring, somewhere between the two.

Host: It takes a special group of people like this team to make Port Lockroy work. Not everyone is built to handle the distance, the close quarters, the smell of rutting penguins, but for this group, they wouldn't have it any other way. Like the best teams, they have each others' back when they need it.

Adele Jackson: We had a situation at the early part of the season where we had a lot of ice in the bay and the ships couldn't reach it so we didn't have access from fresh water from the ships. We had to go down to the shoreline and collect some of the glacier ice that flowed in and then chip away at that with an ice axe, put it into buckets, bring it back to the [inaudible 00:16:45], and then that melted down so that we had some fresh water. It seems like that you've realized that you are living in a remote and wild place.

Host: Slack, helping teams work, better.

Intro/Break/Out: Channel change. Productivity channel.

Host: We're always looking for ways to be more effective at work. We conducted two different productivity experiments. One involves coffee, the other an egg timer. Do you wake up in the morning and instantly reach for your first cup of Joe? How else are you going to start your day, right? Well guess what? Turns out, if you really want to wake up, a cup of coffee first thing in the morning is the worst possible time to drink it. Why?

Well here's the deal. Cortisol is a hormone in our bodies that's in charge of getting us up in the morning. When we wake up, our body tells cortisol to get in there and do its job, but when we caffeinate to wake up during peak cortisol working hours, which is between eight and nine AM, the caffeine and the cortisol totally negate each other. The result, you're not using that cup of java to its full effect.

Science says that to really get that caffeine perk, we should be drinking our coffee later in the morning, not when we wake up. There are actually two zones of caffeine effectiveness. Mid-morning is one of them, but have another cup of coffee in the mid-afternoon and keep that buzz going for the rest of the day.

Stephanie Brown: I did try this. I restricted all my drinking to the hours of 10 to noon and 2 to 5.

Host: Stephanie Brown is the type of person who drinks coffee all day long. She's a high school teacher and she has a plan for her coffee intake.

Stephanie Brown: I made a chart on my wall with these hours written large and people thought I just had really long coffee breaks but I rewarded myself between those hours and I swear to you making this one change I had far more energy in my day.

Host: This brings us to our second productivity experiment, and it involves one simple

kitchen tool, the egg timer. We may not be as obsessive as Stephanie with her coffee drinking schedule, but this work-focused technique might convince you to plan your work in twenty-five minute chunks.

Reporter 2: That sound means my twenty-five minutes are up. Now, I break for exactly five minutes, set the timer again, and work without distraction for another twenty-five minutes, or another 'Pomodoro' as we call it. Pomodoro is a way too simple for this age method of time management, so simple the technology is pretty much your grandma's tomato-shaped kitchen timer, a Pomodoro, which is Italian for 'tomato', named by it's founder Francesco Cirillo, a software designer near Rome.

So here's how it works. You pick a task, and then you chip away at it for an uninterrupted, intensely focused twenty-five minutes. The timer goes off, and you mark an 'X' on your sheet for one completed Pomodoro. Then take five minutes to reflect or go for a walk or a coffee and then start over. After four Pomodoros in a row, you need to take a longer fifteen minute break.

Scott Muc: Let's just do a Pomodoro right now. Let's make this interview a Pomodoro.

Reporter 2: So I have you for twenty-five minutes and then I lose you forever?

Scott Muc: Exactly.

Reporter 2: That's Scott Muc, a software developer based in Germany and a serious Pomodoro user. I called him for a bit of motivation before my experimental week of twenty-five minute work bursts.

Scott Muc: I've used Pomodoro almost as like a procrastination prevention technique as well where you look at a large task and you're like, "Ugh, I don't want to even get started. I might just watch another episode of some show which is like the [inaudible 00:21:33] of Pomodoro, but when you just say it's like, "Oh man, if I just do this for twenty-five minutes, I'll continue the rest of that task later on." It's a very simple technique, but it touches on very deep insights on how our brains work and I think that's one of the things that's so fascinating about it, is how you can trick your own brain and how to behave.

Reporter 2: And I'm going to try to trick my brain, for one whole week. Monday, I don't like this. The ticking timer is like a bomb on my desk I need to diffuse and it's really stressing me out. I'll tell you why I decided to try Pomodoro. When it comes to procrastination, I am a viking. Just ask my producer, I kind of drive her a bit bananas.

Tuesday, the thing I really like about the Pomodoro method is that when you feel temptation to quit or a distraction coming on, you mark it down. You acknowledge it and get right back to work. Let's just say today, my page is covered in marks.

We do live in an unprecedented age of distraction: Facebook, click bait, phone

pings. They all pull us. They all tempt us. Distractions aren't just digital. The mind naturally races: bills to pay, weekend plans. Today I stewed about something that happened two years ago. What the hell?

Wednesday, I'm trying an online timer, and I think I'm getting a lot more done. I'm not taking work home to do later in bed and I actually told a work mate mid-Pomodoro, "I will get back to you in nine minutes." Workplace distractions continue from their. There are meetings, appointments, questions from across the room. The act of really working is really hard work.

Scott Muc: Let's say I work an eight hour day. That should be, if my math is right, sixteen Pomodoros.

Reporter 2: That's Scott again, the software developer and the Pomodoro aficionado, and man, this guy is precise.

Scott Muc: The maximum I was ever able to do in one day was eight, and that was like a legendary day. So that meant like half the day. Like what was I doing? Well, it was like lunch, coffee break, going for a walk. Just all sorts of little things. It just sort of showcases how little time that we actually do focus.

Reporter 2: Thursday, Pomodoro works outside of the office too. It motivated me to tackle the laundry pile, to not just flip through my book but focus on deep reading. I'm attempted to apply the timer to sex, but twenty-five minutes is a little on the long side.

The Pomodoro method has taken off in many a workplace and the twenty-five minute work window seems to be the perfect length for mental agility and concentration. It's a way of measuring your productivity in an eight hour workday that's never really made up of eight of real work.

Friday, I'm a bit of a convert. I like the slight dopamine effects of actually completing something. It's a game. It's a challenge. There's a reward.

Not everyone of my Pomodoros is successful or uber-productive. Meetings come up and I get frustrated. Sometimes I just run out of gas. Strangely my biggest 'Ah-hah' moments come to me on the five minute breaks, when my mind is panting like a played out dog.

Scott Muc: Actually that's an important thing to mention. It's not just the twenty-five minutes, but the five minutes, that break is a way to remind yourself of are you actually making any headway? That's when the time that you decide is like, "Oh, should I continue to do another Pomodoro or am I burnt out?" I believe it has to do with the inherent energy that it takes to focus on something. Oh, it looks like our times up.

Reporter 2: So, I'm losing you now, for five minutes?

Scott Muc: Awkward silence for the next five minutes.

Reporter 2: Okay, well thank you so much for this.

This story was done in fifteen Pomodoros.

Intro/Break/Out: Slack, working better.

Channel change. Brene Brown channel.

Host: Doctor Brene Brown is the author of the New York Times best-seller *Rising Strong*. In this episode of the Slack Variety Pack, she's talking about the stories we tell ourselves and how it affects our teams. In part two of our conversation, Brene tells us how to take control of our stories so that we can write our own endings.

Reporter 1: Let's start part two with a recap of the story so far. Our brains love stories, so much so that when they don't have all the facts they invent falsehoods to create a sense of closure. The false stories are doing a lot of damage to ourselves and our teams. It's time to find out how to take back control over our stories.

Brene Brown: The whole purpose of this book is really how do you reality check what's true and what's not true? One of my favorite parts of doing the research for this book is coming across this definition that said, "What is a story that has limited data points that we fill in with fear and value and belief?" That was the definition of a conspiracy.

Reporter 1: How often does this happen to us during the course of a day, how many horrible stories are we telling ourselves and why do we always veer towards the negative version of the story to make it more of a conspiracy?

Brene Brown: I think we do it all day long. The defaulting to the bad story is neurobiology. Our brain is wired for one thing above all else. There's not even a close second, and that is survival. You're in your Slack office right, and a nine hundred pound grizzly bear runs in the office, breaks down the back door, and starts running towards you in a group of people. Your brain is wired to say, "Pattern, bear, run, death." You're not going to stop and say, "Okay, let's take a minute. It could be a vegan bear."

We're not wired like that. We're wired for fight and flight. The stories that I bring finds the most useful to act on in terms of keeping us safe, always have good guys and bad guys, which is why the stories we make up usually have good guys and bad guys.

Reporter 1: In a way, a lot of the bad stories that we tell ourselves, especially at work where you don't have the full transparency of every single piece that's going on is ... There's a lot of belief that people aren't doing their best and I want to begin talking about that concept and in a way how powerful that is when you change your assumptions to a more generous place around everyone else's intentions and what

they're trying to do.

Brene Brown: A question came up in my personal life and then I turned it into a research project because it pissed me off so bad, was this idea do you believe people are doing the best they can, and I was actually a hardcore no. No, people are not doing the best they can, and if they are, their best sucks.

My husband's answer was my favorite because when I came to him after interviewing forty people about it and said, "Do you believe people are doing the best they can or not?" He took so long to answer it was such a pain in the butt to wait, and he's a pediatrician and he sees the best of people and the worst actually. He said, "I don't know, but I know my life is better when I'm assuming people are doing the best they can." I think that's the trick, I think that's the issue.

Reporter 1: Is it overstating it or misstating it perhaps, that maybe one of the single biggest factors of changing a work culture and a team culture is to individually change the way we think about others? To really, honestly prioritize becoming more empathetic, having more generous assumptions within our boundaries. So much of work culture and team culture is more around external things: how we sit or how we meet or what tools we use. The thing that I love about your work is that it's making a change inside yourself and really thinking about the way you think differently.

Brene Brown: I'm going to go out on the limb here and say something that I really believe from the deepest part of my heart and the deepest part of my being as a researcher who has spent the last five years almost exclusively in Fortune 500 companies. The biggest barrier to effective teams is not professional development. It is personal development. To put it into the most bluntest terms I can is people do not take care of their shit. People are not doing their own work on what it is that gets in the way of them fully showing up, as the kind of people we need in teams and the kind of leaders we need. It is what makes or breaks a team, and it's what makes or breaks culture or leaders is how well do you know yourself? How willing are you to show up vulnerably in relationship with other people, learn, listen, and grow?

Reporter 1: As we approach the end of this story, Brene's final message is to remember we all have the ability to write the endings to our own stories.

Brene Brown: When you own the story, no matter how crazy it is, no matter what kind of shitty first draft it is, when you own the story, you get to write the ending.

Reporter 1: Brace yourselves, here is one last trip inside my head. All right, here it is. Time to step up. Own the story, write your own ending. Three, two, one.

My biggest take-away from talking with Brene is simply the awareness that these stories I'm telling myself exist. Getting to talk about it with Brene made me realize how unconsciously I'm telling myself these stories all the time and the impact they're having on me and my team. There's is a huge opportunity for me to take

charge of these stories and write my own awesome and empowering endings. I hope that for you, listening to this story helps you take charge of the stories you're telling yourself too.

Was that too mellow dramatic? It is isn't it? It's definitely too mellow dramatic. What if Brene doesn't like it? I'm not Brene Brown, who might be saying this sort of stuff? Too confident.

Host: Big thanks to Brene Brown for talking teams and stories with us. If you enjoyed this interview, and haven't seen her TED Talks yet, check them out, and if you're heading to South by Southwest this week, Brene is giving the keynote speech this Saturday, March 12. Earlier in this episode, we promised you some bonus Brene Brown material that you can add right into Slack. Here's how it happened.

Brene Brown: In my next life I want to come back and look at Slack.

Reporter 1: Everyone at Slack is going to be so happy to hear this by the way.

Brene Brown: No really I do, because do you know what I want to do for Slack? I want to do the little nice messages that come up when you first come on like, "You look great today," or I want to do like the affirmations, the Slack affirmations. I want to be chief affirmationologist at Slack.

Reporter 1: I think if you want to do that we could probably come up with some custom messages from you to get in there.

Brene Brown: Yeah, because they always make my day. They always make me smile because I always think Slack bots real, like it's my friend, like, "Hello."

Host: So this week, we invited Brene Brown to become Slack's chief affirmationologist. She's written custom loading messages that you can add to your Team Slack accounts. Head on over to SlackHQ.com/Brene to check out Brene's affirmations and add them to your Slack.

That's a wrap for episode 22 of the Slack Variety Pack. For more information about this podcast, go to Slack.com/varietypack. Subscribe to this podcast on iTunes or Stitcher. If you like the show, please rate us on iTunes. We love those little stars. Thank you for listening.

Intro/Break/Out: Slack Variety Pack? All kinds of teams use Slack to do amazing things.