

Primary Care Cures

Episode # 37 – Will Scott

Ron Barshop: You know, most problems in healthcare are fixed already. Primary care is already cured on the fringes. Reversing burnout. Physician shortages. Bad business models. Forced buyouts. Factory medicine. High-deductible insurance that squeezes the docs and is totally inaccessible to most of the employees. The big squeeze is always on for docs. It's the acceleration of cost and the deceleration of reimbursements. I want you to meet those on this show that are making a difference with us. Ron Barshop, CEO of Beacon Clinics, that's me.

Ron Barshop: When you're in healthcare, you can't avoid seeing burnout if you get around a little bit. About two weeks ago, I spent a week with a orthopedic surgeon who is at the top of his game. Unfortunately, he wakes up every morning crying. Unfortunately, he is totally burned out from his profession and he only works about a half a day, a week every week. His frustration is just with the system. He doesn't understand why something he trained so hard for should be so not fun. He has a wide scope of practice, so we can work on a lot of different cases, but he just literally hates his professional life.

Ron Barshop: I'll tell you the story about a PCP that I met about eight years ago. I would break some bread with him and he never smiled, he never laughed, he never had any ounce of energy. He just was clearly an unhappy person. When you got down to the root of it and you got to know him a little bit, it turns out that he hasn't had a raise in 20 years and he feels undervalued. He skips all the meetings with the practices when they get together. He doesn't have interest in hearing the in-services from the drug reps or the medical device folks. He goes and hides up in the attic, and this is another doctor who, in America, just hasn't found his joy.

Ron Barshop: And unfortunately the majority of physicians are like that. You've got a better than 50/50 chance of pulling that card. Is that somebody want to operating on your child, your grandmother, your mom, or yourself? Is that somebody that you want to treating you with primary care when they're depressed every day and they just put on their best face? The answer is... We all know what the answer is, but let me tell you what I think the problem is, and it's not electronic health records. I think it's the model.

Ron Barshop: What I talk about is studying a business model before you try to get to any other issues with, for example, today we're going to talk about culture. The business model of primary care and the business model of care in general can be actually quantified on a 1 to 12 scale. One of my favorite heroes was a man named Richard Russell, and he wrote the Dow Theory Letter. The Dow Theory Letter was must reading in Washington DC and in Wall Street for about 55 years while Mr. Russell was writing the letter. His most requested column was called The Ideal Business. In The Ideal Business, Richard Russell tells us that you can score 1 to 12.

Ron Barshop: Number one, you get a point if you can sell the world rather than a neighborhood. Number two, the ideal business offers a product with inelastic demand. The Ideal Business number three has a product which is not easily substituted or copied and like that. Minimal labor, low operating costs, low capital expense, cash billings, The Ideal Business can actually be scored. When you score primary care in its current form, it scores a 1 out of 12, which puts it literally at the bottom of any business I've ever seen, and I've talked to hundreds of CEOs scoring them this way. So I don't know orthopedic surgery, but it's not going to be dramatically different with a 1. The only way to improve from a 1 to a 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 is to go with a direct primary care model, which eliminates a lot of these issues and this scoring goes up. Also, when you add ancillary income services to your practice. Those are in two nice ways to take a bad model and improve it.

Ron Barshop: Today we're going to be speaking with a culture czar expert. I'm really excited to welcome Will Scott on our show today. Will is very passionate about creating environments where people can be the best that they can be through better culture. He's a self-proclaimed culture czar, and he studied research and adopted corporate culture strategies that several of his own companies have used and that he's now placing out in the world with implementations. They each have their own remarkable story, and we're going to hear some of those today. He leads workshops. He speaks regularly on the subject, and none of this is proprietary. He can come to your clinic, he can come to your company and help you understand a nine-step process for taking your organization from simply having nothing to having core values and truly having a valued culture. He's the author of Culture Fix: Solving the C-Suite Problems at the Ground Level with Nine Deeds in 90 days. Sounds pretty specific, Will.

Will Scott: Well, that's right, and a prescriptive recipe is always a helpful way for busy doctors and busy practice managers to implement and help them get on the road to having a great culture.

Ron Barshop: Have you noticed that when you go into a medical clinic or a medical client, there's just a different vibe there than the rest of corporate America?

Is there something going on there that I'm noticing that's different? Because I didn't come from medicine, I came from outside, and I noticed there wasn't a lot of joy in medicine.

Will Scott: I think that's very true as a general statement. You can say that. But we probably also know in our towns exceptions to that, don't we? And they really stand out. Those are the businesses where they're not just delivering care, but they're actually running it as a culture-positive environment where people do enjoy what they're doing, feel like they're doing something meaningful, and there you do feel that more positive vibe. Have you experienced that, Ron?

Ron Barshop: There's a company that was my first guest. Dave Berg actually was three of my first five shows, he was so good. Arrowhead Health in Phoenix, Arizona has over 100 employees, and Redirect Health, their sister company, has another 100. Definitely smiling faces, happy engaged employees, and then when I walked in any direct primary care clinic, I get that same vibe, that same juice that there is. There seems to be something different going on, and I just can't put my finger on it, but it has to be what you have studied, which is culture. How did you come around to studying culture and then implementing it in your own companies?

Will Scott: Well, you know it actually goes back to to my childhood and being raised. I used to love building tree houses and inviting friends into those tree houses, but I wanted them to have a positive experience. And so I just cared from the get go about how people felt and realized that the people feel good, they perform better, they enjoy things more. And here I am, many decades later, Ron, doing it for companies where I help companies really define their culture, and then they can have a more positive experience from operating within that culture. I've done that in my own companies, and then friends started saying, "Hey Will, I could use some of that mojo over here." And so I came up with the program.

Ron Barshop: So you're going to help, and it's on the cover of your book, you're going to help people get into the tree house of better culture, and that's going to also enhance performance of the companies. Can you tell us a couple of examples, Will, of some of your clients or maybe your own experience, where you added your nine-step process and it improved not only the returns but perhaps retention and some of the other measurables?

Will Scott: Absolutely, yes. Without wanting to do a plug, but the information is there, Ron, at my website at cultureczars.com, and like you I do have a podcast there. I also have case studies that tell the stories, and the stories are told in The Culture Fix. Really The Culture Fix book tells the story that my own clients experience when they started managing their culture, and there's a common theme through all of them which is, once they

started putting culture first and caring about the way their employees and their vendors and their customers felt when they were having that interaction, then everything went better.

Will Scott: Revenues grew, profits grew, loyalty improved, there's less turnover, and the doors weren't spinning at 5:00 because people actually enjoyed where they were working, who they're working with, and also very importantly, the why they were working. And that's what frustrates me about the healthcare space, because if you want to figure out the why in healthcare, it's really about keeping people alive and healthy and so they can live their best lives. So there's a great purpose there, but somehow a lot of healthcare businesses seem to do a really ineffective job of providing an environment that is joyful to be in.

Ron Barshop: So Will, think how hard it is to take care of a customer when your customer has... It's like walking in a house of mirrors. You think your customer is the patient, but they're not writing a check. They're just writing a free ticket to get in, in some cases, if it's federal, and if it's commercial pay, they're going to write a deductible or a copay check to get in the door. So it's a small ticket growing larger every day. The person actually writing the check is a faceless, nameless corporation called big insurance, and the big insurance companies are sometimes pushing back and saying, "We don't want to pay you this week because you didn't dot your I's and cross your T's."

Ron Barshop: And so they've turned this relationship that used to be a really wonderful, warm, loving tree house, if you will, into a cold, distant, seven-minute quick exchange, get my script, stare into the EHR system and stare into the computer, and it's just taken all the joy and the juice out of the relationship between the customer and the doctor, the patient and the doctor. Because ultimately the patient isn't the customer, they're just a client. They're just someone that's an intermediary, instead of the primary. And that's what's happened I think.

Will Scott: Gosh, Ron. That's very succinctly put, and I think you've just answered the question. Are you saying that it's really hard, actually, for these practices to run the business they would like to because of who's pulling the purse strings?

Ron Barshop: Yes. And it's even harder for hospitals, because now they've got a board of directors, they've got a corporate entity somewhere in Memphis that's going to tell them they're not getting enough ROI, they've got nurses that are going to quit on them if they don't get better treated because they're understaffed. The pressures that hospital administrators have is like 20 times what I just described in a typical practice. But a typical practice is

driving the engine of healthcare in America, because most referrals are coming from primary care.

Ron Barshop: And if primary care is broken, the hospitals never even get to see the patient because they never get referred because there's a missing step in there. But it's just pretty much at every level there is a misalignment of values and a misalignment of warmth in the tree house. Again, I think of your book, I think of you inviting someone up into your tree house and treating them warmly, and that's what led to your career. That's not going on in healthcare today. So here's the difficult problem I'm posing to you is, you've got kind of a dysfunctional tree house. How do you get culture fixed when you don't have an alignment of values? I don't know if there's an answer for that.

Will Scott: Well, you know, I'm an optimist, but I'm always going to believe that within the microcosm of the large organism of health care, whether it's a certain award or a certain hospital, or even a doctor's practice. And of course, maybe a better analogy is dental practices and things where they're more independent, but whatever the unit of people working together is, I still believe it's possible to create a great culture there. And you know sort of the nine deeds in the book talk about... The first thing is to define the culture, and then those are your defining values. I often refer to the values of the United States, our Constitution. How would we coexist without that set of values, that compass, that North star that takes us back to to do something that's meaningful and that tells us kind of how to behave together? So it can go with the microcosm within the healthcare system, I believe.

Will Scott: Define the values, get agreement around how we are going to work together on those, and then we'll definitely have a more positive culture regardless of what external factors are wanting to nudge you off that particular ecosystem of the way things work and how people are operating together. But having defined it and got some agreements around it, now there are ways to keep it alive with your daily huddles and your check-ins and even having basic things like how you greet a patient as they're arriving. If you defined values around that and everyone's conforming to that and it means it comes with a smile, then there's the little effect there that builds on itself and gathers momentum. Then you start rewarding people when you're catching them behaving in concert with the values. That's kind of how I believe it is possible in almost in any environment to at least make things better.

Ron Barshop: When I mentioned a new employee with who just started today, and I went through with her our vivid vision, our mission, our core values, and our purpose. I want her to understand who we are. And really, as CEO of my small company, I really see my most important job as a storyteller. Here's

who we are, here's where we're going, here's what you just joined. And she left a clinic that had zero of any of this. So this is like 25 years in medicine she's never understood what a vision or a purpose statement looks like. And she said, "You know, I'm really looking forward to working here. This is like a whole other world for me."

Ron Barshop: So I walk around and introduce people to my employees, and they seem to be... Well, we have almost zero... We have 100% retention, almost zero loss. We have I think a lot of smiling people. I don't think they're just faking it for the boss, because they're pretty real with me by this stage. They've been with me for many years. So I think I know what you're talking about with the added value that the culture gives you. So which of those nine steps are the most important, or are they all equally important, in your book?

Will Scott: No, I think the most important I would say is understanding the why and the purpose for the business. When that's put into a few succinct words that helps bring meaning to what I'm doing every day, that's really powerful. I like to think of employees that they're stepping into an environment every day, and maybe they're in an office, that's great, but maybe they're also remote, but still a part of the culture. They're stepping into their work every day, and definitely feeling good about who they're working with and the feeling that they're getting there. But at the end of the day, they feel like they have done something meaningful for the world and they feel valued. Those are two very important and sentiments that we don't, I think, pay enough attention to. The younger generation like the Millennials, certainly, it's not just about a paycheck and the most money for them. They definitely want to feel like they're doing something meaningful, something worthwhile for the world.

Will Scott: So of all the knives, I think the why is the most important. There's some great examples of where I've helped companies or CEOs determine that, whether it's a lawyer... I have a firm of immigrant lawyers who thought they were there just to process visas. And when we spent some time together and I had asked him to really test that, what are they really doing for their clients? And usually the value for an employee is what is being done for their clients, or even their client's clients, or their customer's customer.

Will Scott: And so we went through the iteration, and well, maybe it's to keep people out of jail. Well, okay that might be something. Eventually we got down to, Ron, that their purpose was keeping families together. And suddenly the feeling in the room changes and everyone gets a little squirt of emotion and "Ah, yeah. That's what we're really doing. We're keeping families together." So once Lisa, we ran that particular law firm, the Lisa Scott Law Firm, once she coined that, put it on the wall, now when she's hiring

and competing with other firms for lawyers and she can articulate that, then it makes a difference. It makes a difference. I've got other examples too, but I mean, that is, I think the greatest of the nine deeds, Ron, is helping companies figure out their why.

Ron Barshop: You know, that's an elegant case for why somebody who's right now shaking their head... Right now I have a physician listening to this, and she's on her treadmill and she's working out and she's going, "I can't take a day off for my whole team to figure out the why of my business. That's ludicrous. I can't afford to go a day without revenue." So what Will's going to do is, he's going to have some kind of fancy schmancy retreat and we're going to get all touchy-feely and then we're going to... But you just made an elegant case that you have to do this. You don't have any choice if you want to keep good people, because the turnover rate in healthcare is sort of a ludicrous number. But not every clinic is doing that. Some clinics are keeping people, like mine, because we do have a why.

Will Scott: Yeah. And everybody needs to take time off the treadmill and time out of the office to sort of work on the business, rather than being wicked in the business all the time. And you know, people step out to do strategic planning and you know their next new product or their marketing thing. But gosh, why not put that first?

Ron Barshop: What is it when you... Can you kind of smell culture when you walk into a clinic or when you walk into a future prospect? Can you smell when they've got a good culture and when they've got a really lousy culture? What are the telltale signs you're looking for when you're in that waiting room?

Will Scott: Yes. Well, you know I don't believe you can simply smell it by like walking into an office, because you can ask them super cool offices. It's not really until you talk to some people that I find you can determine what the culture is. The sign that I look to look for is how open are they? If they are super open about personal stuff, about stuff to do with the business, then you know that they feel safe, and safety is one of the biggest human concerns or the things that we value. Sometimes we take for granted. But a sign of a great culture and a great team is that people feel safe and they therefore then that's demonstrated by them being open, personally and about things within the business. Certainly if they made a mistake and they're not afraid to share that with colleagues. That is one of the great signs, to me, of a healthy culture and one that you can step into that brave conversation and give feedback and handle conflict and all those kinds of things that lead to great team performance.

Ron Barshop: If I'm a practice manager and I want my physician to wake up, he or she is asleep at the wheel and they're not dealing with this and they're not

addressing this issue, what resources do you have to send them, or where would you take them to get their practice to wake up by way of the physician waking up?

Will Scott: Well, I think probably we alluded to it earlier, where it's to take a little bit of time out and give yourself time to reflect on things, and if the physician, certainly a lead physician leading a practice, I would love to ask them how do they feel when they put their hand on their doorknob in the morning to step into their own practice? If they feel awesome about that and they love who's on the other side of that door, then I would say great, but a lot of them, I bet hesitate and feel, "Oh here we go again, another day of grind." Then those guys, they're spending so much time there... Look at the hours that physicians put in. They're spending so much time there, why not make that and the short time we have on this planet, why not make that an enjoyable experience, and therefore take some time out to fix that culture and to work on that so that when you put your hand on that door, you're feeling excited about your day.

Ron Barshop: So folks, it's almost that simple. If you are facing burnout, if you have employees that are burned out, if you see it coming on and it's a freight train and you feel like it's about to hit you, engage with a gentleman like Will Scott who can help you really take a step back and look from 20,000 feet why you're doing what you're doing, what's your purpose on earth, what is this whole team trying to work towards, other than to get paid by these insurance companies that are so tough? What's the bigger picture here? And maybe it is that you're holding families together. Maybe you're keeping families healthy. So Will, if folks want to find you, what is the best way to reach you?

Will Scott: Well, yes. Thank you, Ron. They can certainly email me at will@cultureczars.com C-Z-A-R-S, or just reach out through the website. That's a great way to find me. You can also find me on social media, so you can ping the culture czar on Instagram or any of the other platforms.

Ron Barshop: If you could get a message over America with one banner flying behind an airplane, what would that message be?

Will Scott: You know think about, to your last point, Ron, I'd like to say is, I don't want to make this sound easy, but I have run my own companies, too. I've started and run my own companies. My first company is 20 years old this year, and a lot of the employees that I have there were the ones that started with me 20 years ago, and there's incredible value to that. So I'm not saying it's easy, but I am definitely saying it's worthwhile. Put culture first and the revenues and the profits will happen that give that busy physician the time to enjoy life a little more and take a time out and enjoy who

they're working with and to feel good about what they're doing for the world.

Ron Barshop: Well I think then we can fly "Put culture first" behind that banner, can't we?

Will Scott: That's right.

Ron Barshop: Well Will, we now know how to reach you. We know what the banner looks like. The one question I want to ask you as a final question is, what should I have asked you that I didn't ask you?

Will Scott: Well, you could ask me what's the costs of investing in culture?

Ron Barshop: And?

Will Scott: My answer would be, of all the things that you're struggling with, or that a physician or a business owner is struggling with in their businesses, culture, I believe is going to give you the highest return on investment of any initiative that you could take. If you're trying to open a new office in a new location, if you're trying to bring a new product to market, if you're trying to develop an app for that cool idea you have, those are all big investments. Kind of risky, don't know if they're going to play out, but make an investment in your culture. The investment is almost zero. It's just some of your time.

Will Scott: Just start listening and caring and following some of the stuff that I talk about in my book, *The Culture Fix*. Very low investment, but the return is massive and that's where you get a big return on the investment, Ron. Low cost, high return. Where's the higher return come from? Again, it's those you're retaining customers, you're retaining employees, you're growing faster, you're making more profit, and it's all for a lower investment. So hard to beat. And, it's fun, by the way. Maybe we should finish on that? It's fun doing this.

Ron Barshop: That's a great idea. And I'm going to also issue you a challenge. If you come across a primary care practice or really any kind of medical practice that you're able to turn around with your methodology. Will you please come back on my show and tell us as a case study how you did that?

Will Scott: Yes, I would love to. Ron, find me that unhappy little medical practice, and we'll do it together.

Ron Barshop: Okay, sounds great, Will. Thanks for being on the show. I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Will Scott: You're welcome. Thanks for having me, Ron.

Ron Barshop: Thank you for listening. You want to shake things up? There's two things you can do for us. One, go to primarycarecures.com for show notes and links to our guests. And number two, help us spotlight what's working in primary care by listening on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts and subscribing and leave us a review. It helps our megaphone more than you know, until next episode.