



Shine On

A NEW BUSINESS VENTURE HELPS QUIET LEADERS

Tom Yorton is a speaker, author, and entrepreneur who helps leaders turn their communication “shortcomings” into competitive advantages. In his first career, he did that as an advertising executive with Ogilvy, Grey, and Hal Riney, and as a marketing VP for Sears and 3Com. In Yorton’s second career as CEO of Second City Works, the B2B arm of Second City, he found a new perspective on winning audiences. There, he turned the company’s nascent corporate entertainment business into a groundbreaking communications and executive education consultancy. Recently, Yorton began his third career with the launch of Shyne Advisors to help quiet, introverted leaders become confident, original communicators.

Yorton moved to Barrington in 2000, and lives with his wife, Maria, and their two sons, Shane and Will. *Quintessential Barrington* spoke with Yorton to learn about his new business, Shyne Advisors.

QB: *Second City must have been an interesting job and life experience. What drew you to that job and then kept you there for 14 years?*

TY: It was a series of happy accidents. I was a client of Second City’s business communications group before I worked there. While at 3Com in 2000, I hired them to help me showcase the promise and perils of the digital home as part of a marketing road show. I thought comedy could make a complex, technical message more accessible, and it beat ‘death by powerpoint.’

When I left 3Com, I saw a posting for the unlikely job of VP Business Solutions, The Second City. It pulled me like a tractor beam. Looking back, it was the job of a lifetime. I got to build an utterly unique professional services company within a world-famous comedy institution, work with smart, funny people, and bring innovation from the stage into business. And I got to laugh my ass off.

QB: *What were the most interesting experiences there that became life lessons?*

TY: I learned about commitment—watching improvisers work every night. Working without a script, they learn to risk and commit fully to a scene, even though failure is a possibility. In business and in affluent communities like Barrington, we’re taught to hedge, play it safe, scrub away uncertainty...but life is anything but certain, so you have an advantage if you can commit despite the risk of failure. I also learned that things are funny when they’re

true, and counter-intuitively, you can use humor to get tough truths across.

I also learned to become more of a ‘Yes, and’ person. [“Yes, and” is the fundamental tenet of improv, where actors accept and build upon other actors’ offerings.] There’s a time and place for critical thinking, for poking holes in arguments. But on balance, we’d all be better off if our default setting at work and at home was to affirm and build upon the ideas around us.

QB: You co-wrote “Yes, And...” Was that a catalyst for starting your business?

TY: Not really, though I’m proud of “Yes, And...”, and my time at Second City. My current business, Shyne Advisors, doesn’t focus on improv. It came from my own struggles as a leader and communicator, from the struggles of others like me—shy or introverted people who are trying to make it in a world that equates volume with vision. And from the idea that you don’t have to be loud to lead.

QB: You mentioned that you are a quiet leader. Did you conquer your quiet?

TY: I’m a situational extrovert who’s learned how to be successful out in front when my leadership roles require it. But I’m naturally more introspective, with shy tendencies that sometimes come across as introversion.

I spent years trying to impersonate the larger-than-life leaders we revere in business, but mostly it was a drag that drained me. Age and experience helped me become comfortable with my style. At some point, we feel less pressure to copy others. In the end, I haven’t tried to conquer my quiet. I’ve just learned how to use it to my advantage.

QB: How did you transition from a job in a vibrant city at a highly creative space to your own business training leaders in communication?

TY: How could I say goodbye to a 3-hour commute? Wasn’t so hard. I still love the city, and have an office and many clients there, but I don’t need it to feel engaged. It’s nice to pick and choose the city when I want it, or bike in a forest preserve when I don’t.

QB: What are the challenges of quiet leaders?

TY: For me, and most researchers, introversion and extroversion aren’t strengths or weaknesses. They’re terms that reflect our preference for stimulation. Extroverts draw energy from being around others and being in the action. Introverts prefer time to contemplate, and when they do put themselves out there, they need downtime to recharge.

I know a lot of loud, gregarious people who are terrible leaders. They can be impulsive, or lousy listeners who are overly in love with their own voices. Quiet leaders face a couple challenges. First, they’re

always being coached to “come out of their shells”, which implies that they need to correct a deficiency. In my experience, the most depleting thing in the world was to act like someone I’m not.

Their other challenge is to avoid being misunderstood if they’re more contemplative or soft-spoken. I show my clients how they can rebalance their communication around their preferences (between written, interpersonal, and presentational communication) to reach people powerfully and authentically.

QB: What about people who are not in leadership positions?

TY: Yes, these ideas are not just for business people. They apply to student-teacher relationships, parent-kid relationships, significant other relationships. It’s time we learn to appreciate stylistic differences in the people around us, in all areas of life.

QB: How will you go about helping or coaching quiet leaders?

TY: I take a three-pronged approach in my work with executives and high-potential leaders. I start with the assumption quiet leaders can be great communicators, they’ll just do it differently.

The first step for leaders is to identify how their communication preferences line up with their practices. Are you a great writer who doesn’t write, because the person before you in the role didn’t? Do you thrive in one-on-ones, but feel like you have to be the killer emcee at the quarterly townhall meeting? It’s amazing how many leaders just do what’s always been done, even if they hate it or are uncomfortable with it. I tell clients that how they connect is always negotiable—that they connect is what matters. I show options they haven’t considered and help them master them.

Second, we skill them up if needed, to make weak areas passable, and strong areas remarkable. Storytelling, vocal coaching, executive presence, interpersonal communication...you name it.

Third, sometimes we support clients by creating killer content that augments their own communication. Could be a custom-written song to bring a new mission statement to life; could be a funny video that acknowledges the challenges of a recent merger.

QB: Why is this such a timely need in the market?

TY: Because we’re living in a noisy, chaotic food fight where the loudest people seem to win. No matter where you look—politics, social media, entertainment, business—thoughtful people and nuanced ideas get squashed. By most estimates, 30-50 percent of our population identifies as introverts, and it’s foolish to exclude those people from the conversation.

QB: You also serve on the board for the Barrington Area Community Foundation. What attracted you to the Foundation, and what is your role?

TY: Well, we both operate below the radar. As it turns out, BACF has been doing important work meeting unmet needs in Barrington for 20 years, with little fanfare or self-promotion. I got to know BACF when I helped them develop a five-year strategic plan in 2016. Up till that point, I had little understanding of what was happening in my town—I just slept here and worked somewhere else. I wanted to contribute, and BACF gave me the chance. I’ve been a director for a year, working on the grants and marketing committees. It’s been gratifying and enlightening. 



An Outspoken Advocate for Shyne

Shyne Advisors is working with Cara Chicago to prepare high-potential leaders for greater responsibility. Cara has evolved into a best-in-class job training and placement provider for people living in homelessness and poverty, and a vehicle for true life transformation. Cara’s Chief Business Development Officer, Joe Mutuc, offered this about the Cara-Shyne partnership.

“We appreciate Shyne’s ability to help quiet leaders identify and use their unique strengths as communicators. Despite conventional wisdom, louder leaders aren’t always stronger. In a noisy, high-stakes business climate, we need the focus, deep listening, and creativity that our quieter staff bring. Their ideas and perspectives make us stronger, and we want to empower them. Shyne is on the front-end of a trend, helping organizations unlock the hidden talent of their quiet leaders. Based on early success, we’re looking to broaden our partnership to help our whole team rise.”