

InVisible InCourage with Doug Smith

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Transcription provided by Stacie Valle for Virtual VRI

Kellie Pokrifka: Hello everyone and welcome back! I am so excited to introduce Doug Smith! Tell us about yourself and what you do!

Doug Smith: Today I am extremely busy. I wrote a book called *The Trauma Code* in 2011 and have been on the road since. I appreciate the opportunity to share the stories since the day I was playing against Wayne Gretzky and other greats. It is an old part of my life but it was a great time.

Kellie Pokrifka: Doug was one of the youngest players to be drafted at 18 years old.

Doug Smith: I was drafted 2nd by the LA Kings and played for 5 years. Then I was traded to Buffalo and when I got to Buffalo I was picked up at the airport and at the hotel I was told he believed I could be one of the best players and I scored quickly within my first game there. I went from a healthy scratch in LA to a front line player within a month. It was all about my mind set. Then I went to the Edmonton Oilers and then to the Vancouver Canucks and then after 2 years there I was sent to Pittsburgh and that ended up being the highlight of my entire hockey career. As a professional and seeing what everyone was capable of there. I went to Europe to play and in professional game 607 I went headfirst into the headboards and it resulted in paralysis and started a new phase in my life.

Kellie Pokrifka: What was that like for you?

Doug Smith: Everything stopped. Everything had been moving so

fast and suddenly I was on the ice, and I knew I had broken my back. I committed to being a better person if I made it through the situation. It was like a flip book and I saw clearly all the times I had treated people badly and I had this vision and I committed to go back, and over 10 years I went back and apologized to people for not saying thank you to people that had drafted me, or traded for me. And that was what I saw when I broke my neck. So that is what changed me.

Kellie Pokrifka: That is incredible. I can't believe that is what you were seeing.

Doug Smith: I was millimeters from death. Conscious but not in pain. My spinal cord was actually held in tact because of how directly I hit from the top of my head. If I had hit sideways I would have likely died.

Kellie Pokrifka: What is it like to watch that?

Doug Smith: I have seen it so many times, I put it up for people to see it. Every time I sit with a group of people, the emotion of the group impacts me.

Kellie Pokrifka: That is so interesting. One of your topics you talk about is cumulative emotional trauma. Can you talk about that?

Doug Smith: It is part of a bigger system. It is the 4 is "system 438." The first 3 are visible traumas and the 4th is cumulative, invisible. So there are 4 types of trauma, 3 priorities of the subconscious brain. Meeting basic needs, then having clarity of thought and then the 4th priority is helping other people. I gave more power, or more risk.

There are 8 behaviors that feed the priorities. Belief in self,

motivation, focus and trust. Those got me to the NHL. Then there are emotional control, awareness, asking for help, purpose. Those 4 helped me survive in society after I broke my neck. I didn't need to control emotions in the NHL I was rewarded for it from the guys and only got a 2 min penalty.

Kellie Pokrifka: Tell us more about grooming for the NHL.

Doug Smith: When I was born I had leg problems. I was in leg braces like Forrest Gump. My mom built my belief to get there in the first place. I was identified as a prospect as a young age. But I wasn't surrounded by the best people maybe. I was conditioned to have no fear.

Kellie Pokrifka: So you said the 8th aspect was having purpose. What is your current purpose?

Doug Smith: Meeting basic needs, clarity of thoughts and helping people. But maybe that isn't yours.

Kellie Pokrifka: So how do you find that, what do you do? How did you end up finding your purpose?

Doug Smith: I was dying, I was put in that position. I came up with something that works. I explain how trauma works and about PTSD and 11 pages of scientific studies. We are all looking for a better path. I stumbled into the boards like I did the NHL. I just happened to survive. My daughter was a week old when I became a quadriplegic. Without Patty I would probably have died 3 or 4 times by now. It has taken that long for me to be tentative around dangerous things.

Kellie Pokrifka: That's incredible.

Doug Smith: System 438 becomes a filter for the rest of the world. Once you understand trauma and that everyone suffers from it, but you understand it better you see things others can't see and you can help others in ways others can't. You will have to help them! It feels good to do it, but you will see stuff you might not want to see. I say to my wife all the time that I can't believe strangers are opening up to me. So if you have a story in the audience, in my first book "driving in transition" I have a model there on how to write a book.

Kellie Pokrifka: Amazing! What are common misconceptions about trauma you want to clear up?

Doug Smith: That it is physical. Trauma is mental. You can manage it. Picture an 800 pound gorilla. Do you want to let it run your life? That is a dangerous decision. Feed it the right behaviors and it will calm down and will help you build and lift heavy things. I have a line of people that will say they used it to work for them and integrating it how they want to. They just put it in the right order. It is no longer about doing the right thing. You can, but it has to be in the right order. I won the Bobby Smith award as a junior, and then I went to the NHL and stopped learning for 17 years. I appreciate the opportunity to have played in that environment but they still have a lot of work to do. There is a lot of discussions around trauma right now but there is a big nut to crack around COVID-19. They are ready to come and sit down to find ways to fix the problem.

Kellie Pokrifka: What has been the most rewarding thing you have done since leaving the NHL.

Doug Smith: When I was paralyzed it was Whistler. I was a ski racer at 16, and so when I was paralyzed I took my kids to Whistler. It cliché mountain climbing and it snowed 30-40cm the night before and it took us 4 hours to get down the mountain that day. It all fit

together.

Kellie Pokrifka: When you are going through some of your hardest times and forever seems to hard to comprehend, what gave you the courage to get through one more day?

Doug Smith: There are so many people that could use a hand, it is really the next person I meet that opens up to me that says "this is my issue, maybe you have a solution?" You can't speak to trauma, but you can observe it. I give it to them, the options, and back away. I try to relate to their trauma and leave them with options. It is a very systematic process. It never stops learning. If you put it in front of multiple object tracking we haven't seen an end to the ability to the brain to speed up and learn. Over the last 8-10 years, working and understanding how this all fits together has made me stronger. I think I am a better basketball player. It has done that for me. Anything that improves the brains performance. There are only a few companies out there that are qualified to modulate the central nervous system.

Kellie Pokrifka: You talk about using the subconscious brain. How do you do that?

Doug Smith: You understand what it needs. You need to consciously understand it. It is all your strength that understands more than we can consciously. The more you understand the more you can use it and the system. So you start to feel better. The more you look back on it the more you can manage it and test it. It is great if I can go to the car and look over the system and say "ahh - that was the problem."

Kellie Pokrifka: Is it more about listening to yourself and what you need?"

Doug Smith: Its about the order. Awareness and purpose are first. The way we learn them and need them, through System 438 . . .

Kellie Pokrifka: We just lost Doug. I think we were just to get something really good and hard hitting right there. Hopefully he'll come back. But if not, thanks so much for joining us.

[End of show]