



SPI 220

An Interview with Make-a-Wish Co-Founder, Frank Shankwitz

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Pat: This is the Smart Passive Income podcast with Pat Flynn. Session number 220. Here's a question, what would you wish for?

Announcer: Welcome to the Smart Passive Income podcast. Where it's all about working hard now, so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. Now, your host, when he was a kid his favorite toy was a typewriter. Pat Flynn.

Pat: Hey. What's up everybody. Thank you so much for joining me today. This is a very special episode, because I was so thankful to get connected with Frank Shankwitz. Who is the co-founder of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. A lot of us have heard about the Make-A-Wish Foundation. You may have even seen documentaries or heard stories, in and around your home town. There was 1 documentary in particular that my family watched together, that my son got really excited about. This was called, Bat Kid. You may remember this story from about a year ago, I believe. When a kid who was sick, he had asked to be a superhero for a day, to be Batman. The entire city of San Francisco transformed for this little boy's wish.

I was just again, very thankful to get connected with Frank. Who is no longer the CEO, but he was the co-founder and CEO, first president of the foundation. We talk about business. Of course, we talk about what it takes to run a nonprofit. What it's like, and how to fundraise, and all that stuff. Just, Frank is a great mind. Some great stories to tell. Also, about why it got started. The whole purpose of doing this in the first place.

I just invite you sit back, listen. Frank, you'll hear in his voice, that he is just such an authentic person. I connected with instantly, even though this was the first time I've ever chatted with him. In this episode, I literally teared up and cried while I was doing this interview. I laughed and you might just do the same, so just as a warning, this is a great one. I'm always looking for some new opportunities out there for philanthropic efforts. This was very inspirational. I do have some big things planned, which I'll share with you in the future. I don't know when, but there are big things coming and Frank will definitely help be a catalyst for that. Here we

go.

Hey, what's up guys. I'm here with Frank Shankwitz, the co-founder of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. He has received so many awards for a lot of what he's created. The Presidents Call to Service Award that making a difference in a world and making a world of difference. The Ellis Island Medal of Honor Awards. Man, just Frank, thank you so much for being here. Such an honor to have you on the show today, I appreciate it.

Frank: Well, thank you Pat. I appreciate the invite.

Pat: Absolutely. I'm always trying to encourage others through example, but also through having guests like you on the show. To think beyond just, you know, serving our customers out there with the businesses that we. To really think about what else we could do with a lot of the success that we find. I've been doing a lot of what I can to explore different philanthropic efforts. That's why I wanted to get you on the show to talk about kind of your start here with the Make-A-Wish Foundation. I know you're no longer in management there. You're doing other things, we can get into that as well. Could you take us back to the beginning when Make-A-Wish started and where did this idea come from? How did it all get formed?

Frank: Well, let's see. We need about a 3 hour show for this.

Pat: Well, maybe the 5 minute rundown or something.

Frank: I'll try to summarize this as best as I can, Pat. In the mid-70s, there was a very popular television show called, CHiPs.

Pat: Yes.

Frank: That was very popular with the kids. For people aren't aware of that, CHiPs was about the adventures of deep California highway patrol motorcycle officers. Extremely popular with the children. In fact, the show featured children as often as they could. During this time period, I was a motorcycle officer with the Arizona Highway Patrol.

In fact, I was on a squad of 10 men that we worked the whole state of Arizona. 2 weeks of one town, 2 weeks in another. Because of the popularity of Chips, we would always go with 2 man teams in these little towns areas. Because of popularity of this show, all of the sudden the kids would just start waving at us, because we're in town. The teachers would ask us to come to the school and talk about bicycle safety and just meet the children. The greatest PR tool ever for the police force, was especially for Arizona Highway Patrol. Our motorcycles, our uniforms, and everything were identical to California. In fact, we initially trained with California Highway Patrol in Sacramento. [...] Again, the kids just loved it.

In 1980, I received a phone call from a friend that was a U.S. customs agent and said, he'd met a 7-year-old boy named Chris. Chris had terminal leukemia, only a few weeks to live. His heroes were Ponch and John the television show CHiPs. All Chris ever talked about, was he would love to meet a motorcycle officer, a highway patrol motorcycle officer. Tom often was a customs agent and asked us if we could do something [...] and several other people [...] A special day was arranged for this little boy to come to our headquarters building. In fact we flew in our state police helicopter, from this hospital. I was asked to standby to meet this little boy. I'd never met him before.

Helicopter landed. I expect our paramedics to help out this little boy, because he'd just come off IVs. Like I said, extremely ill. This little bound of energy hopped out of that helicopter. When he looked over at the motorcycle, he thought he was looking at either Ponch or John from the TV show. Just ran up. Just this big smile on his face. His mother was with him. I was watching her reaction and she's just got tears, because she's seeing a 7-year-old boy just all of the sudden running around happy giggling. Just having the greatest time. Chris went on that day to become the first and only honorary highway patrol officer in the history of the Arizona Highway Patrol Now we're going back almost 36 years. Complete with uniform that was made for him. His motorcycle [...] Everything that this little boy could imagine.

Unfortunately, he passed away a couple days later. Our department asked me, they said, “We have lost an official officer. He was going to be buried in Illinois. Would you please go back with another motorcycle officer, give him a full police funeral?” Which we did. He was buried in uniform. His grave marked [...] Arizona Trooper.

Well, flying home from Illinois, I just started thinking about this little boy who had a wish. We made it happen. Why can’t we do that for other children? That’s when the idea of the Make-A-Wish Foundation was born. It took me 6 months to get it going. I finally found 4 other people would sever as board members. We became official in November of 1980. I was the first President and CEO at that time.

Pat: Wow. You were bringing me to tears right there with that story. I have a 6-year-old boy and I can just imagine that situation as a parent, and what that would be like. If I find myself with my kids in that sort of situation, I would want to give them their biggest wish like that. Just thank you for sharing that.

When you were starting you said, it took you about 6 months to get it going. I think that’s one of the things that a lot of us who are listening the show, we have these grand ideas of things we could do to help others. Then, the actual action that it takes to make that happen is the difficult part. It’s difficult, a lot of us don’t actually do those things. What were those 6 months like? You get this idea on the way home and it’s obviously, motivating you. What are your first steps from there?

Frank: You have to remember this was the days before internet.

Pat: Right. You’re absolutely right. Thank you for reminding us.

Frank: Yeah. How do you start a nonprofit? That was going to the research library. I fortunately had a friend that was an attorney. It’s not an oxymoron, sometimes attorneys can be friends. I always tease them about that. Just a lot research. I’m working full-time though, like most police officers, I’m also working off duty jobs. It just took a lot

of effort. I also started receiving a lot of help from the attorneys, from other people how to research this. How to start it.

We finally filed a 501 decree. Again, just a lot of time. The biggest thing, Pat, that I had a commander with the Arizona Department of Public Safety who endorsed this idea. He came to me and he said, "I know what you're doing. I'm going to allow you to use company time when you have to." He said, "But I want you to give me 8 hours work. If it takes you 15 hours to do that, you're going to give a honest 8 hours work." I always admired and respected the gentleman for that. Went above and beyond to fulfill that little contract, that he'd made with me verbally.

Pat: Wow. That's great. Well, thank you to him for allowing you to do that. Another thing that comes to mind, is just how big Make-A-Wish is. I don't know the full history on Make A Wish, but when you had started it ... I mean, it's one thing to start something like this, I mean it's awesome that you had done that. Then, to be so big that when it is sometimes the first nonprofit that comes to people's minds. One that is very much a part of the public eye.

We see stories like the Bat Kid story. Immediately brings us to tears. They had that documentary. I actually watched that with my son a couple weeks ago, about the Bat Kid who was going through San Francisco. Man, my son was just glued to the television. I'm always trying to teach him about giving to others. That just showed him what a who city did, really. Really a whole world did to come together, because of the internet. It's ability to connect everybody together nowadays, to support this one child. Even my son was asking me, "Why are they doing this for this little boy?" Initially, I think it was, because he wants stuff like that to happen to him too. He was like, "How are all these people coming together just for this one kid?"

Could you speak a little bit, before we even get to the marketing or the growth of Make-A-Wish, on just how important it is to focus even on just one single person. In entrepreneurship a lot of people are like, oh how do I reach the most people as possible? When you're

trying to help others, even just affecting one person's life can make a world of a difference. Can you speak on that a little bit, Frank?

Frank:

People care. That's the biggest thing, is people care. It's such a strange world we're living in right now, but people still care. The Bat Wish is the most perfect example. It just started out, that this young boy wanted to be Batman for a day. That was simply it. The word got out, through volunteers and that. Like you said, the whole city came together, because that city care about this one little boy. That's what made this foundation what it is today, people care.

People may not know we serve children with life threatening medical conditions. When we started this, it was for strictly with children with terminal illnesses. Through the grace of God, modern medicine a lot of those terminal illness children, are now surviving today. But we still don't know if they're going to survive that condition. That's your question, is strictly because people care. They want to help.

If so many of these businesses get involved ... A business is very successful in the community. What's the best way for a business to identify with a community, is to give back somehow. With some type of a charity, with a nonprofit. I know we would say, companies go in and help people fix up their houses. There maybe be a widow situation or a elderly person, they can't do it. They'll go in and clean yards, paint. Whatever it is, somehow just giving back to the community. Caring about people.

Pat:

Yeah. That's really what it all comes down to. Every single person is important. When it comes to the growth of Make-A-wish, I think that obviously, that caring is a big part of the growth of it. Were there any strategic things that happened in the beginning stages of Make-A-Wish, that really helped it get it's footing and help spread the word out there? Were there any specific, I don't know, moments that you can remember that were really-

Frank:

Oh, yeah. Yes.

Pat: Big lifting moments? What were they?

Frank: It would be our very first official wish [...] in March 1981. Again, I sat near a little boy. His wish was to go to Disneyland. We had very little funds. Nothing, but we were going to make this happen. We called and called Disney people over at Disneyland, California. They had no idea who we were. We were brand new. Wouldn't help us out. I started this charity based on character, integrity, accountability.

Like I said, Disney just wouldn't help us. I finally called Disney ... We would call several times. I said, "I need to talk to the director of public relations with Arizona Highway Patrol. I have a warrant for one of your people." I got the man on the phone immediately. The first thing I told him was, "I lied to you." Now, remember I just said, I base this charity on integrity, accountability. I said, "I lied to you." This is the reason I'm calling. Here's my name. Here's my badge number. Here's my supervisor's name. You can get me fired immediately, but please listen to my story."

Told him about the Make-A-Wish Foundation. What we wanted. We just wanted to get young boy in there. He was in a wheelchair. Can we possibly get him in front of the lines. That one little lie started the relationship with Disney, who now 36 years later has been one of the biggest sponsors of Make-A-Wish Foundation. Sometimes you've got to just lie a little bit. See if there's an integrity [...] That was the start of the growth, because Disney gave us immediate press. The press picked it up right away. The Associated Press, because they had never heard of anything like this, the Make-A-Wish Foundation. There was no similar organization in the United States or the World. Then, NBC television picked it up. It went on a nationwide broadcast, which immediately got us the press coverages.

Other states started calling. How do we franchise this? How do we get a chapter in our state? We just started that growth. Because of just that one little event, now all these years later, there's 63 chapters in the United States. 36 international chapters on 5 continents. I always want to stress that all, because of one little boy.

If it hadn't been for that 7-year-old little boy, this would've never happened.

Pat: Wow. Also if you hadn't really wanted to talk to Disney and just did what it took. I think that's another thing. You really believed in what you were doing. You really knew that this was something could work. You told a little bit of a lie. Of course, when somebody hears that they have a warrant on them, you'll talk to the person you need to talk to. Man, what an incredible ... I was literally getting goosebumps while you were telling that. To think now, like you said, 36 international chapters. 5 continents. I'm reading here on the wiki, there's over 300,000 wishes world wide that have been granted. To think that ... Those are not just the lives of those children, but the lives of the families of those children and everybody who hears and reads those stories. I think it's spreading, just giving hope for everybody. I love that. I thank you again for all of that.

Oh gosh, there's so many things that I want to dive into. Based on your experience, I know you're not working as CEO and president anymore. You're the first president back in the 80s. You're also still involved as a what's called a wish ambassador. Can you talk a little bit about what that means?

Frank: Wish Ambassador. The foundation has asked me to go to different chapters throughout the United States ... As far as Gaum. On keynote speeches, keynote fundraisers the meet and greet with certain executives to explain the mission. Just give that 1-on-1, not a telephone conversation, but an eye-to-eye as I like to call it. Police officers like to look at people's eyes, their reactions. Just explain what the mission is and ask for their support. Been very successful at, to get this deployed. To make the foundation grow to what it is today. The current president and CEO of the National Foundation [...] has been just an excellent job.

If I can go back a little bit, I had to make a career choice after two years of starting the foundation. Am I going to run this foundation and then I'm going to be police officer? I was an excellent police officer, bragging a little bit. I knew little about the nonprofit world.

It was all brand new to me. Like some of my mentors tell me, you hire the experts. That's what we started doing. I never took a sale. We knew we had the fire of the experts. That was probably one of the best business decisions myself and the board at the time made. Let's hire these experts, so over the years have been made this road to what it is today.

Pat: Yeah, that's an excellent point. It reminds me of Andrew Carnegie back in the steel days. Where he had connected with what he called his Mastermind Group. He just hired all the experts in the steel industry. He actually didn't know much about steel, but he was able to become one of the richest men in the world. Revolutionized just a lot of things. Also, become the biggest donor ever at the time, giving to charities and what in a similar fashion. Because of his connections and the fact that he had hired other people, like you had just done and had said. I think that's very smart.

That brings me to my next question here, Frank. Which is all about the business of this work. I mean, it's amazing that you started this and it's continuing to go and it's continuing to run. It's also, we have to realize that it's still business. It still has to run. It still has to profit and make money, so that it can continue to run and help others. I think that's a big struggle for people too.

Can you talk a little bit about when you were starting it out, how you were able to keep it afloat? I think that's one of the things. Especially, with this kind of thing, where you want to give so much. It's very hard to keep it afloat in terms of the profits that ... You need to keep it running. What can a person do, who's looking to get into nonprofits? Based on your experience, what can they do to make sure that they continue to keep this thing moving forward, that they're going to actually just stay afloat?

Frank: Probably the one word is integrity. If you're starting a nonprofit, it's all about the nonprofit. It's not about you. What I mean on that, is you've got to focus on the mission. A lot of nonprofits that you looked at ... My favorite website is charitynavigator.org. Charity Navigator is the watchdog for nonprofits. They're approximately 1.2

million nonprofits in the United States right now.

Pat: Wow.

Frank: A whole bunch of them [...] own personal gain. Charity Navigator rates on a 4-star system. They point out where the money is going, because every nonprofit has to report quarterly to Internal Revenue Service. Charity Navigator gets those reports, looks at them, and find out where the dollars that people that donate are going. Is it going to the mission? Is it going to somebody's high salary? That was one of the biggest things that we stressed on when we started this. That's why I never took a salary, because I wanted every dollar to go to the mission.

Make-A-Wish right now is maintaining a 70% or higher of every dollar donated, goes direct to the mission. Which to maintains a 4-star rating, with Charity Navigator. Is still maintains that mission. The biggest thing, if somebody's in the nonprofit or are starting ... Like I'm starting a brand new nonprofit we're getting ready to launch here next month hopefully, is again, we're going to focus on the mission. Not an individual person.

Pat: I don't know if you're able to, but do you want to talk about what that next venture is for you and just maybe share a little bit about it, so we can perhaps show some support for it.

Frank: I mentioned to you that the Make-A-Wish Foundation is a well run, well founded organization. It's mission is for the children with life threatening illnesses. I meet so many people around the country, because I'm now a motivational, inspirational speaker that talks about well, how come we can't get somebody to help meet with my friends with service dogs [...] I did research on that. Just an example, \$58,000 average price to train a service dog for an autistic child.

The same service dog will go to our veterans. That can help them. A veteran with prosthetic legs and that. Help them get around. Help them do things. The same price and the VA doesn't provide that. Just all sorts of individual causes. A friend of mine suggested get a

foundation. We will try and get in the community. Start a ripple effect to raise money for these individual causes. That's in fact the name of the new nonprofit. Ripple Effect Foundation. Our mission is going to create, manage events, meeting and online benefits for all types of charities.

We're getting ready to launch here pretty quick. I've developed a pretty good board on there. Some names I'll mention, you won't know their names, but you'll know their relations. One of the board members is David Stanley. His step-brother is Elvis Presley.

Pat: Oh, wow.

Frank: Another one is Tanya Brown. You don't know her name, but you her sister, Nicole Brown Simpson. We're getting some people that have contacts, who can really help us out and see what we can do to help a whole bunch of other people.

Pat: That's awesome. Well, I look forward to learning more about Ripple Effect Foundation in the near future. We'll definitely put links on the show notes page and everything for you. The last question I have for you, Frank ... Again, thank you for your time today. Really appreciate it. Is about the fundraising aspect of creating a nonprofit. I think this is something that scares a lot of people. Even people as entrepreneurs who are just starting out. Sometimes they're even scared of asking their customers for a sale or for money, because they just don't like the idea or are afraid of asking for money.

As a business owner, you have to believe in your product of course. When you do that, it's much easier to ask for the sale. Even then, some people still struggle. As a nonprofit, I can imagine it being a very big struggle for some people who don't feel too awesome about making people full out their wallets. How do you best approach the fundraising aspect of running a nonprofit organization?

Frank: That's a very good question. I always tell people, if you're afraid to ask you shouldn't be in the-

- Pat: Right.
- Frank: Not for profit business. The first thing is, you have to have a mission that people will relate to. Whatever it may be, helping veterans. It's going to be a mission. Again, it's got to be a mission of integrity and accountability. You just go there as your ... The business world is all about sales and a nonprofit is the same thing. It's all about sales. You have to sell that mission to people.
- You're going to find the right people support it. Then, it always goes ... When I find that right person, how big is your Rolodex? That you can contact your other friends to see if they believe in that mission I'm doing. Just as a business would be, how do you believe in my product? It's basically the same salesmanship. If you have a good product in the business world and then, you have a good profit in the nonprofit world. Then, it works the same way.
- Pat: Love it. That's a great answer.
- Frank: Plus, you have to show a return. You have to show in the nonprofit world that money that's being donated is going to that mission. You're accomplishing a mission, just like in business. You're accomplishing a good quality product.
- Pat: Absolutely. I think the big struggle with the fundraising aspect in nonprofit world is, a lot of times with the business world you often get a return immediately after. For example, if you're buying a piece of software or something. You know, you're buying a book even. You get to hold it or start reading it immediately. Start using that software and get that immediate return or that immediate ... You know, it's a 1-to-1 real-time transaction. Whereas, when somebody's donating money often you really know what happens.
- Frank: You're 100% correct. A brand new nonprofit like Ripple Effect, we have \$0 in a bank account right now. It will take us a good year to get started. We're actually going to start giving back to the dollars donated. Again, accountability. The thank you is to show them what's going on in a nonprofit world. Here's the money. Here's what

we're doing. Here's what we're going to do. Then, through your social media sources keep everybody informed. Transparency.

Pat: Yeah. I love it. Frank, when Ripple Effects starts collecting, let me know. I'm more than happy to help out, for sure.

Frank: Well, thank you so much. Thank you.

Pat: Absolutely. We'll keep that in mind. Is there a website where any particular place where people who are listening to this right now can go. Is this kind of a-

Frank: Yeah. The website Ripple Effect is being developed. We haven't even got on there yet, but anything. For my individual, you can follow my adventures. We're having a movie made. Universal Studios is doing the movie about my life, which is kind of flattering. That's a whole other topic. The book's coming out. At my person website is wishman1, the number 1, wishman1.com.

Pat: Wishman-

Frank: And on that-

Pat: 1.com.

Frank: 1. The number 1 [...]. On that, to be able to follow everything that I'm doing as far as the new Ripple Effect Foundation. Movie, the books, and so on.

Pat: Man, I'm super inspired. Frank, thank you again so much for coming on and sharing all of your wisdom and just the inspiration. I really look forward to these upcoming ventures. The movie and the book, I didn't even realize that was happening. I will definitely make sure to catch those when they come out. If there's anything I or the SPI community can do for you, just please reach out to me and let me know. We'll make things happen.

Frank: Pat, again, I appreciate allowing me the time on your show.

Pat: Yeah. Thanks for coming on. Cheers.

Frank: All right.

Pat: All right. I truly hope you enjoyed that episode as much as I loved re-listening to it. Especially, recording it and having a conversation with Frank. It just makes me, just so happy that I'm able to connect with people through the podcasting world. I mean, I never thought I would be connecting with some of my heroes. Even people I didn't know would be my heroes until after I chatted with them, like Frank. I just want to thank you Frank if you end up listening to this or if somebody who knows Frank ends up listening to this. Again, Frank Shankwitz. Co-founder of the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

To everybody else out there who has donated to Make a Wish. Who has helped or was involved with Make-A-Wish in some way, shape, or form at moment in time you guys are doing great stuff. It's so inspirational, because I want to do big things to help people like that too. I've built a couple schools in Ghana. I'm on the advisory board for Pencils of Promise. The reason for that, is not only so I can help out in other ways, but also, I just want to make connects with as many of these philanthropic people as possible, because this is how we make change in the world. That's why I'm so excited about all of this. Frank, you're amazing. Everybody else out there, you're amazing. Thank you so much. I hope you enjoy this episode. A little bit different than other episodes, but also a lot of great content too. Frank definitely brought the good. He has a lot of experience and wisdom to share. This is great.

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All right. Thank you so much. I appreciate you. There's just so many great episodes coming up. The next one is with a student of mine, who's been on the show before. He's doing some stuff that I've never heard of before either. It's sort of the student now teaching the teacher. You're going to get a lot of information that's going to help you. Especially, if you sort of flatline with sales. If you flatline with sales, this is going to help you get to the next plateau. It's going to be amazing. I look forward to serving you in that episode. Episode 221. Until then, just keep pushing the envelope. Keep pushing forward. Love you guys. Thank you so much for your support. Check out the show notes for this episode at smartpassiveincome.com/session220. Take care. See you then.



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