

EPIISODE 06

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE THE FIGHT?

Trajectory matters.
Accountability changes
the future.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT — A SUSTAINABILITY SERIES

Clay Coleman | Community Mountain

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The event is visible. The trajectory is not. Understanding what came before does not erase responsibility for what happened.

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Accountability and Understanding Are Not Opposites

The fight happened. Someone may have been hurt. A rule or law may have been broken. There may need to be consequences.

Accountability asks: What did you do? Understanding asks: How did you get here? Sustainability adds: What happens next?

Meet the Child

Imagine a student from a difficult environment. This morning there was no breakfast. Home was volatile. He leaves angry, hungry, embarrassed and hurt.

The driver, school, teacher and classmates see a student. Nobody necessarily sees what got on the bus with him.

The Invisible Backpack

He is carrying the morning — perhaps yesterday, perhaps years. Circumstances do not eliminate agency, but they can affect trajectory.

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The Event Still Matters

Understanding the invisible backpack cannot become permission to harm other people. The student who was hit matters. Other students deserve safety. Rules and accountability matter.

Tracing the path into the fight does not erase the event. It changes what else we can see.

Before → Event → After

Before asks what conditions influenced the trajectory. The event asks what happened, who was harmed and what accountability is appropriate. After asks where the trajectory goes from here.

Punishment itself becomes part of the person's next environment.

Punishment and Serve Can Coexist

A person can experience an appropriate consequence and receive Serve. "What you did was wrong" and "We aren't giving up on you" can occupy the same sentence.

Accountability addresses the action. Serve can help address the trajectory.

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Follow the Tentacles

Why was there no food? Was transportation missing? Was assistance unknown? Was the child struggling academically, being bullied, or exposed to violence?

These are influences and points of connection, not excuses or formulas. Risk is not destiny.

A Door Opens

An incident creates crisis, but crisis also creates visibility. A door opens to discover Need, relationship, Serve and capacity.

Serve cannot guarantee an outcome. It can create opportunity.

Justice and LOVE

LOVE does not require pretending harm did not happen. Justice does not require abandoning the person who caused it.

Accountability can establish a boundary. Serve can create a path forward. Hope can insist that today's terrible decision does not have to become tomorrow's identity.

Food for Thought

- What if the visible event is only one point on a much longer trajectory?
- What if understanding what happened before an act does not require excusing it?
- What if accountability and Serve can occur simultaneously?
- What if crisis creates visibility into Needs that previously went unseen?
- What if punishment asks “What happens because of what you did?” while community also asks “What happens to you next?”

NEXT EPISODE

EPISODE 07 - WHAT HAPPENED TO CAPACITY?

**The next question is already hiding inside the one we
just asked.**

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