

Invictus Games Radio Podcast: Episode Five- Michael Landsberg

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**Pj:** Welcome to Invictus Games Radio. I'm Pj Kwong. The Invictus Games Toronto 2017 take place September 23rd to 30th and will harness the power of sport to inspire the recovery of wounded, ill and injured servicemen and women. This podcast shines a light on the stories of those competing in the Games and those surrounding them. Their spirit is unconquered.

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**Pj:** I am thrilled, well really unbelievably thrilled and impressed to be talking to sports broadcasting legend Michael Landsberg. In a career that started in 1984 on TSN and he moved over to his own show, *Off the Record* in 1997 until 2015. I'm talking to him today because he is a vocal advocate for mental health issues with his #SickNotWeak and a website with the same name: sicknotweak.com where you can check out his daily *Lands Blog*. He also is on Twitter @SickNotWeak and @HeyLandsberg. Michael recognizes that coping with mental health issues can be Herculean and we're going to talk about his coping skills and how this might fit in with the Invictus Games' competitors coping with the same thing. Michael Landsberg, god bless you for talking to me.

**Michael Landsberg:** Really?

**Pj:** Yeah, really. **[Laughs]**

**Michael Landsberg:** Really. OK. Well I guess I would... Can I start with a question? OK I'm... Just so you know, if I so choose I can take this over and start asking you questions and you won't even know it! But you...

**Pj:** Maybe.

**Michael Landsberg:** OK what are the boundaries here? Do you want the smartass Michael? Can I be myself?

**Pj:** You should be yourself!

**Michael Landsberg:** OK.

**Pj:** I'm going to be myself mister.

**Michael Landsberg:** OK.

**Pj:** Alright, so speaking of Twitter, people are going bananas in our Invictus Games office because you were there. So I want to know, what did you find out about the Invictus Games Toronto 2017 that are coming here next September and why does it matter to you?

- Michael Landsberg:** It matters to me because it matters to me. I mean, like, first and foremost outside of everything else, my stance on mental health, my advocacy for mental health, the fact that I work in this business. I mean the Invictus Games is is, is, is fascinating, regardless of any other aspects of my life, I think that the concept for it is, is brilliant. I think the fact that it's in Toronto is exciting and I just think now as I start to incorporate other aspects of my life, what it, what it... Acknowledging post-traumatic stress disorder. Acknowledging the massive struggles that people that give everything and offer everything in their lives to us, that they undergo, is something that has long been buried. I'm also a student of World War Two so...
- Pj:** Oh I didn't know that.
- Michael Landsberg:** Yeah it's like my...
- Pj:** Like a hobby kind of thing?
- Michael Landsberg:** Like a total hobby.
- Pj:** Ok.
- Michael Landsberg:** I think it's my only hobby. *[Pj laughs]* So no you're laughing, I don't know why you're laughing I think that is great this deal of disrespect, like I'm supposed to have more hobbies, but it is one of my few hobbies and so when I think back to what that would have done, what the world would have been like in 1946 when, when folks came back from fighting. And you realize that the devastation, that not only they would have experienced but all of our community would have experienced, how it would have touched everyone. I think that something like the Invictus Games could have made a massive difference in 1946.
- Pj:** I think you're absolutely right. As people are returning from war, and I don't know if you know the statistic, but in terms of PTSD, or as the Invictus Games competitors like to call it, post traumatic stress injury. *[Static noise]* Sorry about that, a little bit of a hiccup there but it's all, it's all good now.
- Michael Landsberg:** Right because your microphone fell off.
- Pj:** I know!
- Michael Landsberg:** Right. Now, I don't know if you wanted me to expose that. *[Pj laughs]* Well that doesn't make you unprofessional, microphones fall off, you know...
- Pj:** I know.
- Michael Landsberg:** .... Professionals.

- Pj:** It's good now. It's good now.
- Michael Landsberg:** Now if my microphone fell off and...
- Pj:** Heads would roll.
- Michael Landsberg:** ...People miss a single syllable of the magic that I'm saying... *[Pj laughs]*
- Pj:** Ok so back to my statistic. People returning from Afghanistan, military members returning from Afghanistan, suffer from PTSD at a rate that is almost twice that of regular or other Canadians. Let's put it that way. So about nine per cent of the military population comes back with PTSD versus four per cent in the Canadian general population. So I think that the horrors of war cannot be discounted. So you're right, in World War Two as those men all came back and they were told pretty much to just kind of swallow it, get on with your life. How, as somebody who has struggled with depression for as long as you have, were you told or did you feel that you had to swallow it? Or tell me about what you...
- Michael Landsberg:** Never did. Never thought of the stigma. Never hesitated, I remember, there's, there's a whole evolution that most of us experience of coming to realize that you have a mental health issue. Because it doesn't hit you like a baseball bat would hit you, it's a tap on your shoulder day, after day, after day and eventually if you tap in the same spot, it starts to bruise.
- Pj:** Yeah.
- Michael Landsberg:** And then after a while you go wait a second here, my shoulder's hurting, what is wrong with my shoulder? And then you go, well maybe it'll go away and you wait a couple more weeks. It's like the bath. You take a bath, the water is warm you think, ah this is great, and then you realize the water is not warm anymore, but you didn't feel it changing. So for me it was this, this really harsh awakening that, oh my gosh, who I am isn't who I was. I don't want to be this person, what happened? And then I started to think back to my, my life six months previous to that and how I stopped doing the things that I wanted to do. How, how I no longer existed and I had been replaced by someone I didn't want to be and I immediately told people at the time. I told my family, I told the people I worked with I never thought of the stigma. I never even realized the stigma existed and I didn't realize it until I saw it reflected in what other people would say to me. How it would be like, you know I would be talking in a voice like this: I'm struggling with depression. I have to go. I'm going to go on medication, I'm going to pick up my medication and people would talk back to be like *[whispering]*, "Oh ok, well you know good for you for doing that."
- Pj:** *[Whispering]* Quiet.

- Michael Landsberg:** Yeah, yeah like, hello I'm not ashamed, why are you ashamed? So I never hid it. And for me, I don't know why that is, I think it has to do with my, my, my upbringing. I think my parents instilled in me, you know, a sense of confidence in, in who I was as a sense of communication and sharing so I just, I never was afraid to say, "Hey, I suffer from this illness. It's not my fault. It's, it's I'm not embarrassed. I'm not ashamed." And as the evolution of this went on for me and I'm sure as hell not weak.
- Pj:** That's for sure.
- Michael Landsberg:** Yeah so, but, but that's the perception, is that mental illness is a weakness not a sickness.
- Pj:** So when I looked at sicknotweak.com, one of the things that I really loved about it is the fact that in the About Us section, it's almost as if depression is presenting its resume.
- Michael Landsberg:** Yes.
- Pj:** And that's amazing. If people don't think that you're a real person, you're a real person and the way that you were able to characterize depression is just... It's like depression is a separate entity. Do you feel that?
- Michael Landsberg:** Of course I did. Well I could, I could, I have and I'm going to say something now that sounds boastful but in the end you'll go, it wasn't boastful. But if, if, if, how many people will compete in the Invictus Games?
- Pj:** Five hundred and fifty and 17 nations.
- Michael Landsberg:** Five hundred and fifty and 17 nations. By the way did I ask you how many nations?
- Pj:** No but I'd like to over deliver.
- Michael Landsberg:** You know I'm in control of this now and I don't want you ad libbing.
- Pj:** *[Laughing]* Good luck.
- Michael Landsberg:** Ok so 550 people. If I, if I got them in a room. And I said ok, you know most of you wouldn't know who I am, obviously you know my name is Michael Landsberg.
- Pj:** I'll tell 'em.
- Michael Landsberg:** You tell 'em. And they would say, maybe when you told them, well who cares. But I would tell them why they should care. And I know from having done some research last year for the team that was, that was leaving for Florida...
- Pj:** Orlando, yep.

- Michael Landsberg:** I know, because I asked one of the team organizers and I don't remember this person's name. It may have been you actually. *[Laughs]*
- Pj:** *[Laughs]* I wasn't there.
- Michael Landsberg:** Ok, because that would be embarrassing if you would have gone, "Well that was me! I can't believe you don't remember that!" I said how many... It was 30?
- Pj:** Last year, yes.
- Michael Landsberg:** How many of the thirty would suffer from, besides the physical issues that they may have, how many would suffer from PTSD? See, I have learned.
- Pj:** God bless you.
- Michael Landsberg:** God bless me. That's the second time.
- Pj:** I know!
- Michael Landsberg:** You have forced God to bless me.
- Pj:** I know.
- Michael Landsberg:** I said, how many of these people would have the experienced that? Would be going through that? And he said 22 maybe you know just... So if, so based on that, if you got to 550 people there, if you say ok well, two thirds of them maybe have experienced this, so now there's 300 people in the room who are suffering from this. I could say, look I have not been to war, I don't suffer from PTSD, but I suffer from many of the things you would suffer from. I'm going to tell you what depression feels like to me and as I'm telling you, you are all going to nod because you will all think, "Oh my gosh he's in my head." So you talk about what is depression, first of all my currency to trade on it is the fact that I am a sufferer and that can create a bond with those 300 people that, no matter, no matter what I said to them, if I hadn't suffered from the illness, I would lose all credibility with them, right?
- Pj:** Yep.
- Michael Landsberg:** Because... So I can talk about what it feels like to me and have them go, "Well same thing for me." So when I say I know what those, those athletes would be thinking, would be feeling, would have the experienced, not based on war, but based on their struggles with depression or with anxiety which are to symptoms of PTSD that I suffer from although it's not rooted in PTSD. We would have this incredibly close bond because we have, you know, it's... I once I actually wrote about how it was like we had fought a war together. Right, because and that would bond people together in a common enemy, in an understanding of what it's like to fight on the frontlines against depression. So I think, I think depression in itself is this entity, this language that I can speak, that if you haven't suffered, that you

can't speak and therefore they won't understand you the way they'll understand me.

**Pj:** Well it's interesting because you and I both value words and being able to express ourselves and I've had some private conversations already with competitors talking about PTSD, cause I had a near catastrophic car accident that, fast forward 30 years all of a sudden impacted me. And so I understand first hand what that kind of level of anxiety as. And the same with depression. I understand what it's like and it feels to me, the picture I always paint, is that I'm suspended upside down in a jar of olive oil. I can see out sort of, but I can't really get out. What's your picture?

**Michael Landsberg:** My picture of depression is... You know, I have to have a number of them. One of them is being in a, in a hole and looking up and barely being able to see a way out. Barely being able to see any light, not being able to see any life around you, because there's this perception that I'm the only one that understands it. Oh my God no one understands what this like, so I'm in this hole and I'm by myself and I look at the size and I think, how am I ever going to climb up and then I realize that I'm wearing a vest. You know how would you go to the dentist and you wear the x-ray vest...

**Pj:** Yes.

**Michael Landsberg:** And it weighs all of this weight? Well I've got one of those vests on and it weighs 150 pounds. So here I am, the cure for my depression, or the treatment for my depression, or that glimmer of light in hope is 20 feet up, I got to climb up the sides of this hole and I'm wearing 150 pounds. Oh my God, I don't possibly have the energy to do that, cause the 150 pounds is one of the symptoms of depression, which is whack of energy, lack of enthusiasm, lack of the ability to even to get out of bed. So now here you're faced with the situation where I have no energy for my life and yet now I have to fight harder against this thing than anything before and that's a really tough mix. One second I'm going to cough. **[Coughs]** And of course, random and spontaneous coughing is known to be a symptom of depression as well. **[Pj laughs]** I'm glad you find that funny, that you know, my depression is funny to you. Ok so...

**Pj:** I'm heartless.

**Michael Landsberg:** So I see, I see depression for me as, as being that... Isolated.

**Pj:** Do you know what? I love the fact that you are you. Doesn't matter who comes at you, you know, there's the odd mouth breather that comes after you on Twitter and wants to challenge you in some way and you just say, "Hey, you know what? You're entitled to your opinion. This is what I'm doing."

**Michael Landsberg:** No such thing by the way, as a wrong opinion.

- Pj:** Ok.
- Michael Landsberg:** If someone watched me on TV. and said, "You know, I think you're a jackass." I can't say you're wrong, because if that's the way they see me, then they're entitled to their opinion. Right?
- Pj:** Yeah, ok.
- Michael Landsberg:** If they say to me that, you know, I'm rude to people in my life, that would be wrong. I would correct them on that.
- Pj:** Or 5'2.
- Michael Landsberg:** Or I'm not 5'2.
- Pj:** So those things are incorrect, opinion or not. Ok, yesterday on Twitter, as we're recording this today, you responded to a tweet and I'm going to read it to you: There's always a light, sometimes distant and dim, but it's always there. Let us push you towards it. #SickNotWeak. What does that mean to you? That's just so emotional. I think it just really again paints beautiful picture.
- Michael Landsberg:** Well. I think the context that I was responding to was I can't see any light at the end of the tunnel and my point is that the light is there, it may be very dim, it may be hardly there, but it's there. But what we have to do is, we need to push... This gets back to the whole, whole explanation that I had or this analogy that I had. So here you are, you're looking in the distance and you see the light, that light is help, you have, you have nothing but lethargy. You, you have you have no energy to do anything. So how are you going to get to the light? Because every time you get closer to the light, it gets a little brighter and now you start to build momentum, because the brightness of the light is hope. Right? The brighter it gets, the more hope you have. So how are you going to get there? Because you don't have the strength. I'm going to push you there or I'm going to drag you there. And that's what I talk about a lot on Twitter, I mean you learn to talk in 140 characters, because it's one of the best ways that I have to communicate with people and I say look you don't have the energy to fight, I know that. I know what it's like to be in your position. But what we can do, and when I say we, I'm talking the Sick Not Weak community. Other people who would follow, who would respond. What we can do, is we can give you some of our energy, we can drag you out of bed, metaphorically speaking, we can push you to take that first step and once you take one step, the second step is a little bit easier. So when I say push him towards the light, I'm saying the light is help and he can't get there on his own, so I want to help him.
- Pj:** Your Sick Not Weak community is something that anybody can access. And it's a resource but it's also... I found it really hopeful as I was looking at some of the videos and as I was again, I love that first person account of depression delivering depression's resume. Was the... Tell me about the moment that you had the idea for the website and for the

movement.

- Michael Landsberg:** Um... The moment came... November the 24, 2009. That was... You mentioned that you worked on the Battle of the Blades, right?
- Pj:** Yep.
- Michael Landsberg:** Do you remember Stéphane Richer?
- Pj:** Yep!
- Michael Landsberg:** Stéphane Richer was a guest on *Off the Record* on November the 23. He was promoting Battle of the Blades. I'd never met him before. So this is the conversation that he and I have. It's kind of bizarre how our worlds have now intertwined and to be honest with you, I may have made up the date. It was around then but I'm...
- Pj:** Sure, that's ok.
- Michael Landsberg:** I thought I sounded a bit more interesting if I said it exactly as November 23. **[Pj laughs]** So on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November or whatever the date was, he shows up and I say I had researched him and I knew that he had suffered from depression in the 1990s. I knew that he had attempted suicide after winning the Stanley Cup in New Jersey so I thought, oh well my job as the interviewer is to make an interesting show. So I said to him, "Stéphane, you don't owe me anything. I've never met you before, I don't want to invade your privacy," but this was just outside our green room, right. I can remember, he's up against the wall and I say, "I'd like to ask you how you're doing, if you're ok with that." And he thought and there was a long pause and I thought he's going to say no, cause I could see the pain on his face.
- Pj:** Sure.
- Michael Landsberg:** I said, "Look, you know, if, if you're ok with it, I'll throw it out and say, 'hey I too have suffered' and we'll find out, obviously, that you and I have some similarities in that regard. Although I never scored 50 goals in the NHL, I never won Stanley Cups..."
- Pj:** Yet!
- Michael Landsberg:** Yet. **[Pj laughs]** Thank you very much, because we know that 59 year-old men who...
- Pj:** Adorable man. Yes, there I said it.
- Michael Landsberg:** Yes there I said it, you know what it was the elephant in the room who is going to say adorable first. It would have been pretty lame if I said.
- Pj:** I know that's why I did it for you.

**Michael Landsberg:**

I was going to write it for you in the intro and adorable... So I said to him, "Look, would it be ok?" And he said, "OK." We went on the air, we talked for maybe 90 seconds. You know, I said, "Stéphane people that followed your career may not know that you're the last Montreal Canadien to score 50 goals, but what they for sure don't know is that you suffer from depression in the 90s. How you doing?" And he said, "You know I'm doing better. You know I didn't enjoy hockey. I didn't enjoy a second of that. He said, "Imagine being a kid from Montreal being drafted by the Montreal Canadiens, scoring 50 goals for the Montreal Canadiens, winning the Stanley Cup. And. Not. Enjoying. Anything." And it's like, bingo, that is an explanation for what depression is. It, it robs us of our ability to experience joy. Cause as Canadians, what is more profound, what is more exciting, what would you think could possibly be better than winning the Stanley Cup, in your hometown. And most people would say nothing. Well, if he couldn't feel the joy then clearly it's not self-imposed, clearly this is some kind of chemical imbalance that existed in him. Then I said, oh ok, and he told a little story and I said, "Well I've suffered as well, you know, I've suffered at this point I think for about ten years and you know I've got no problem saying it. I'm glad you did, and I'm not ashamed or I'm not embarrassed." That was it. Maybe 90 seconds. The next day I start getting emails. Almost all of them from men and almost all of them saying the same thing: "Hey Michael, watching you and Stéphane talk about your struggles with depression, it was the first time in my life I've seen two men talk without shame or embarrassment. And because I saw you and because you look like you were ok with it, I'm telling you this and I've never told another human being." That is when I first... When the movement started, was when I read those e-mails and there is one in particular where I found two and a half years later this guy's pretty famous in my life now, Tyson Williams. Tyson Williams of North Battleford, Saskatchewan told me two and a half years later that when I responded to his e-mail, cause I got like two dozen of them and I thought it's my duty, to respond. I responded to him, we went back and forth six times he said what you didn't know was that I had a belt on a hook in my closet and I was in the process of hanging myself. And I heard the computer go and I thought, ok, maybe it's someone in my family. Maybe I should go check that and it was you and I messaged you back and I remember this conversation but I didn't know how dire his situation was. I just thought he'd given up. But I had no idea, I mean woulda called 911. So he said the last thing that you said to me, resonated with me. So the next day I went to my family doctor and that was my road back. So I mean this story is unbelievable, he sent me a picture a year later, he said this is this is my newborn baby girl. She's wearing a Boston Bruins sleeper, he said, this is what happens when you share. You shared your story and now I want to share my story. And then September the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2016, I went to North Battleford, Saskatchewan, then drove to Prince Albert Saskatchewan and then drove an hour north of there were no Jewish person has ever been before and I was the best man it is wedding.

**Pj:**

That's a wonderful story.

**Michael Landsberg:**

It's an amazing story, but it's a basic story. It's a story that outside of the node you having gone it's sounding very Captain Kirkish.

- Pj:** I like it. *[Laughs]*
- Michael Landsberg:** I'll go where no Jew has gone, Northern Saskatchewan. *[Both laugh]* But...
- Pj:** Where I have family. We're not Jewish.
- Michael Landsberg:** Where's your family?
- Pj:** Well I've got one cousin who's in Prince Albert is a dental technician and others and Regina.
- Michael Landsberg:** See that's interesting that your dental technician. There must be a ton of business because what I remember of Prince Albert *[Pj laughs]* bad teeth. Reaaaally bad teeth. So actually that's bizarre, because Tyson Williams, who is from North Battleford, got all of his teeth pulled. Yesterday.
- Pj:** Why?
- Michael Landsberg:** All of his teeth pulled. I don't know just why, I mentioned...
- Pj:** Is it a wedding tradition in Saskatchewan?
- Michael Landsberg:** Yeah or maybe I assume that it was a medical thing. So that he wasn't getting gold, that he wasn't getting a grill. *[Pj laughs]* So what I, what I, the point that I wanted to make was that what I experienced through those 24 emails and through Tyson Williams, made me feel incredibly special. But I'm not incredibly special. Everybody who has this illness has the power to change somebody else's life if they talk about it. The difference between me and them is: a) I have platforms available to me. I mean you would be talking to me if I was just...
- Pj:** I might be you never know.
- Michael Landsberg:** If I was a dental technician in Prince Albert and I had suffered from depression, you wouldn't be talking to me, chances are.
- Pj:** You never know though because I believe everybody has a story. But you're right, we wouldn't have been connected right now.
- Michael Landsberg:** I believe everybody has a story and my point with this is that everybody has the same power to implement change that I have, I just have better platforms available to me.
- Pj:** Yeah that's true.

- Michael Landsberg:** And I have a history with the illness, which gives me the ultimate credibility and I'm willing to share, not just that I suffer from this illness but what this illness has done to me, what it makes me feel a loss of self esteem, all of the things that people don't talk about. People will say I suffer from depression, but will they say when I am in a crowd getting up ready to speak and I'm having a bad day, that I'm filled with self-doubt, because I'm that I mean I don't know how people perceive me. I only know what they tell me, but they tell me that I look like I have this cocky swagger. Yet I'm willing to say that I lose all of that and it all becomes an act and now that becomes valuable because your relative in Prince Albert, this hypothetical... This imaginary relative with the, with the illness goes, "Oh, well me too. Wait a second here, Michael, you know, I've seen him on TV and he seemed like he was always really cocky and I actually thought he was kind of an arrogant... You know, mean, a mean spirited guy because of the way did interviews, but I never thought he was weak. And that is that is hugely powerful for people. So.
- Pj:** And it's liberating because people feel that if this is you...
- Michael Landsberg:** Yes.
- Pj:** If this is who you truly are, then it gives them permission to be... They feel that they're somehow less well so that means that you're on equal, equal footing. Do you feel that this is kind of a family disease?
- Michael Landsberg:** Ok. Do you mean did I inherited from my family...
- Pj:** No, no.
- Michael Landsberg:** Does everybody in my house...
- Pj:** Impacted.
- Michael Landsberg:** Oh absolutely. Oh without a doubt. Anyone who says it's not is, is delusional. Now, delusion can be an illness. You know it could be a symptom of mental illness, so maybe, maybe it's a symptom that I have not experienced or maybe I am experiencing delusional thoughts and I just don't know because if you know they're delusional then they're not delusional.
- Pj:** Oh that's good. May I write that down? Who's got a pen?
- Michael Landsberg:** Well you've recorded it. I assume.
- Pj:** Yeah I know but I can't...

**Michael Landsberg:**

So, you know anyone who thinks that you can have this personality robbing, this social... This anti-social illness that sucks who you are out of you, it changes all of us. Now for me it does certain things that maybe it wouldn't do to you, because you and I don't start off at the same place, like we all have different personalities. But it is, it's the thing that robs you

generally of the things that make you unique. It robs you of caring for other people because you don't have the energy to do it. It robs, it robs the spirit that you would bring to a room and we all bring different spirits to the room, but the thing about the person with depression is they bring no spirit to the room because they have none, because, you know, one of the symptoms of depression is the absence of everything. You just... You are a rock and a rock doesn't make a room better, a rock doesn't make a dinner table better for the family. So it's a hugely family illness.

**Pj:**

You know it's so interesting, as I said, I've, I've already of them some podcast interviews with competitors, many of whom talk about being in the basement and really not being able to cope with family, not being able to cope with anything, for them, the Invictus Games and then the shot at being on a team has been a way out. One of the competitors Bruno Guevremont, was team captain last year, he said something that I actually wrote down because it just... It has such impact and that is that suicide doesn't take away the pain. It simply reassigns it. And he was one, he was ready to go. He knew that he wanted to commit suicide and then he all of a sudden realize that the pain that he was feeling would be transferred to his six year old. So when I was looking at your website and you were looking, you've got a page that's available to people who are contemplating suicide and I love the fact that you say on that page that you can't say to somebody you're going to get better when they really feel that there's no way out. It is just the most impossible dark place.

**Michael Landsberg:**

You know one of the things that I think is really important is when you are... I mean I don't know what I mean, you introduced me as an advocate or what, however you put it. I mean so, I don't know what my relationship is to the illness but if you if you minimize it, you hurt people. And if you think that you have a solution to, to suicide, the fact that in Canada statistically they'll be 4,000 suicides every year, but we know that it's probably double that. If you think you know an easy way to get people to stop from taking their lives, you're wrong. It's incredibly complicated because for me depression has a voice. It talks to me. In my case it tells me, you know, good, you're going to give a speech you're going to be terrible, people are going to laugh at your stupid sense of humor and it is a stupid sense of humor and you know, you think you've got a smart line for everything. Well you don't. So it knocks me down and it knows where I'm vulnerable, right? This voice that talks to me is unique to me, it's my voice and it knows where I'm vulnerable, because it's in my head and the plays against all of those fears. Well, that voice tells other people you know what, your six-year-old child will be better off without you.

**Pj:**

Yeah.

- Michael Landsberg:** Many times have you heard people say, “Oh my gosh, he left a note and said oh you know my family will be better without me.” Well what parent has ever taken their own life and their kids were better off without them.
- Pj:** Yep.
- Michael Landsberg:** That's, that's the illness, makes up lies and convinces us of them and that's why it's so hard, it's so hard to treat, because that voice is so real and for me what I try to do is, try to tell people look that voice in your head is the illness speaking, not you. These are these, these are lies that your illness tell, tells you because your illness wants you to suffer, your illness wants you to retreat and your illness wants you to take your life.
- Pj:** Your illness wants to have control over you. Your illness wants you. It's like an organism that somehow is trying to slowly take over.
- Michael Landsberg:** Yeah.
- Pj:** It's, it's really. it's really tough. Did you have a relationship to sports when you were a kid?
- Michael Landsberg:** Yeah I was, I was, I was a sports fan. I was like one of the few things that I was actually really good at, you know, I could remember, you know, dates and players and I could formulate arguments and I had opinion on everything. It was kind of like, for me it was like my safe world and it wasn't until I committed to try to get into that world as a broadcaster that... Like that day when I said OK well I'm going to do what I want and what I want to do is, I want to be on television or radio talking about sports. That was a huge life changing moment for me because it gave me purpose. It was like, oh my gosh, there's a like I see what everybody else sees or what some other people see or that person really wants to be a doctor. Well that's why school is easy for them, because they have this motivation. I had nothing that I wanted and so being a sports fan was really what I did best, which sounds kind of funny right? Like I was a good sports fan.
- Pj:** No, but if you can keep details in your head, especially if you're interviewing and be able to think about things on the fly, that's really, that's kind of skill in itself. Being able to sort of connect with people, you've never met them before, here we are like old friends.
- Michael Landsberg:** We are and that maybe that's your skill.
- Pj:** Maybe. I like that.
- Michael Landsberg:** Maybe maybe you're the first person that's ever brought this out of me.

- Pj:** I don't think that's true somehow, but thank you for saying that. I'm going to give you a bookmark later, that's kind of girl I am. I want to know how you feel... Like if you're talking about your own skills, I want to know how you feel that you are or why you? Why are you able to connect? What is that, what is that skill within you that allows you to put the shame aside or the mystery of the whole mental health issue that depression aside and connect to people?
- Michael Landsberg:** Let's assume that you are one of those people.
- Pj:** Ok.
- Michael Landsberg:** You.
- Pj:** Yes.
- Michael Landsberg:** Because you and I are having this conversation now. I can connect with you, because I can, I can talk about what this illness feels like to me, what this illness does to me, what this illness does to the people around me. And because of that, we immediately have a connection. Just like if, if you had if you had fought in Afghanistan and I had fought in Afghanistan at different times and we sat down and I started telling you about my experiences there and you went ok, well, you know, different, different time for me and maybe a different specific location but oh my gosh, he knows the fears that I went through, he knows the things that, that tormented me, that would be an incredible bond and therefore you and I can have that bond because I'm willing to open the line of communication. You're not going to come to me and say oh Michael this is what depression feels like to me, because if that was the case, you wouldn't need me to bring you out. So, so you were looking for someone cause you are in a room and there is your place of work. How many people work at the Invictus Games, in your office?
- Pj:** Let's say 40ish.
- Michael Landsberg:** Ok, so there's forty people, yet you're one of 40 people there's 39 other people. You're suffering from this, this horrible depression that you don't believe anybody else understands and no one else at your office suffers from this illness. You feel all alone, you feel like oh my gosh I am by myself. I'm isolated.
- Pj:** Yeah.
- Michael Landsberg:** There's no one. There's no one that I can turn to and then you hear me talking about this and you go, oh, finally someone understands me. So now all of a sudden I can make you less lonely. I can, I can reduce your loneliness and increase your hopefulness because hopelessness and loneliness are two symptoms that we all experience. So just me talking like that, me talking about what it, what it feels like will bring this sense of relief to you

# INVICTUS GAMES

TORONTO 2017

because... It's like you have been dropped into Russia. You don't speak a word of Russian...

**Pj:** *[Speaks Russian]*

**Michael Landsberg:** Damn. Ok. You've been dropped into... I'm pretty sure you don't speak a word of Hebrew. So you've been...

**Pj:** Shalom.

**Michael Landsberg:** Ok, so that's all you know.

**Pj:** Yeah.

**Michael Landsberg:** So you're walking around and you know, you, you want you want to go to a bakery. But can I... Where's a bakery? No one understands you, you feel like, oh my gosh, I'm like, no one understands me. This is terrible! That's what depression is like when you're around a whole bunch of people. So you shouldn't be lonely technically, right? Because there's 39 other people at work or I'm walking the streets of Russia, I don't speak any Russian, but I feel desperately lonely. So I'm on the street, and I'm walking, "Excuse me. Can you tell me where the bakery is? No you don't understand? Ok." Then I go to someone, "Can you tell me where the bakery is?" And you go, "Oh my gosh. You speak English. I speak English too! Oh my gosh!" That like would be hugging each other. "Oh yeah we both speak English. This is great." That's what hearing someone who understands depression feels like. You've been walking for three hours, looking for someone to tell you where the damn bakery is and finally you meet someone.

**Pj:** Ok, so two quick questions. Here's one: I want to know if somebody out there is listening, what the upside to sharing is for you. What, what do you feel as a result of sharing?

**Michael Landsberg:** What do I feel?

**Pj:** Yes.

**Michael Landsberg:** What, why does this work for me?

**Pj:** Yes.

**Michael Landsberg:** It works for me because on a totally different level, nothing to do with mental illness, it gives me a usefulness as human being that I wouldn't have if I didn't have this. Ok, so here you have what I think is, most people on the planet Earth, their jobs are neutral, they don't do anything good for mankind. They don't do anything bad for mankind. Right?

**Pj:** Ok.

**Michael Landsberg:** You know, like, they're just like the, the world revolves and we all do different things and we don't, we don't speed it up, we don't slow it down.

**Pj:** Yeah.

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- Michael Landsberg:** And then all of a sudden... Now, so I hosted a sports talk show for years I wasn't, I wasn't helping people, I wasn't hurting people, I was just neutral. So now I find out I have this illness, which has been for me the worst thing that I have had to suffer through and now I have a chance to use that had to impact other people. So now all of a sudden I go well, I can help people. It doesn't cost me anything. I have this unlimited reservoir of sharing. It's not like if I share with you, now I can't share later on so... And it allows me to use this poison that I have inside of me to be your medicine. It, my pain can help you overcome your pain and it's so simple and it's so easy so I get to get in bed at night and think that, you know, I did something ok and that's, that's a good feeling.
- Pj:** You know it's very interesting, some people have expressed to me that when they experience depression for the first time, they feel... I lied, I'm going to sneak in an extra question... They feel like they have almost no right. They've got a healthy family, they've got a good marriage, they've got you know all the food they need, they've got a roof over...
- Michael Landsberg:** OK well you say I'm depressed and I'll be the, I'll be the ignorant person out there.
- Pj:** I'm feeling depressed. I just...
- Michael Landsberg:** What, what, hold on. Really? Ok you need to take a step back and need to say ok, you know, do I have a good job? Yes. Do I have a good life? I mean I don't know anything about your life, you know. Are the people around me healthy? Yes, the people around me healthy. Do I have money to put food on the table? Yes. Can I buy my kids' birthday presents? Yes. Well...
- Pj:** What I have to be depressed about?
- Michael Landsberg:** Right?
- Pj:** Yeah.
- Michael Landsberg:** Which is you know which is very similar and makes as much sense as saying, well you know, I know that you have lymphoma.
- Pj:** Get a grip.
- Michael Landsberg:** Well why do you have to, you know... What it would have to be cancered about, you know. Like I'd like to see it, you know until, until we get to the place where I can show you visible proof of my illness, you will continue to doubt me. Not you, but people will. Because you've got to believe me. Right. So I say ah, I mean, I'm in a lot of pain and I can't go to work today and you go, well how much pain are you really in and then there's the whole other issue, which maybe have to be part two for this, but the whole other issue is that people who don't suffer from depression believe that they have beaten depression.

- Pj:** Yeah.
- Michael Landsberg:** Because, they think ok well, you know Michael says he's got this illness, well you know I've had bad times in my life and well you know I just sucked it up and I got out of bed and I went on my, my work I didn't have to go to the doctor. I didn't have to go on medication; therefore, Michael is weak and I am strong because I have had crap in my life and I've been able to overcome it. So...
- Pj:** Suck it up princess.
- Michael Landsberg:** Suck it up princess.
- Pj:** You know and it's not, it's not the same thing at all. Feeling sad is not the same as depression. They are two different animals.
- Michael Landsberg:** I don't feel sadness when I'm depressed. For me, depression is the inability to experience joy. So when I wake up in the morning it's like... I was counting on my fingers three words: What's. The. Point.
- Pj:** Interesting.
- Michael Landsberg:** I wasn't sure what to do with what.
- Pj:** I know because it's contraction. Yeah.
- Michael Landsberg:** Yeah it screwed me up. Ok. You know so I will go to for a while. So I, so I wake up in the morning and I go on a bad day I go: *[sighs deeply]*. Like I know that feeling like this, that nothing good is going to happen to me today. Not that good things won't happen to me, but I will be able to feel that. So what's the point, really? And like what's a point getting out of bed. So.
- Pj:** Is there a point to getting out of bed on a bad day?
- Michael Landsberg:** There's a point in getting out of bed on a bad day if you're going to use the energy that it takes to do that to, to get help. To take that first step. You know one of the hash tags that I use is #ChangelsHope. You, if you do the same thing every day for six months.
- Pj:** Yep.

- Michael Landsberg:** A year. In some people's cases, ten years. And you've suffered all throughout that time. You can be pretty sure when you wake up tomorrow morning, you're going to still be suffering. Unless you do something and I tell people look you've never, you've never gone, you've never gone for help. You've never pursued help. Make an appointment with your family doctor today and you know what? After you've made the appointment, you'll have a tiny bit of hope, because it's going to be... Even if you don't, even if you don't really believe that there is help out there for you, something inside you will go, "Well I'm taking a step. I'm... I've done something tiny which could become something huge to own my illness as opposed to my illness owning me." So.
- Pj:** Oh I love that. That's really wonderful. All right here's the last question. You're going to like this one, maybe.
- Michael Landsberg:** I like them all.
- Pj:** Do you? I love that.
- Michael Landsberg:** Well this is good because...
- Pj:** It is good. I love the fact that, I love your candor, I love the fact that people... Really this is... You are a fully fleshed out, evolved human with a point of view and unapologetic. Which is really what you've built your career on and I love that.
- Michael Landsberg:** I don't think it gives me long to live though, once you fully evolved isn't you know like...
- Pj:** No you've got time.
- Michael Landsberg:** OK.
- Pj:** You've got time. Just don't go back to Saskatchewan. **[Both laugh]** Never mind and keep your teeth.
- Michael Landsberg:** Ok, you have one more question.
- Pj:** I certainly do. I want to know if you are an Invictus competitor or a potential Invictus competitor who is struggling with mental health issues and you're in your basement and the only thing you've been able to do today is to listen to this podcast. Can you please give me three suggestions for that person?
- Michael Landsberg:** Go to the Internet, you're probably already there, and Google what you think your illness is.
- Pj:** Ok.

- Michael Landsberg:** If it's PTSD or what's the dominant symptom that you have. Ok, so you don't know what's wrong with you. That's what doctors often will make a diagnosis if you're sitting in your basement and you don't feel like getting up out of your basement, if every place you want to be, you are thinking to yourself, I want to be someplace else.
- Pj:** Yes.
- Michael Landsberg:** It's like you're chasing something. So I'm sitting here with you on a bad and I'm thinking oh my god, please can she leave. Not because I'm not enjoying this, but because this is really painful for me...
- Pj:** Entirely.
- Michael Landsberg:** ... and entire time there is this, this, this, this, false sense that the next place will be better, but it never is. If that's you, then there's a pretty good chance that you're suffering from depression. If I ask you the question: when was the last time you were able to say well you know, that was nice? You know for me, I call it the simple joy test. For me it's a cup of coffee in the morning. I get the cup of coffee, I take a sip of it, it gives me simple joy. It's not like I'm going, **[high-pitched voice]** "Oh my god this is the greatest thing in the world I have a cup of coffee!" **[Pj laughs]** It's just like this thing that you go, you know that was nice. If you can't remember the last time that you enjoyed simple joy, then there's a pretty good chance that you're suffering from depression. So go on the Internet and Google depression. There's a pretty good chance because you're in your basement, that you are somehow ashamed of this. And when you see 100 million hits, when you start to go through and you start to see, oh my gosh look at all these people that have suffered from depression. Oh my gosh like, like there's thousands and thousands of websites that are devoted to this. Maybe it is an illness, not a weakness and maybe you can take the steps. So those are two things. Is number one, you've got to look at yourself and say, "Am I ok?" And chances are if, if you are listening to this in the context that you just described, you're not ok. So you've got to figure out, what do I think maybe is wrong with me and then you do some research and you will find out that this is not a weakness. This is your sickness and do one other thing. Two other things: go to sicknotweak.com or @HeyLandsberg and follow me on Twitter and I will follow you back and all of a sudden now you realize there's a lot of people who get me and when you do that, immediately you feel less lonely. And there was one other thing I was going to say that you should do. It would be change something else. Make an appointment, do something. If you're on medication already and it's not working, you've got to go back, because there's who's counting again. Fight for your happiness. Four words: fight for your happiness. It is a fight and a fight is not by definition going to be easy. You have to fight, you have to go and search for it. You have to push for it and if you do that eventually, you will find happiness again.
- Pj:** And you know for the military competitors at the Invictus Games, if there's something they know about, it's battle. So they're, they're poised for it I would think. Ok, last word to you. Is there any message that you want to send out to the competitors of the Invictus Games Toronto 2017?

- Michael Landsberg:** I would say my message to, to you, competitors 2017, is to reach out to me. Michael.Landsberg L-A-N-D-S-B-E-R-G, you're going to have to work on the Michael part yourself *[Pj laughs]* because I'm assuming...
- Pj:** I'll be doing a written intro, I can point that out!
- Michael Landsberg:** Ok...@sicknotweak.com. You will have someone who's got your back.
- Pj:** Do you know what? This has been a remarkable conversation. Honestly thank you so much Michael. I... You were well worth the wait.
- Michael Landsberg:** My pleasure.

*[Music Playing]*

- Pj:** Thanks for listening to Invictus Games Radio. For more information visit: [www.invictusgames2017.com](http://www.invictusgames2017.com).