



Hanselminutes

Hanselminutes is a weekly audio talk show with noted web developer and technologist Scott Hanselman and hosted by Carl Franklin. Scott discusses utilities and tools, gives practical how-to advice, and discusses ASP.NET or Windows issues and workarounds.

Text transcript of show #144

December 29, 2008

Week Three in South Africa - Ntombenhle

Scott's on holiday in South Africa with his family this month. Rather than doing repeats or "best of" shows, Scott's doing man-on-the-street interviews and uploading them over cell phone. In this episode, Scott talks to his Wife, Ntombenhle, an MBA and Homemaker from Zimbabwe.

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Lawrence Ryan: From hanselminutes.com, it's Hanselminutes, a weekly discussion with web developer and technologist, Scott Hanselman, hosted by Carl Franklin. This is Lawrence Ryan, announcing show #144, recorded live Tuesday, December 30, 2008. Support for Hanselminutes is provided by Telerik RadControls, the most comprehensive suite of components for Windows Forms and ASP.NET web applications, online at www.telerik.com, and by .NET Developers Journal, the worlds leading .NET developer magazine, online at www.sys-con.com. In this episode, Scott talks with his wife, Ntombenhle, an MBA and homemaker from Zimbabwe.

Scott Hanselman: Hi this is Scott Hanselman and this is another episode of Hanselminutes. Week three in Africa, actually week three plus one, we just got back from Africa yesterday, got off the plane, rolled immediately into bed very, very, very, very jetlagged. We were going to do a couple of more interviews from Africa but a couple of people dropped out at the last minute so instead we're talking to my wife. Hi, small wife.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Hi, how are you?

Scott Hanselman: I'm very well, how are you?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I'm fine, thank you.

Scott Hanselman: All right, I'm glad. So, small wife, this is my podcast, by the way. You've never done the show with me before and...

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I haven't and it's really interesting to see from this side. All I usually hear is, "Get out! Get out! I'm recording! Stay quiet! Gag the kids if you have to! For the love of God, keep it down."

Scott Hanselman: But now you have to hold the microphone for yourself.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Okay.

Scott Hanselman: So, yeah, keep it close.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: How do I sound?

Scott Hanselman: You sound fine dear. So, what is your name, love?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: So, okay, my name is Ntombenhle Nkiwane, but I go by Mo.

Scott Hanselman: Because I call you Mo.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Because you call me Mo. And people always ask me, they're like, "Wow, how do you go from Ntombenhle to Mo?" Well, the Mo is part of my middle name Mola.

Scott Hanselman: Yeah.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: So you grew too lazy to say Mola because those two syllables are such hard work and you cut it down to Mo.

Scott Hanselman: Yeah and you find that strange and I call you Ntombenhle.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, that's right, that's right, bizarre. You're weird.

Scott Hanselman: So, you're an Ndebele?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I am.

Scott Hanselman: And that is a tribe in Zimbabwe.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: That is correct, yes.

Scott Hanselman: We've got family spread all over the world. We've got people who immigrated to Tanzania, we've got people who immigrated to the US like yourself, you became a citizen a couple of years ago. We've got people who've immigrated to South Africa and worked there and we had a reunion just last couple of weeks. You are four of seven?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Uh huh and when you always say four of seven I don't know if you mean the fourth child of seven but yes.

Scott Hanselman: I mean people who watch Star Trek will recognize what that means but yes, you are four of seven.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Oh, okay.

Scott Hanselman: You're not seven of nine.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: It's like, seven of nine.

Scott Hanselman: Exactly, you're four of seven.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Which I would say, is that nine of eleven?

Scott Hanselman: No, you're four of seven. So we went and we stayed in the house of two of seven and spent time with the other six of seven.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right.

Scott Hanselman: So you are coming up on your, what I'm calling your halves party which is when you will have been half here and half there, which I think is a particularly interesting thing. You came to the States, when?



Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Ninety two.

Scott Hanselman: Yeah, so that's, when was that, you were?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Eighteen.

Scott Hanselman: Eighteen. So you're coming up on the half and half and you came to Las Vegas when you came here?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: New Mexico, Las Vegas, New Mexico, yeah.

Scott Hanselman: Were you disappointed?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I was, I thought I was being kidnapped, I think I told you this that when I heard Las Vegas, I was expecting Nevada and imagine my surprised when I got tiny, tiny, Las Vegas, New Mexico that I had never heard of and I immediately thought, "I'm being kidnapped! Oh God!"

Scott Hanselman: Did you really think you were being kidnapped?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I did, I did.

Scott Hanselman: Like you were bamboozled or something?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I could not imagine a country having two cities with the same name, it was bizarre, strange. Who does that?

Scott Hanselman: Yeah, we do, it's like 18 Portlands.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I know, I'm still counting off to three and I said, "Oh, okay."

Scott Hanselman: So this has been an interesting thing in our relationship, I think, because people usually say, "Oh, well, you know, you're white and you're wife's black, you must have lots of trouble with color and this and that." And I have always said, "You might as well be purple, the fact is that your African and it's the cultural differences that have been the trouble. Have you, has color been an issue for us, as much as culture?"

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: For us as a couple, less so, I think but you're right, people see us and they see the obvious stuff first, obviously.

Scott Hanselman: Right, my beauty and just the general pulpitude of Hanselman.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: That's right, that's right and they wonder, what you're doing with me?

Scott Hanselman: Who is she? I understand.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Are we taping this because I'm going to recant right away.

Scott Hanselman: Yeah but they see the obvious, they see the skin color but they assume, like for example, I'll meet people who are African American in a mixed relationship and they'll assume.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right. And they don't know that a lot of the stuff that we argue over really is, I mean, cultural stuff. The way you were raised and how wrong that way is and how I'm helping you see the light and that kind of thing.

Scott Hanselman: Now, one of our very first arguments, cultural arguments, was I think one of the second or third times that we were going to see my parents. If I remember correctly, we're on the freeway and you said, "We're going to stop by my parents." And you said, "Well we need to get something, we need to get some bread because it was dinnertime." And I said, "No, no, no, we don't need to get any bread." And you said, "No, we're going to get bread or I'm going to open the car door and I'm going to roll out onto the freeway and get the bread myself." You were very strong, you felt very strongly about that. Why is that so important?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Actually, that wasn't an African thing, that was an American thing. I had observed that a lot of Americans, when they come, first of all, they call before they come, they don't just show up which you were just in South Africa, we were staying with my brothers and you saw that. I mean people just stroll in casually and they give very little thought to whether it's convenient or inconvenient for their host. Their goal is, we're here to see you, we're happy to be with you and whether we're coming right at dinner time and you're trying to eat your meal, oh well. So that concern for me was what I'd observed other Americans around me doing, you called first and you bring something, you don't just show up. So it was troublesome to me that we're going to do this to your parents, we're going right at dinnertime and just kind of strolling in empty handed. My impression of that is it's okay for children, if our boys would come and see us, that's fine, they're little, but adults, working adults who are competent and self-sufficient probably should do something, so it bothered me that you were insisting that we not.

Scott Hanselman: Well, I wasn't insisting that we not, I was just like, "Oh, another place to stop to get more stuff." So Africans don't bring stuff every time they come over? It seems like they do.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: No, I mean really, honestly, we don't. We take stuff when we're going to see somebody at the hospital, obviously, because they're not able to get out there themselves but for the most part and you saw this, people just showed up.



Scott Hanselman: Yeah, we had a house of, what, six or seven people and then we would blink and suddenly a cousin would come over or a second cousin and then they would bring their wife and their four kids and the next thing you know, we've got 15 in the house.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Exactly and just when it always seems like an inconvenient time we're serving dinner for those that we knew were going to be there and, wouldn't you know it, right when people are sitting down to eat, in walks seven other people and it's like, oh, crap but somehow, food is always found, you make do with whatever little is there, you cut it into quarters and if that doesn't work, into eights and whatever you're going to do...

Scott Hanselman: That was interesting, because no one ever actually said, I mean we were there a month and no one said, "Do you mind if we stay for dinner?" or "Is there enough? I don't want to impose." That was never said, people just sat on the couch and then a plate appeared.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, right. And sometimes a plate had a whole bunch of food and sometimes the plate had very little food but there was always a plate and there was always food.

Scott Hanselman: Now when you bring the plate, when people come over, I notice that people, of course I've noticed this for the last 10 years so I'm speaking a little like this is new to me but for the purposes of the interview, someone would bring a pitcher of water, a towel and then a big bowl and then you would wash the hands of the guests. It seemed like that only happened when new people had come over. Like we didn't do that everyday when we were just hanging out but an uncle would come over and an auntie and then that would come out.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, in part, it also depends on A, where the persons been, so if somebody's been working in the car and they go come in and it's dinner time, yeah you're going to offer them that to wash their hands or what have you, the equivalent. I mean that happens all the time, wash up before dinner type of thing but it also depends on what we're eating, right? If we're eating, what we call, sadza, the cornmeal, you use your hands to do that so you would definitely offer everybody their hands, to have them wash their hands so that they're clean, right, because they're going to eat but it's also just out of respect that you'd say, "May I wash your hands?" And sometimes they'd say, "No, my hands are clean." That's fine so you would let them go at that.

Scott Hanselman: There was a pecking order, for lack of a better word, because there was always one of the young women in the house that would do the washing, it wasn't ever our host, your

brother, it wasn't ever me, and when you would walk around and bring the water, you did it in the, there was kind of an unspoken order. Let's say that it's me, your mom and an uncle who's really old, probably the uncle would go first and then your mom and then me. How do you figure those things out? Is that, I was in my mind trying to work out the business rules, I was writing the program to figure out. "Oh, they picked her first. Oh, okay, is that because she's older? Because she's a woman?" How do those things get figured out?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Well, I would still argue that Africa is a male dominated society and people don't always agree with that but I think so and you see this in whether it's the way you wash people's hands, whether it's the cuts of meat, if you've got chicken that you've cooked, right? Who's going to get the bigger piece of chicken? Well, it's not going to wife who did the cooking, it's not going to be the kids, it's usually going to be the head of household, the bigger piece goes to the male.

Scott Hanselman: Oh, you do that?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah.

Scott Hanselman: The big piece of chicken?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

Scott Hanselman: That still happens today?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: It still does, I still do that. You know after 16 years in being in the States.

Scott Hanselman: Yeah, I don't know why you take the big piece of chicken.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: As I said, the brains behind all of this.

Scott Hanselman: Your stealing chicken from me dear, what's that all about?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, but you're right, absolutely that it is going to be an age thing and then from the age thing it's going to be respect.

Scott Hanselman: And gender though, too.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: And gender, yeah.

Scott Hanselman: Right, and if there were two old people wife and husband, you'd do the man first.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I'd do the man first, I would, yeah.

Scott Hanselman: Does that bother you?



Ntombenhle Nkiwane: You know, it's what I grew up with so I never really questioned it too much, that was just the way it was and as much as the women were the ones that were doing the cooking and the cleaning every night, you saw that, and a couple of times you'd try come in and help and it made other women very uncomfortable to have you there.

Scott Hanselman: That was weird, that happened also eight, nine years ago when we went there the first time because, I think it was day 2 in Zimbabwe, on our very, very, very first trip and I was like, "All right, dinner's ready, dinner's done, rather, let's do the dishes." Because this was what my dad does, you know my dad right?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, right.

Scott Hanselman: We did a show with my dad, he would roll up his sleeves and let's start doing the dishes, no ladies, all the ladies sit down, the men have got this. And he'd make a big, big thing about the men are doing the dishes. You guys kicked me out of the kitchen.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Well, A, you we're in the way bumbling around.

Scott Hanselman: Well, thank you, I appreciate that.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: But you're right, it was very odd, they didn't know what to do with you, they didn't really know what your role was then. It was like, "What is it that he needs? Let's help him get it but he can leave."

Scott Hanselman: They kept offering me drinks.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, you're obviously looking for something, you're in the kitchen.

Scott Hanselman: Right, right. Well, you know they ended up sending, this is the thing, they ended up sending me outside to make fire.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: With the other men.

Scott Hanselman: With the other men, right. So all we were doing out there was arguing how best to rearrange the wood such to make this barbeque successful.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Okay, while we're toiling away with our hot stove, cooking for three or four hours.

Scott Hanselman: You guys were mopping the kitchen and we're trying to figure out whether the

cardboard goes on top or underneath the wood, it was very high tech.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: And yet men I would want to say that I mean, men work very hard too. If you look at my brother and his wife, he's doing a lot of work himself as are you, so is she.

Scott Hanselman: It's different, it's different.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: It's a balance, it's a different balance.

Scott Hanselman: Right, I mean, she would wake up 4 or 5 in the morning, come out, setup breakfast and then go back to sleep and then for us, for the people who woke up at 8, it was a miracle.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Food was there.

Scott Hanselman: We went to bed, there was no food, we woke up there was food, no one was seen and that was what she did.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right.

Scott Hanselman: But at the same time, your brother, her husband would get up at 11 or 12 at night to go and pickup his brother from work and then drop him at his house because he didn't have a car. So it was different work but it was equal, they're definitely a house where they're working equally hard.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, everybody's pulling their weight, it's a different kind of weight than what you and I are doing here on the States.

Scott Hanselman: Do they have any trouble with me coming into the family at all, or was it, from a color perspective or was it, again, just cultural stuff, like this is just a weird guy, as opposed to, this is a weird white guy.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Well, can we say this on your show?

Scott Hanselman: Well, I don't know, what are we going to say?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: That's right, we can always edit this right? One of the things that happened when I was young was we had an uncle, I don't know if he was a drunkard per se but he considered himself like a visionary, somebody who could see into the future and he called it for me, he just said one day, I must have been 11 or 12, "Oh, you're going to marry, somebody, a foreigner, somebody not from here." We didn't think that it was going to be a white guy but that was always out there for me so when I left and came to the States, I think that seed had long been planted, even though we dismissed it, what did he know, he wasn't really much of anything, it's just this



uncle, I mean, it's not like any of the other things that he said were true but nevertheless, he had said it, he explicitly, while having dinner one day just...

Scott Hanselman: This really happened, I mean I heard this story before and your sister, the eldest child, your sister actually gave this speech at our wedding.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, at our wedding, yeah.

Scott Hanselman: And I was like, "Nah, this is a story." This really happened?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: No, it actually did happen, yes. So were they surprised when I married you? Yeah, they were surprised but was it a total shock? No it wasn't and again, the big issue for them wasn't so much the race and as much as it was I had long been saying I was never going to marry, not just an American but a foreigner because I always wanted to go back home to Zimbabwe because I always wanted to go back and be with my people and help them out. That's why I was getting an education right so I could go back home and make a difference and all of a sudden, here I am saying, I'm getting married to you and it's like, what do you do with that, all that feeling that you've had in the past about, I want to go back home, I want to go back home because I always wanted to avoid making somebody choose between me and my people and my home and you and your people and your home. So that was, it was a difficult choice, I had expressed it as being a very difficult choice and one that I wasn't willing to make to have anybody make on my behalf, so they were surprised, I mean they were stunned.

Scott Hanselman: I remember that you were concerned, even when we were getting married that you would have to sneak assistance to the family. I you have confided in me, after the fact, once we found out that it was going to be a non-issue, that you were concerned, "Well, All right, I'm married, I've made this decision, I'm marrying this guy but I'm still going to have to sneak my own money to the family to help them because he's going to lose patience quickly."

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, it's a hard thing when you're one of seven. I was raised with a very clear expectation that we take care of ourselves and we take care of each other and I didn't really think that that was something that a lot of Americans were familiar with. No disrespect to the listeners, but it's just a burden is a wrong word for it but it is maybe an obligation. It is this thing that you were raised with, this idea to take care of yourself and take care of your siblings and your parents and your aunts and uncles.

Scott Hanselman: Maybe say something about Ubuntu as a concept.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, Ubuntu is exactly that. The way of being, I guess, I failed to find English literal...

Scott Hanselman: Well, they say people are people through other people.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah.

Scott Hanselman: That you are no one without your other people.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, right, I mean that's a song that you are referencing by Brenda Fassie, a South African singer but, absolutely, "Ubuntu, Ubuntu, Ubuntu" in Bantu, that's pretty much the same thing. You are who you are because of other people so in their absence type of thing. So I didn't think that would be something that my American husband would understand, I just didn't think that it was a concept you were going to be familiar with but it wasn't something that I was willing to give up, so in my mind, "Well, I'm a working individual, I'm bringing in money, I'll find a way to get the necessary funds to my family." Of course, thankfully, it was a non-issue because how you were raised, as it turned out, that you do have some more values, etc, etc, but I didn't expect that. Before we got married, I really didn't expect that understanding because it is a hard, it's not a short thing, it goes on in perpetuity.

Scott Hanselman: Well, yeah it's not just a life commitment to you but it's a life commitment to the other seven people.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: My family, yeah. And exactly and their kids.

Scott Hanselman: And their kids and their kids and on and on and on.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Exactly, so it's ongoing and it's work.

Scott Hanselman: Just to be clear, it's not necessarily monetary but it's to make sure that you're calling everyone and checking in and making sure that everyone's okay.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Absolutely.

Scott Hanselman: It's not about writing checks and throwing money over the wall.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: That's right, it's emotional support, it's spiritual support, it's if they need you, are you there, type of thing.

Scott Hanselman: Do you know how to make the possible out of the impossible? Well, the .NET ninjas at Telerik do. The just released a huge pack of



web controls all built on top of ASP.NET Ajax that'll help you build impossibly fast and interactive applications in no time at all, it made the impossible possible in desktop development. If you think you can't have a Carousel component in WinForms, well, you can, they're Windows Forms Suite features a super powerful grid view control and 32 other crazy desktop components that'll give you dazzling WPF-like features in WinForms. They do the same thing in reporting solutions with a new design service like nothing else, looks just like graph paper, gives you advanced page layout capabilities, makes it feel more like a graphic design software than a reporting solution. Go check them out at telerik.com and be a .NET ninja, thanks for listening.

Scott Hanselman: Now one of the things that I am consistently having trouble with when I am overseas or interacting with your family is the idea of honesty versus diplomacy and one of the people on the blog, one of the commentors on the blog said that this is the difference between me having IQ and you having EQ, or another way to phrase it is that I'm a socially backward programmer because I don't know my ass from a hole in the ground and you are a subtle and thoughtful member of society. Has that idea of being straight with people versus being diplomatic while still getting the message crossed been an issue with us?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, I think it has been an issue for us, I thought you were going to ask if it's been an issue just for me, in general. It has been, I remember when I first came to the States, I found people very, very abrupt. People would just say, "Hey, can you do x, y, z for me?" And I think, "Good grief, you just don't care about me, do you?" There's no hello, how are you doing, how's the day treating you, none of that. There was just...

Scott Hanselman: No pleasantries.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Exactly and I found it very abrupt. So I did have a bit of trouble with that and I think you and I have gone back and forth on this issue of, you want something but care little bit about me, the person you're talking to enough to value my well being before you value whatever it is that you want from me. So it's been difficult but what I've found very interesting is, as we've been married and over the years as I have gone back, people say that I am just as abrupt now as they would find you which I'm shocked, I'm stunned, how's that possible?

Scott Hanselman: And that gets back to the idea that you're half here and half there.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah.

Scott Hanselman: And you don't, I always feel like when we go there, we try to go to Africa every year too, that you reassert your

Africaness, with all due respect here. Your accent switches back, you start to hit words differently, you start to kind of move the needle in the other direction, a little bit and be extra African. Do you consciously, do you have any conscious understanding of maybe doing that? Of reasserting, basically putting, you're stamping your foot on the ground and just kind of pushing a little harder to make sure that you remember where you came from?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: You know I don't. You're not the only person who has pointed that out, I remember that a couple of our cousins just a couple of weeks ago were saying the same thing. It's not a conscious thing that I do, obviously I do it because even they heard it, they said, "Whoa..."

Scott Hanselman: So you knew this? I'm not the only one, because you've told me for years that I was insane and this was just me. This is news.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: And I actually remember, being an engineer, you actually recorded it at one point in time and when you played it back to me, I could hear it but in the moment, no.

Scott Hanselman: Well, that's the accent, the accent thing is usually proven. When you're talking in your language which is really kind of like, it's like Spanglish in the sense of it's half Ndebele and half English because you use a lot of borrowed words, your language uses a lot of borrowed words. Those borrowed words are said explicitly in Ndebele accent but I'm thinking more of the personality stuff, you're even more differential to elders when you're there, you're really, when in Rome do as the Romans do.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: But to be clear, I think it's amplification of who I am is what you're getting at there because I do believe in being deferential to elders even here when I'm away from that but yeah, it probably is just a desire to blend in and not be. What's been interesting in our life from a race point of view is that when we're in the States, I'm typically the one that stands out because Oregon has so few Black people but when we get to whether it's Zimbabwe or South Africa, like we were just in Joburg, we went to the mall and you were one of...

Scott Hanselman: We didn't just go to THE mall, we went to the Soweto Mall, the Maponya Mall.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Exactly.

Scott Hanselman: Which is not just the Black mall but it's like the all Black mall in Soweto and yeah, there was me and one other guy and he worked there.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: We didn't see him for a while. So it was very interesting to me to have you be the one now that sort of anything that you do, you've



got 15, 20, 30 pairs of eyes that are pretending not to be watching you but they're watching you. You've got a lot of people that are listening to you but pretending to be nonchalant when you're doing something else or whatever. So that that is what I think is where race comes in but coming to this show of honesty versus diplomacy, I think you tend to hit it hard, you're very, very honest, you as an individual and I think maybe a lot of Americans, as a people, are honest too and I'm generalizing here so bear with me.

Scott Hanselman: Yeah, yeah sure, understood.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Whereas I was raised with the idea that even if I have to listen to my grandmother say something that I know is absolutely wrong, what does it hurt me to let her think she's right?

Scott Hanselman: Right.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: At the end of the day when all is said and done, I can, in my head, know that I was right but give her this one small thing and so I learned to just let a lot of stuff go, good, bad or different, certainly I wouldn't stand there and let her perjure herself or something extreme but for the most part...latitude, yeah.

Scott Hanselman: Sure but you give people a lot of time.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, yeah.

Scott Hanselman: And this is I think one of the problems with, not just, Americans, again we continue to generalize but people are time obsessed and I am certainly time obsessed. So every time we go to Africa and we get more than five or ten people in the room, there's some kind of a crisis. It might be a little crisis. We had a crisis where we had to buy a refrigerator, when I say crisis I mean, tiny little lower case c, it was a very simple, "Let's buy a fridge." We've got some brothers are starting their life, they need a fridge. From my point of view I wanted to attack it like, All right, what are the candidate fridges? What are our candidate fridges? I was ready to do the whole consumer reports write up on the fridge. Well, I felt that you guys are just going on and on and on about an unrelated, unfridge related things, unrefrigerator related things and it made me realize that there's thing that you've always told me, cry with the crying and you want to say something about what that means, cry with the crying?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Well, it's just basically empathize, really is the short of it. I think, talking about you personally, you tend to come in and be very efficient, right, and you want to get the job done. If you come in and you find people sort of lamenting that, "Oh, we're hungry."

Scott Hanselman: "Oh, the fridge. What are we going to do? Where do we go?"

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Exactly. Whether it's hunger, whether it's a fridge, whether it's a car or whatever, you just want to identify the problem and attack it and just handle it, get it done.

Scott Hanselman: I have found in Africa that saying, "All right everyone, what is the very next action?" not the best way to attack a problem, in South Africa, at least, in my experience.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: No, speaking specifically just for my family...

Scott Hanselman: Well, let's go specifically to Nbele culture, Black South Africa, your family

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, yeah.

Scott Hanselman: I'm sure that there are families that maybe attack things this way, I don't know, maybe not but definitely not my finest hour.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, when you do that, then you're coming in and you've taken away the people, we're in mid-discussion, you find us in a middle of a conversation and you just stop everything and just kind of like, "I am here, I have seen the light and let me show you." And you don't mean it that way, but it's just, it's very cold water. It just stops the discussion and leaves everybody feeling very confused and what ends up happening then is that people defer to you. So at the end of it all, when you then...

Scott Hanselman: Defer to me because I'm the loud one?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: You're the loud one and you're the one that's come in and sort of asserted yourself aggressively and said, "Let's get this job done, my way." And then afterwards, when you ask them and say, "So are you happy with the fridge?" Then the push back is well, you are and then you're taken aback, you're stunned and say, "What do you mean, I am?" "Sure, we did it your way, so as long as you are happy with the fridge, what do you need from me?"

Scott Hanselman: So let's take that concept and flip it on it's ear, after you graduated with your MBA, you went to work and you went to work with a very diverse crowd of different ages and different colors and different levels of experience and when it came to sitting in a room and solving a problem, not necessarily getting a fridge, but procuring something else, or working through an issue at one of the non-profits that you worked at, how did your technique and



you style and your Africaness work within the context of a room full of Americans?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: It was difficult, there was definitely a learning curve for me, when I'm in the office or if I'm taking a call from a client, for instance, yeah, they may or may not be interested in my 5 minute, 10 minute warm up before I get to the real problem. There are people that legitimately didn't have a lot of time, they need the things handled and handled quickly so it took a while but I guess I've always seen the difference between a professional setting and a social setting, I've always made that distinction between...

Scott Hanselman: Whether it be in Africa or in America?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, right, even in Zim people get things done, even in Zim. So I don't want to imply that Zimbabwe is a bunch of incompetent people that just, everybody's sitting around just kind of saying, "Yeah, don't worry about the time."

Scott Hanselman: When I blogged about African time a very large number of people who've been to Africa immediately related but a lot of people felt a little offended, a little insulted that I was saying, "Oh, you're saying that Africans are lazy and late?" And no, what I was trying to say and apparently I failed, was that Africans have a much more fluid perception of time but that doesn't necessarily mean that a business meeting is going to be running 3 or 4 hours late.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: That's right, that's right, it all depends on what the situation is. I talked about going to visit people in the hospital, for instance, we may leave the house and say, "Okay we're going to visit uncle Mike or whoever for 20 minutes." When we get there, if we find that he really is in a bad state, for instance, I'd be more inclined to spend a couple of hours with them or if we're just having a good time or whatever the case may be whereas I would suggest that you probably would still sort of say, "Hey, we came in here saying, we're going to give it 20 minutes, are 20 minutes are up, let's go, let's do this." So it's probably unfair...

Scott Hanselman: I hear what you're saying, examples like that are always unfair but I think the point is that if somebody's in Zimbabwe we're trying to close on their mortgage, they're going to show up on time at the mortgage broker for the thing.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right.

Scott Hanselman: But if there's a dinner afterwards, for 5 o'clock, they roll in at 8:30.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: That's right, depending on who's hosting the dinner, if it's a boss...

Scott Hanselman: If it's an elder, what they're expectations are.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, first of all, you don't disrespect, that's the way that I was raised. So if my mom were waiting for me somewhere I would be less inclined to keep her waiting, for instance, than a friend of my because then I'd say, "Oh, I was doing this and that and that other thing."

Scott Hanselman: And this goes both ways, people are equally forgiving, based on context.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, right, right. You saw with my brothers, for instance, they'd leave or I'd go with them or you'd go with them and let's say, I'll be back in an hour and then 4 hours later they stroll back in, no apology.

Scott Hanselman: I have a lot of trouble with that because I always over empathize about the other person's time, we went to pick up one of our cousins and he was in downtown Joberg and supposed to pick him up at 11, I think he got picked up around 3 and I thought he was being artificially gracious because he was saying, "No, no, no, it was fine we just hung around." But he was totally fine, he took the opportunity of our lateness to show his wife around downtown and they spent a very leisurely and relaxed 4 hours which I can't even conceive of, a leisurely and relaxed 4 hours of waiting for a ride to see the sites.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right.

Scott Hanselman: So, it's not just about lateness or waiting for someone to be late but it's also taking advantage of the time to do other things which is consistently difficult for me to get my brain around.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Well, in the end, it's all about how you take it, right? If you understand that they mean no disrespect to me by not being here, then you're more likely to roll with it and let it go. If you assume that, "Oh, most Mo said she was going to be here at 11, it's 11:10 and she's still not here, that means that she thinks my 10 minutes is not worth much of anything." It's a very different thing.

Scott Hanselman: Right, it's representative of what she thinks of me as a person.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, but if you say to me, "Scott said that he was going to pick me up at 11, it's now noon." I know that in that hour, whatever he was doing was really very compelling, so much so that he thought it best that he take care of that issue than come here and get me. Then when you come, I can say, "So, what was going on?" And you'd probably tell me, "I had a flat tire, I had to take care of the babies." Whatever, there's usually something. In that instance that our cousin was waiting for us, my



brother was supposed to pick them up, I think was somewhere helping somebody else take care of a really big...

Scott Hanselman: He had a legitimate reason.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: A legitimate thing, it's never, the assumption is never that you're dissing him, you're disrespecting me, and you think I'm not worth anything to you, so I think it's all about perspective.

Scott Hanselman: Yeah, the culture gap is consistently a challenge for us. Time is one thing, interacting with my parents versus your parents, I know that there was a, I don't know if it was a technicality, there's a rule that I'm not supposed to, if I understand correctly, be in the same room as your mom alone, or I'm not supposed to eat? What is the rule?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, it's not that you're not supposed to be in the same room with her and this is really old school, my parents were not like that even before my dad passed away.

Scott Hanselman: Well, they grew up in the city, right?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Yeah, so they've let go of a lot of stuff and they're fairly educated so they don't hold on to a lot of the traditions as much as some people might but right, the idea is that eating is delicate so that's something that should be done separate from the son in law/ the mother in law, so if my mom is eating, you should show your respect to her by letting her eat freely by not being in that room, that type of thing. So you let her eat freely in as much as you should take a bath for instance, you wouldn't be in the same room, obviously and on and on. So it's just a way...

Scott Hanselman: Oh, I see what you're saying. So it's obvious to me in my culture that, yeah, I would not be in the bathroom while your mom was taking a bath, same kind of idea, while she is eating and smacking her lips and doing of that eating stuff.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, right.

Scott Hanselman: And I remember earlier on, it was a debate, mini, mini, tiny debate about, "Are we going to follow these rules? What exactly are we going to do?"

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: And they immediately, my parents immediately just blew them off and just said, "He can't possibly know about these things so a lot of it was just sort of waived.

Scott Hanselman: Right.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Even the bride gift, I think you kind of been pushed to do it because I just said, he's not one of us.

Scott Hanselman: Well, the bride gift was an interesting thing because I knew that, the impression that I got from your mom and dad was that it would have been appreciated, it was appreciated when we did go through with it but I could tell that they were hedging in, in the sense that they're saying, "Well, this white American doesn't want to go through our process, let's let him off the hook."

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Let him go, right.

Scott Hanselman: But I had a sense that if we didn't go through with it, it would be one of those little back of the mind things, 10, 20 years later that would be remembered, not necessarily with negativity but not with fondness, they're not going to go, "Oh, we're fond of the fact the he didn't go through the process." So maybe speak a little bit about the bride gift because I remember we had to get a blanket for your mom to keep her warm, this is called Lobola.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: So yeah, Lobola is basically is your way of thanking my family for taking such good care of me and raising me and all of that good stuff and it is, in it's purest form, it really is just a way of expressing appreciation. Obviously, with the hard economic times, it's become corrupt, a lot of people use it as a way to get money and get rich kind of quicker than they would otherwise, that is not what the original intent was, it really was just a way of saying, I acknowledge that you've raised this wonderful woman and I thank you for it.

Scott Hanselman: And to be clear, this is not a Dowry in the sense that the husband to be receives money from the bride's parents but rather this is a bride gift in that the young man who is marrying the woman is presenting gifts, cows and blankets to the parents of the perspective bride to be. So it's a little bit reverse from what you've think of as a traditional Dowry, it's not a Dowry.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right and I guess it depends on your perspective because, obviously, I grew up with it being, the man does the giving so for me, you never have to explain to me that it's not a Dowry.

Scott Hanselman: This is for the listeners.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right, right. You're right, it is called, it's still is called the bride price really but I don't like that term because it sort of says you're buying something, as I've said, in it's purest form, it really is a way of expressing appreciation and gratitude to your future wife's family for taking care of her.



Scott Hanselman: Is it also setup as a place for the bride to fall back on if the relationship doesn't work out? She could go back to her parents and they're not destitute?

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: You know, I don't know, I have to ask them, I don't know.

Scott Hanselman: I've heard that theory.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: I don't know. I wouldn't have said so but it's entirely possible. I always thought that it was just, as I've said, that expression of appreciation but it tends to be difficult. My parents, obviously because you weren't a Zimbabwean and you had no way of getting cows for you...

Scott Hanselman: Right, then we just went with cash because I couldn't find cows but we did get the blanket, the Ijale for your mom.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: That's right and we did have the goat.

Scott Hanselman: We did have a goat and we went through that whole process.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right.

Scott Hanselman: But I gave the monetary equivalent of a number of cows while your brother who is marrying a woman from Swaziland is going through a much formal process with actual cow procurement.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right.

Scott Hanselman: Which is quite a challenge because he's a city guy, he's a business man and he's got to go and find uncles and people who are going to represent him and help him to find these cows.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: Right.

Scott Hanselman: It's an ongoing process.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: And it is a process, it really is a journey because you could go a couple, two, three times and be sent back as a way of testing your determination and your endurance. How committed is this guy to our daughter? So the first time you show up they may say, "We don't want to talk to you, go away, go away!" And then they chase you out of the house and then you come back again and then they chase you out of the house again and then maybe the third time they'll listen to you and welcome you in and that type of thing. So it is not -- the process is long but again, everybody does this as a sign of respect.

Scott Hanselman: Well, it's definitely been a challenge with one foot in Africa and one foot in America but thank you, small wife for talking to me today on this special edition of Hanselminutes and we will see you again next week.

Ntombenhle Nkiwane: That's right, take care.