

A Musing

Podcast Transcript

006 ▸ Octothorpe

There's a symbol out there that's gone through various versions of itself and refuses to become irrelevant. Perhaps there's something to learn from something as simple as a symbol we use everyday.

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00:00:00.640 - 00:00:03.460

Welcome to A Musing, I'm Diego.

00:00:12.702 - 00:00:15.702

Today's episode, Octothorpe.

00:00:29.910 - 00:00:34.650

Growing up, I was used to seeing this symbol on our phone keypad.

00:00:34.650 - 00:00:39.190

This wasn't a key I found myself using too often, but once in a while, I did.

00:00:39.190 - 00:00:43.750

Back then, we all knew it as the pound sign, or the number sign.

00:00:43.750 - 00:00:49.310

Nowadays, it's been christened by social media as the hashtag.

00:00:49.310 - 00:00:55.150

But that little symbol was originally known by a different name, the Octothorpe.

00:00:56.350 - 00:01:01.030

I know, try to use that word in a conversation today, triple dare you.

00:01:01.030 - 00:01:04.850

Now, the origin of the name Octothorpe is a bit debatable.

00:01:04.850 - 00:01:10.210

Octo means eight, and that refers to the number of line ends in the shape.

00:01:10.210 - 00:01:19.890

However, Thorpe can refer to either a hamlet or a village, according to the dictionary, or to Jim Thorpe, a famous Olympic athlete.

00:01:22.510 - 00:01:27.670

But regardless of the origin, Octothorpe was the first name the symbol had.

00:01:28.490 - 00:01:39.110

Later on, the symbol would come to be known as the pound sign, the hex sign, the square, the cross, the common sign, the space sign, and of course, in our modern times, the hashtag.

00:01:47.478 - 00:02:00.098

The use of the symbol began sometime around the 14th century with the introduction of the Latin abbreviation LB for the Roman term Libra Pondo or pound weight.

00:02:00.098 - 00:02:14.618

And it actually had never occurred to me that the pound sign had to do with actual weight until I saw my manager at a metal distributor that I worked for years back using it next to numbers in these quick notes he used to take.

00:02:14.618 - 00:02:19.478

I had no clue why he was hashtagging numbers on paper, so of course I asked.

00:02:19.478 - 00:02:22.738

And he explained it and schooled me.

00:02:22.738 - 00:02:26.558

And it makes perfect sense why that symbol was known as the pound sign.

00:02:28.358 - 00:02:36.998

What we do know is that a guy named Chris Messina was the first to use that symbol to group topics on Twitter.

00:02:36.998 - 00:02:48.718

And Twitter was the first social media platform to make anything preceded by the symbol into a clickable link that would lead you to a feed of other posts using that same keyword.

00:02:48.718 - 00:02:53.478

Soon Instagram and Facebook would of course follow suit.

00:02:53.478 - 00:03:02.058

Now you may be asking yourself, what type of lesson or pearl of wisdom could we possibly take from the Octothorpe?

00:03:02.058 - 00:03:14.258

Although I geek out over the history of the symbol, the most important aspect of the story of the Octothorpe is how it's managed to survive and stay relevant for ages.

00:03:14.258 - 00:03:25.518

Everywhere from people working at a wholesale metal distributor, to keys on a dial phone, to tags for keywords when you go on a tweet storm.

00:03:25.618 - 00:03:31.038

What's allowed the symbol to survive and thrive is reinvention.

00:03:32.398 - 00:03:39.718

In the three uses that I just described for the Octothorpe, the symbol represents very different things and it fulfills very different needs.

00:03:40.578 - 00:03:42.418

And yet it works.

00:03:42.418 - 00:03:49.938

Reinvention has meant survival and evolution for those simple little crossed lines.

00:03:49.938 - 00:03:54.638

And for that reinvention to happen, someone had to break with convention.

00:03:54.638 - 00:03:58.838

Someone had to say, to hell with it, let's go this new route.

00:03:58.838 - 00:04:01.998

Someone had to take things in a new direction.

00:04:03.358 - 00:04:07.398

And if the Octothorpe could do it, so can you.

00:04:23.507 - 00:04:29.947

Have you ever hit one of those seasons in your life where things feel dry?

00:04:29.947 - 00:04:41.087

When you've reached a lull in your life and nothing exciting seems anywhere near in your horizon, you ever get the sensation like you're trudging through peanut butter?

00:04:41.087 - 00:04:51.587

I know, weird visual, but imagine that sensation and what it would be like, trying to traverse a distance in peanut butter up to your waist.

00:04:52.747 - 00:04:54.947

You can feel that, right?

00:04:54.947 - 00:04:58.267

That's a feeling I had during a season of my life.

00:04:58.267 - 00:05:03.207

I knew that things weren't headed in a positive, vibrant direction.

00:05:03.207 - 00:05:05.947

Everything around me felt stale.

00:05:05.947 - 00:05:10.207

And believe me, I was busy during that time period.

00:05:10.207 - 00:05:17.127

<v SPEAKER_2>But it all still felt so slow.

00:05:26.049 - 00:05:45.309

Soon I realized the feeling was due to the fact that I was dragging a lot of ideas, mindsets, relationships and routines that I no longer felt connected to, that I no longer felt added to my life, but rather depleted my life of energy and purpose and expectation.

00:05:45.309 - 00:05:50.509

And man, that last one, expectation is so important.

00:05:50.509 - 00:05:58.089

When you reach a point in life where you lose the expectation of what's to come, that's when you know it's time for a change.

00:05:58.089 - 00:06:02.189

That's when it's time for the pound sign to become the hashtag.

00:06:15.743 - 00:06:19.783

I know that a shift in direction can be a terrifying thing.

00:06:19.783 - 00:06:22.743

Believe me, I know firsthand.

00:06:22.743 - 00:06:28.023

That trudging I was feeling in my life was something I was no longer willing to put up with.

00:06:28.023 - 00:06:34.823

I needed to heed the warnings of my heart and mind that they were yelling at me from the inside.

00:06:34.823 - 00:06:36.423

Family wouldn't understand.

00:06:36.423 - 00:06:38.763

My then-wife wouldn't understand.

00:06:38.763 - 00:06:41.383

Those I called friends would judge me.

00:06:41.383 - 00:06:43.403

The community I belonged to would shun me.

00:06:43.863 - 00:06:46.703

All of these things happened.

00:06:46.703 - 00:06:59.583

But I needed to make changes in my life and in myself that were going to be hard, yes, but that in time would lead me to become the most genuine and sincere version of myself I've ever been.

00:06:59.583 - 00:07:06.643

And along with that feeling of being my most genuine self, that sense of expectation returned to my life.

00:07:16.623 - 00:07:24.983

Try this if you feel that sensation of trudging in your own life, and your inner voice is screaming out for change.

00:07:27.012 - 00:07:30.472

Break with the conventions in your life.

00:07:30.472 - 00:07:34.292

Be bold and say to hell with it, I'm going in a new route.

00:07:34.292 - 00:07:36.952

Take your life in a new direction if you need to.

00:07:36.952 - 00:07:42.972

It's your life to explore and to navigate until you've arrived at a place of contentment and peace.

00:07:42.972 - 00:07:43.732

<v SPEAKER_2>Don't settle.

00:07:44.452 - 00:07:47.432

Now, this is a tricky gray area here.

00:07:47.432 - 00:07:53.472

You should not deliberately cause harm to somebody by the change that you're making in your life.

00:07:53.472 - 00:07:55.812

You should not abandon a dependent.

00:07:55.812 - 00:07:59.212

You shouldn't forsake your responsibilities overnight.

00:07:59.212 - 00:08:01.772

That is not what we're talking about here.

00:08:01.772 - 00:08:09.632

But it's also important to realize that it's not your job to please another human being at the expense of your own peace and joy.

00:08:09.632 - 00:08:18.972

And if someone who claims to love you is forcing you to settle, perhaps it's time to re-evaluate the sway and influence that that individual should have in your life.

00:08:20.692 - 00:08:30.592

We grant power to the people in our lives by choosing to go with their flow, but that current that they're following isn't always in our best interest.

00:08:32.072 - 00:08:38.392

Don't let the shackles of fear keep you from discovering a better version of yourself and your life.

00:08:39.752 - 00:08:42.272

Don't fear reinventing yourself.

00:08:42.272 - 00:08:44.392

Life isn't a prison sentence.

00:08:44.392 - 00:08:45.712

It's a journey.

00:08:45.712 - 00:08:53.512

The moment you feel like you have nothing left to grow or evolve in, that's when the journey ends and the trudging begins.

00:08:53.512 - 00:08:56.912

So if you need to, go the way of the Octothorpe.

00:08:56.912 - 00:09:00.532

Rediscover yourself to the fullest.

00:09:02.252 - 00:09:03.432

Let me know how that goes for you.

00:09:04.592 - 00:09:09.852

You can write me at [contactamusing at gmail.com](mailto:contactamusing@gmail.com).

00:09:09.852 - 00:09:19.152

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00:09:19.152 - 00:09:23.192

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00:09:23.192 - 00:09:29.032

And please share this message with someone who needs to hear it in your life.

00:09:29.032 - 00:09:30.352

I'll catch you in the next episode.

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