

**Peter:** [00:00:00] Erin, Welcome to my podcast. And thank you for taking time out of your very busy day to have a conversation with me today.

**Erin:** [00:00:08] Thank you so much for having me.

**Peter:** [00:00:10] As we're recording this, we're also video recording and as you'll see when you're watch this on YouTube. The sun is shining where it is and today is April 6th. We're recording this show some a month or two or three or go by before it actually is aired. But she is talking to us from beautiful San Diego, California, however she used to live in northeast Ohio in the Cleveland area. And I think she was saying before we got started how much she missed the winters the cold the snow. And think about maybe relocating back is that... Or is that just sarcasm on my part?

**Erin:** [00:00:51] You know I do miss my Cleveland Cavaliers but I do about the weather.

**Peter:** [00:00:57] Yeah I actually I was thinking about this. I played golf in San Diego at an AICPA conference some years ago. The conference was in May. I'm in Southern California in May and it was the coldest round of golf I think I ever played. What was it. The May gray June gloom?

**Erin:** [00:01:18] Yeah that's right. Our nicest months don't really come around until September and October.

**Peter:** [00:01:24] And then through now to April.

**Erin:** [00:01:28] Right.

**Peter:** [00:01:28] I thought it was sunny and beautiful year round in San Deigo, so I guess I learned the hard way I was completely wrong about that.

**Erin:** [00:01:35] You must have been here on one of our 20 days of gray.

**Peter:** [00:01:40] I was. It felt a lot like baby fall in Cleveland at times when we were playing golf. So Erin give us your story tell us tell us about yourself because you are a CPA and as I mentioned in the intro but you're not their stereotypical CPA, which kind of really intrigues me because obviously I'm not one either.

**Erin:** [00:02:02] Yeah I like to tell people I'm a recovering accountant. For those of you who are just wrapping up this season and I know you know what that feels like. But I did. I started my career in public accounting. I actually really enjoyed the work for a short amount of time. And then the long hours just really started to get to me and eventually I moved on to industry looking for a work life balance, which is also kind of a joke because we all know that it doesn't happen if you're in the accounting field, regardless of where you are working. But while I was in industry I had an opportunity to really work with leaders of all different shapes and sizes. That's one of, I think, the gifts of working in accounting is you do get a chance to connect and work for different people, which keeps it exciting. Right? it's not a sterile environment. But what I learned was there were a few that I just absolutely loved working for and there were also asking that I wasn't happy to work for. right? Didn't only have the leadership skills that were required. And at the time it just felt like gosh this is not for me I don't want to work with people like this. [00:03:18] And so I made the jump. I went completely 180 from accounting and started a coaching practice. And really the thing that I love about the work I'm doing now is that I get to come back to the accounting industry and work with these professionals to help them be their best selves. Help them and become better leaders who are more effective and who can connect to the people that they're leading. [26.3]

**Peter:** [00:03:46] So tell me, when you when you left public accounting, and you just left

accounting and went into coaching. Tell me about this coaching venture that that you went down.

**Erin:** [00:03:59] Well really what happened - it's kind of an interesting story - but I went to a cocktail party in our neighborhood. We lived in a condo complex. There's quite a few units here. And actually wasn't even thinking I was going to go. But I got dragged there against my will and I ended up meeting a neighbor of mine and she overheard me telling somebody that I was an accountant and I was really not enjoying my work and I felt like there was more to life. And she came over and said "You know I've been there. I'm a recovering accountant too. And you should come check out this program," and it was a coach training program, and really I went hoping to learn more about myself because I was in this place where I knew I didn't like what I was doing but I also didn't know what else was out there. So people said well why don't you go back to school or why don't you switch careers. But [00:04:53] I really felt stuck. I didn't feel like I had a clear direction. So I actually took on coaching and coach training as a way to just learn more about myself, really for that person development aspect of it. And almost by accident fell into it as a career. [17.9]

**Peter:** [00:05:11] That's a great story. So you're kicking and screaming at a cocktail party. I don't know anything what that's like. I think I run to them, versus kick and scream, but you know even to the point, when I talk to the accountants and stuff about networking, you just never know what could happen at any type of networking event. And the ones that you tend to go to kicking and screaming, or hemming and hawing, actually I find that something actually magical. That's happened to me a couple of times.

**Erin:** [00:05:47] Yeah. It's all about relationships. You just never know.

**Peter:** [00:05:50] It's all about relationships because we are we are all in the people business and the more relationships the better relationships. So prior to coming back into the accounting side of this, what type of industries were you were you involved with?

**Erin:** [00:06:06] I worked with people from a variety of industries. Some of them I still work with today even though my focus is on the accounting industry. I was working with psychologists. I was working with attorneys. I was working with small business owners. People who were leading teams, and a lot of that is consistent with my business now working with business owners or team leaders. But really when I was starting out I would work with anybody.

**Peter:** [00:06:36] One of the qualifying questions was does the check clear - Will the check clear? I'd be happy to work with you. That'd be great. That true entrepreneurial spirit. When someone asks you can you do this and you pause for a moment and go, "Of course I can.

**Erin:** [00:06:52] You look at your bank account you're like yeah. I can.

**Peter:** [00:06:55] Give them a great big smile and go into the lab and get it done. So when you going through this training program, what did you find that was maybe a strength of yours that you have that maybe you didn't realize was as strong as you thought it was?

**Erin:** [00:07:16] One of the things that I really think I took away from it was connecting - connecting with people. It's something that I love to do, and I think in that regard I took it for granted: that it's a skill that not everybody has, but it's something that I really enjoy. I really need interaction with people I love to meet new people and learn different things from them and from their experience. And so then they told me that by connecting with people and helping them to develop as individuals I can build a business, and I thought well that's pretty awesome. Good deal. And [00:07:54] I think I took that for granted in the in the accounting industry, too. Not. Not everyone has that natural ability to connect and relate to other people. So it's a skill that I like to help others develop. [13.0]

**Peter:** [00:08:08] I got a couple of quick follow up questions but, one, I mean we go back... how long have we known each other? on LinkedIn.

**Erin:** [00:08:15] I don't know maybe a year or two.

**Peter:** [00:08:17] Yeah I was trying to find that information but we had talked earlier this year, maybe last month, a mutual friend of ours Kristen Rampe, who I interviewed a while ago, kind of gave us one of those online virtual introductions on LinkedIn and you had contacted me a month or two ago kind of emailing back and forth. We said why don't we just pick up the phone and have a conversation, and all of a sudden like an hour flew by I think. Because I mean we do share a lot of the same interests in the accounting profession. But [00:08:56] **it's just making that connection. And you're right. A lot of our brethren in the accounting profession really have a hard time making that connection. I hear a lot of times "what do I say?" It's as easy as just walking up to them and saying hello and just asking some questions, but I know there's a bit of nerves involved.** [21.1] But the one thing I do want to ask about your background: when you graduated college, did she go immediately into the accounting profession?

**Erin:** [00:09:27] Yeah that's kind of an interesting story too. I. Went to school and my parents said you know what do you want to do? What do you want to major in? We're not going to pay for your college for you to just go party the whole time. You have to have some direction. And I said you know I'm not really ready to answer that question right now, but all I know is I will not major in accounting. I know for sure. And I started to register for classes and wouldn't you know it, because I had transferred, so I was kind of late to the game. And the only class available for intro to accounting was this professor who had a real reputation. He was the guy that was going to chew you up and spit you out and filter people out of his beloved accounting program.

**Peter:** [00:10:18] Ahh.

**Erin:** [00:10:18] Like oh I'm in for it. And one day he told me he came up and he said Erin I think you're really good at this. You should consider a career in accounting. And that's literally all it took. Next thing you know graduating with my degree in accounting and I did. I was able to secure a full-time offer through an internship and moved to California and started right away.

**Peter:** [00:10:43] So do you remember the name of the professor?

**Erin:** [00:10:45] Yeah. Dr. Robert Bloom at John Carroll University. I'm sure... everyone knows him. People still talk about him. I hear he's still there.

**Peter:** [00:10:55] So if anybody is listening to this podcast in the Cleveland area and went to John Carroll University, please go tell the professor to listen to his podcast. I think he would enjoy that reference because being a former professor of accounting at Ohio Dominican University, I love it when I would hear stories like that from my students. That's really cool. But you've had... I mean you're not your stereotypical accountant. It must have been growing up, and your parents gave you this gift of communicating, this gift of gab. In my family... you know I was raised in the Greek-American household. All we do is we eat we talk, we connect, we serve food. I've worked in restaurants, and that's where I developed that skill. And I'm curious how yours was developed at an early age.

**Erin:** [00:11:50] You know I think my mom's very social She always used to throw parties, hosted events at our house. We were always kind of house to be at, but my dad's a little bit more shy so I'm not sure. I must have gone after my mom and maybe a little bit of having to figure it out on my own in school. I'm not sure.

**Peter:** [00:12:13] That's great because it does take a little bit of... I think once you get the hang of it, once you're comfortable with it, you don't think about it. But it's making that transition from it's something I'm not used to to something I need to do. And last year I was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and my contact there was a partner at a local firm. And I asked answer the question how did you get into accounting? And her words were "because I didn't like people." All I wanted to do was come to the firm, sit in my cubicle, and do tax work. And I said wait a minute. Clearly, you're a partner in the firm, you realized at some point in time that you needed to make better connections and she goes "yes, and I've worked on it very hard to get to it. It still doesn't come naturally." But she's worked so hard perfecting it that she doesn't have to think twice about it, except she says she can stand in front of 400 people teaching class and not even worry. But sometimes she struggles in smaller social, say four or five people, and a circle communicating and she just goes blank or tries to stay away. What advice would you give this person in how to break through that?

**Erin:** [00:13:36] Well I think that you said something interesting, where like we have to do it, and I think it also gets easier the more you do it. So part of it is just about practice: where you start to trust yourself in those types of situations. And it's interesting because usually it's backwards, right, where you can talk to five people, but put me in front of 400 and no thanks.

**Peter:** [00:13:57] Right.

**Erin:** [00:13:58] But on the other hand you can rehearse what you're going to say to 400 people, and you don't have to deal with that uncertainty of what will they say or what will they ask me or how will they respond. So I would say practice, for sure. And I think it's really just about trusting yourself and owning who you are. All your quirks and all of it. Just bring it and connect with people.

**Peter:** [00:14:23] I like that. All of our quirks. Because we all do, and a lot of us will let that be a hindrance into doing something because we're afraid that we will make a mistake or say something stupid. If I had a nickel or dime for every time I said something stupid at a networking event, I could retire very rich... But you know you learn when you say something stupid. I'm sorry I didn't really mean or apologize or just move on and move past that and don't make it that big of a deal, while inside your head your inner critic is just screaming their bloody voice at you. It is that balance and that confidence level.

**Erin:** [00:15:05] Yeah and I think it's also remembering that they're human too, and they've been in your shoes. They've made the silly comment at a networking event before. You know we can all really relate. I think we hold ourselves to super high sometimes unmeetable standard, and think that everybody else is perfect and we're the only ones that you know that put our foot in our mouth sometimes, and it's just not... it's not fun to... it's so much pressure.

**Peter:** [00:15:33] Accept failure. [00:15:34] Accept that you're going screw up or make a mistake. And the other thing I tell audiences on this on this topic is you know why you might not like to network, you know why you might be hesitant to network. And it's it all goes back to your mother. I blame your mother. I blame my mother. I blame all mothers for those who struggle in networking [19.6] because your mother always told you "don't talk to.

**Erin:** [00:15:58] Strangers.

**Peter:** [00:15:58] Strangers. However, [00:16:01] a stranger is somebody who's in downtown Cleveland with a bottle of Mogen David trying to get a conversation going with a mailbox or a light pole. That's a stranger. But I always tell people in any business environment, these aren't strangers - these are opportunities. [16.4] And the more that you can grasp that knowledge that you just never know what could come about meeting someone and not giving them that power...

it's easier to get past that shyness. It's easier to get past it and embrace it versus repel from it.

**Erin:** [00:16:35] Yeah. And you know my my husband actually has historically been very introverted; very much against networking. If he could build his business and be successful in his career without it, he was the kind of guy who would do anything.

**Peter:** [00:16:51] Yeah.

**Erin:** [00:16:52] To avoid that step, and we actually met with somebody recently that is very successful in the military arena. He's an admiral, and he was sharing about some times in his career where he just you know kind of went above and beyond to help somebody who was struggling. And then later on was faced with... I think he shared that it was someone who he had mentored when he was working at the Naval Academy, and then he was up for a job promotion and turns out that student's dad was going to be his future boss. And it's just things like that... he didn't know that at the time, when he reached out to mentor this young Navy officer, and it turned out that it was somebody that really advanced his career later on. So I always think of that too because [00:17:44] the thing I see at networking sometimes is people say well I'm not selling anything or I don't mean to network for my accounting career. And you might not quote unquote need it right now, but like we said: you just never know where you may be able to help that person or they may be able to help advance your career in some way. [21.5]

**Peter:** [00:18:06] Yeah. I agree with that. You just never know. Somebody came up to me at a conference and said that their companies are just merged and he'd been the CFO for one company for 20 plus years and now he's going to be out of a job. And he goes oh my gosh I haven't networked in 20 some odd years. And he had this fear in his face. And I said, one, breath, two, go home and take a pad of paper and just start writing names down. You have been networking. You just haven't been really focused on it. But ultimately you've made connections, you've run into people, you just need to remember who they are. Write them down. I think you'll be surprised how big your network is. And then I put the caveat: It could have been it could have been a whole lot bigger if you said I need to network at any business opportunity. Any CPE event. And just get to go as many people as possible.

**Erin:** [00:19:04] Yeah absolutely.

**Peter:** [00:19:06] Because you just never know. So when you're coaching those in the accounting profession, are you primarily coached at the manager level, senior manager or partner, CFO, staff? What is the crux?

**Erin:** [00:19:22] Yeah [00:19:22] I like to say that I coached throughout our career lifecycle. I start way as early as CPA candidacy, so that might be fresh out of college just starting their careers, or sometimes up to the manager level. I help candidates who are struggling to pass the CPA exam to be more successful and they've been having really good results from it, which is pretty cool. [23.6]

**Peter:** [00:19:47] OK we'll get off the phone right now. Hold on. So tell me about this. You're helping coach those who are studying for the CPA exam, but it sounds like you're not coaching them in the technical aspect of taking the exam.

**Erin:** [00:20:00] Mhm.

**Peter:** [00:20:01] So you tell me more about that now. Now I'm intrigued. You're a guru.

**Erin:** [00:20:05] Yeah. So you're right: it's not at all about technical content. Because to be honest it's been a little while since I've done that, and also I could never keep up with all the different



studying materials that people use. So candidates usually come to me after they've failed one or more parts. Some have failed multiple parts multiple times, have been passed up for promotions. Like they are really getting to that point where it's make or break. And so we work on things like how to get over a failure. We were talking about a high performing group of people, many of whom have, you know like me, breezed through life and were very successful almost by accident, without ever having to try... And then you meet your first challenge where you have to... you know, you don't become automatically successful. And it's a challenge. It really is. So I help them with bouncing back from a failure. We also talk about creating a plan that really works with our life. When I was taking the exam myself I remember people would say well here's how I did it.

**Peter:** [00:21:15] Mhm.

**Erin:** [00:21:15] That's not necessarily what's going to work for everyone. And so we really work closely with you know sort of looking at the demands of their life. Do they have kids and a family? Do they have outside activities that are really important to them? And how can we have the CPA exam fit in with what's already going on? And then there's of course some things about boundaries and accountability and sticking with it.

**Peter:** [00:21:39] Right.

**Erin:** [00:21:40] It's a long process. You know you have to stay motivated and to study, even when you don't feel like it. But it's been a lot of fun. It's super rewarding, and I get so excited when they call me and say "I passed!"

**Peter:** [00:21:53] Wow. So you might have the statistic, you may not, but if you can guess: [00:21:58] what is your success rate on those who come to you wanting your help, wanting your advice, on how to get past the failure and how to create that plan and how to be successful? What would you say that success rate would be?

**Erin:** [00:22:11] Well the average pass rate is something around 49 percent for each part of the exam. I run more like 85 percent, and I don't think I've ever had someone who's failed twice after working with me. And to give you a little bit of insight, I had people sit for five parts of the exam in the last quarter and they all passed. [38.5]

**Peter:** [00:22:37] Wow.

**Erin:** [00:22:38] Mhm.

**Peter:** [00:22:38] All right so now I have asked this question: do you take clients nationally?

**Erin:** [00:22:44] Yeah. I work nationally. It's all over the phone. I do have a few clients that I meet in over Skype or Zoom, because they like the personal connection. If I can meet them in person, locally, or if I'm traveling, I always try to do that. But yes, my clients are everywhere.

**Peter:** [00:23:00] OK audience. Those of you who know people who are studying for the exam and struggling, I think we may have a solution for you. Uncovering a solution for you. Because I am so intrigued by... I've always heard, when I hear somebody talk about a CPA exam coach or a CPA exam, I think of Becker. I think of the review courses. But this is the other— This is completely the opposite. And having an 85 percent success rate - Wow! That is... that's boom! That's cool.

**Erin:** [00:23:36] It is really fun, and I use to... actually when I first started doing it I didn't like it because I was feeling the pressure. Like I have to help these folks pass - it's on me now.

**Peter:** [00:23:49] Right.

**Erin:** [00:23:50] But I've really been able to refine the process and get some tricks up my sleeve that do tend to help people.

**Peter:** [00:23:57] OK. So two things. So how long have you been doing this coaching? How many years?

**Erin:** [00:24:01] I've been coaching for four years now. I've been coaching for the CPA exam for the last two.

**Peter:** [00:24:07] So not to give out all your tricks and techniques. but if there's one small trick that you could share with the audience on being successful what would that be?

**Erin:** [00:24:18] Well I'm trying to think of my favorite. You know this is the one that I really love. A lot of candidates come to me and, whether they've started already and had some failures or if they're just getting started, which is amazing because they don't have any experience with it, but they come to me already hating the CPA exam.

**Peter:** [00:24:39] Yeah.

**Erin:** [00:24:39] They are like geared up, ready for battle, I'm going to conquer this thing... And they've already got this enemy type relationship with it. And so one of the things I've worked with my clients on is developing like a love-hate relationship with it. It's not going to be fun all the time, but it's almost like hey come on like we're in this together. It's going to be a kind of brutal six months, and actually where this came from I'll give you the background: A colleague of mine her or, her aunt I believe, was experiencing some really debilitating back pain. She went to all sorts of specialists, was really struggling, and was frustrated because she had just retired and this was supposed to be like the prime time of her life where she would get to enjoy and really experience everything. So she was heartbroken that she was basically bedridden and was just in so much pain and no one could figure out why. And she was resisting it. She was angry about it. You know she was just trying to get rid of it. So really resisting her current situation. And one day she just decided look - I can't let this ruin my life. I'm going to figure out a way to live with it, and actually had a conversation with it and said you know what... It's just me and you back pain. We're going to do this life together. You're coming with me. And you know we're so going enjoy the grandkids, we're going to go travel as much as we can, and we're going to do this together. And within a few weeks it was gone.

**Peter:** [00:26:14] Her back pain?

**Erin:** [00:26:15] It Went away, and it was just... I mean some people aren't believers in that stuff, but I really am and I think that the more we resist things the more it persists. And she just was willing to let it go and partner with it. And you know move through it. It's crazy. And that's the same thing with the exam: we resist it, it persists. So just own it and love it.

**Peter:** [00:26:41] Wow! That's a wonderful story. Man, my jaw hit the floor. Phew! At the college level, at the university level, I don't ever remember professors saying it's OK. The CPA exam you'll be okay. Back when I took it was before they had it... We had to take it all at once, basically over two and a half day period. The horror stories that people would talk about coming out of it and just even the professors... they were they were not painting a decent picture. And you know I knew my strengths and weaknesses. I got into a profession a little bit later in life. So I was in graduate school and I went and took all four parts without studying.

**Erin:** [00:27:28] Mm. How did that go?

**Peter:** [00:27:28] I wanted to see, one, if I would pass anything - I didn't - But I also didn't fail anything at the time. So that gave me a baseline. I said OK, what are my two favorite parts here? So the next time I took it I took all four, but I focused on those two knowing that I had a good probability that I would pass the other pieces. I think it took me three times in total to do it and figure out a plan, versus I hear people - and I did spend a lot of time studying and preparing for it - But yeah you do psych yourself out for that thing.

**Erin:** [00:28:03] Mhm. It's just like golf. It's just as much a game of technical skill as it is mental. You know if you go in there and you spend all the hours that you should - you know really did your work as far as studying and preparing. That's great. But the first second you get a question that you don't know and it psyches you out, and you're not mentally prepared for that, that's it.

**Peter:** [00:28:28] Well that's a great point because I use that same analogy when I talk about public speaking. If you're so... if you've got this perfectionist mentality, the first thing that you know that you messed up or got the question wrong or something, standing in front of an audience, you begin to panic and it's just all downhill from there... versus OK I messed up. Let's just keep moving forward and I'm not going to let this thing get me down. And as we're sitting here talking about it, in my mind I'm having flashbacks of nightmares, I believe, that was happening. But wow that is such great great advice. And even more so: hire her! Don't go through the mental anguish of the exam - take the great outlook that Erin has and have her help you, and don't stress over it any more. Wow. That's awesome.

**Erin:** [00:29:22] Yeah. It's cool. But then, kind of back to your original question, I do work with people past the CPA exam. Later on in their careers when they've been successful and now they're managing people. I do coach and also train a lot of those folks with really developing their leadership skills to be more well-rounded as professionals.

**Peter:** [00:29:45] Because we all know that the first four years, five years of the CPA's is life is full of technical knowledge and absorption with no anything else. And when you get to the manager level... you know a lot of I think the profession has utilized Peter Drucker's theory of the Peter Principle: we will promote you to your level of incompetence.

**Erin:** [00:30:08] Mhm.

**Peter:** [00:30:08] Because I'm not used to working with people. I don't know how... and I've got to do reviews. I'll have to manage them, but now I have to manage up to the partners - oh and I have to manage out to the clients, and it's not so much about the work. And yeah there's a lot of need for us in this area.

**Erin:** [00:30:30] Yeah. It is overwhelming. And like I said you get a chance to work with all different leaders. I had a chance to work with one. His name is Kevin, and he was my supervising senior on one of my biggest engagements and he really pushed me - he pushed me outside of my comfort zone as a young staff. He had me working on challenging areas. I was in audit practice, so challenging audit areas, and at the time I thought he was crazy. I was thinking to myself like does he not know I'm fresh out of school and have no idea what I'm doing? What is he thinking? Like this guy's crazy. But he took the time to really develop me. He took time. You know he was really busy also, but he took time to help me understand why I was doing the things I was doing, why it was important. And you know not only did that develop me as a professional but it created a loyalty from me to him. If he ever needed anything, I was the first one to raise my hand. I was willing to work long hours or go the extra mile for him. And we're still friends today. [00:31:40] So I think we tend to have this short sighted view of things when we're real busy. You know let's just get done



what we have to get done. But there really needs to be a focus on developing yourself as a leader and developing the people around you. [17.1] The one thing I think of sometimes is, you know, when you do get promoted, it's like they know you're technically strong. If you weren't technically strong you wouldn't have gotten promoted. They would figure out a way to move you to a different department or move you out. So you've proven that already. And now it's about soft skills.

**Peter:** [00:32:19] Wow. That's so true. So [00:32:22] when when you're coaching at this level what's the number one skill that you see is missing? [8.7] That you have to spend more time on in developing?

**Erin:** [00:32:34] Just one?

**Peter:** [00:32:36] What's the top one? The number one.

**Erin:** [00:32:40] I think the top one is actually probably delegation. [3.4]

**Peter:** [00:32:44] Delegation.

**Erin:** [00:32:45] Yeah. Knowing how to delegate effectively is one part of it. Right. Actually having a road map or how to step by step guide so that you can do kind of like Kevin did, where he delegated work to me but made it a development opportunity and had be something that I saw value in for myself versus this guy is just piling on more work. And this isn't really my job I should just be auditing cash and have an easy day. So that's one thing - it's the how to - but then it's also the willingness to do it. There's all sorts of fears and underlying things that get in people's way that stop them from delegating altogether.

**Peter:** [00:33:30] What are some of those fears that you see?

**Erin:** [00:33:33] Well one is... we talked about how this is such a high performing group of individuals right. We've been praised, many of us (this may not speak to all of us, but many of us) have been praised throughout our lives for being the one that gets results. Like I am- You can count on me to produce high quality work and I'm going to get it done for you. Now if I'm getting my value from you appreciating that part of me, I'm not going to give my tasks to somebody else because I get praise for that.

**Peter:** [00:34:06] Mmm.

**Erin:** [00:34:07] So they almost see it as... some people will share, well, if I delegate these tasks, they'll see me as replaceable or my value inherently goes down because I've given that to someone else and now they can get praise for doing that work. So that's one side of it. And then the other is not wanting to be pushy - not wanting to be that guy that is dumping more work on other people. You know it's my responsibility. The only other one is just wanting to control it. I'm better at it, faster at it, smarter than you. It's easier for me to do it myself rather than take the time.

**Peter:** [00:34:48] That's the one I probably hear more often than not is I can get it done quicker, it's easier, I'll just get it done. But then I also ask them how many hours a day are you working, because you haven't delegated. And then if I do it's going to take me twice as long to teach Erin how to do this. Right it is. But you know a month from now you can let the reins off and Erin will be fine and you just carve out extra extra hours in your day. There is that you know that upfront cost, that sunk cost, that you have to incur in order to release some things. And I hear that. But the one that you lead off with kind of surprised me a lot. That thought process of I've been praised as the high performer. I am a person that gets it done. But once you once you've moved into a management role that whole job description is now changed from when you've been a senior or a

staff person, and your job is to develop people. And I think teaching is a hard thing to do. As we're sitting or thinking about it, we speak in a different language. We speak in a foreign language called accounting.

**Erin:** [00:36:13] Yeah [laughs]

**Peter:** [00:36:13] And it has taken us a long time to master that. So as they've been learning this new language of accounting to delegate, to teach, it's not all accounting language. You've got to use some different approaches. Some plain English aspect to get people to understand. If I can't get you to understand I get even more frustrated, and then it just goes haywire versus let me let me see how I can translate this to you in a simpler manner or put some type of analogy around it or metaphor to help you understand. A lot of people really struggle with that.

**Erin:** [00:36:53] Yeah. Yeah absolutely. I think one of the challenges when I was first in a leadership role with brand new staff working for me was if I explained it the one way that I understood it, and then they didn't get it, they have a different learning style or just a different communication style than I did... It really threw in my face like oh maybe I don't know it as well as I thought I did. It kind of highlights some of those insecurities. And again I think that's really all it takes for some people to get thrown off and not want to confront that again. Like OK well never mind I'll just - I'll do it.

**Peter:** [00:37:32] I ran across a recent quote by I think it was Einstein said "if you can't described something simply then you don't know it well enough." I just I'm sorry Albert I know I just kind of butchered that. But it was along that sense there.

**Erin:** [00:37:48] Mhm. Some people say you should be able to describe your business or describe what you do so that a seven year old can understand it.

**Peter:** [00:37:54] Right.

**Erin:** [00:37:55] And it is - it is a challenge, and I think that's where accounting firms could... well, I don't want to call anybody out, but I feel like we could do a better job of developing those types of skills and really placing some more emphasis on how necessary it is. [00:38:14] We tend to focus on being really technically sound, which of course is important because that's the job. But being able to teach and develop others is not a skill that comes naturally. We don't just know how to do that because we got promoted to senior or promoted to manager. You know it doesn't come in a little package they give you - you have to develop those skills, and sometimes it feels a little too little too late. [25.0] They do it at the manager level. These folks have been leading others for a long time... and maybe not doing a great job of it.

**Peter:** [00:38:49] Exactly. And it should be it should be sprinkled at some degree - the 15 percent or 20 percent during those first five years. I think another challenge that managers have with this complex language that we've learned over a period of time is translating that in a way that somebody else who doesn't have the same learning style that we do, even within the profession, but [00:39:18] we tend to be attached too much to data and we don't turn data into stories. People remember stories... we don't remember data. [12.6] And I think that's one of the biggest opportunities we have as a profession - is to take very complex information and build a story around it so people can understand, and I've heard people say mine is so complex and there's no way I could turn that into a story, and my response is to go watch a TED talk. Technology Education Design - it's all technical in nature, and they take very technical topics and craft it in a way, into a story, and talk about the statistics and the story that really resonates with people. So it can be done... it's just not billable; it's not chargeable.

**Erin:** [00:40:16] [laughs]

**Peter:** [00:40:16] And that might actually - I just thought about that. That might be the challenge because it's something that's not, but takes extra work to do.

**Erin:** [00:40:23] I love that though. I was thinking that you do need to be able to understand the application of it. You know I think the other challenge is that, when we do get busy in accounting, and I mean we get real busy and if there's not enough time for that it resorts to well I'll just file the work paper from last year. I'll just do what they've done. I'll kind of figure it out, but we don't take that extra time to get a really deep understanding that would be required to create a story out of it to explain it in multiple ways. But I love that. I think that would be more fun, if it was stories that people can remember.

**Peter:** [00:41:02] I think it is too, and what you just described was... what was her name? We all dated her. Sally? Yeah. Same as last year.

**Erin:** [00:41:13] [laughs] Yeah.

**Peter:** [00:41:14] Yeah we have to find a way to dump Sally and find a new creative approach. I just... shameless plug, but the class that I developed came about because a managing partner who I knew, I asked him a question: So what keeps you up at night? He goes Sally, and I say your wife's name is Mary.

**Erin:** [00:41:35] [laughs]

**Peter:** [00:41:35] Are you confessing something to me? No. You know what I mean. Sally same as last year. Our firm has been in business for a number of years. He was a young managing partner and we've been doing that same thing we did prior year, prior year, prior year. I'm afraid Sally is going to rear ugly head one day and is going to take this firm down. And he said how could you help me? So I came up with that creativity course for him. But yeah we get so busy that we're also under these chargeable constraints, whatever, that I think don't allow us to take a moment to really think through the issue.

**Erin:** [00:42:15] Mhm.

**Peter:** [00:42:15] Because we got to make budget.

**Erin:** [00:42:17] Right. Yeah. It's kind of like you're stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Something we should do, and sometimes the constraints don't allow for it. But I think it's really worthwhile to take some time out and and look at that. Because, I think like you were saying, that partner is onto something now. You know we get - I'm guilty of it in my personal life, too -

[00:42:41] You get sort of stuck in your ways, you get complacent, and then things get comfortable. And then before you know it the industry changed; it's moved on, and there you are still doing it the same as last year, which is really the same as 20 years ago. And you're like woah, what happened? [14.4]

**Peter:** [00:42:56] Exactly, and you're a lot younger than I am, so you can imagine how I see my baby boomer brethren getting really... still, this is the way we've done it. When I hear "this is the way we've always done it," my first thought is now we need to change it.

**Erin:** [00:43:13] Yes.

**Peter:** [00:43:14] Because it's outdated. And some people go oh no it's not. I went Oh OK. May I

ask you this question? Do you have a Blackberry on you that I can use?

**Erin:** [00:43:23] [laughs] Or like the the old car phones that you have to plug into the cigarette lighter.

**Peter:** [00:43:29] [laughs] They were about the size of a couch at one point in time. Go back and watch the movie Wall Street with Charlie Sheen and his dad. You look at these phones - and Gordon Gekko and Michael Douglas - and these things were huge and now we've got everything on a phone. Yeah. We have to not be complacent and reliant on salary. And so... is it time - this was probably stuck in my mind because this one of the episodes coming up in the next couple of weeks is I interviewed Jodi Padar, who's the radical CPA. If you don't know Jodi, listen to the interview because she's trying to flip the profession to get out of that rut - to start looking at things in a different way, and maybe it's time that we have to dump this utilization, realization, building model and go to a flat fee type of thing to allow us to have the time to reflect; ask that extra question and don't feel like we're under this budgetary time constraint. Because what I even ask those in the firms, "Does utilization and realization really work?" And I get the same answer: "Probably not, but this is the way we've always done it."

**Erin:** [00:44:53] Yeah it's true. And I think the profession really is moving. I will check out her interview and that sounds really interesting. But it sounds like it is moving to being more people focused, more client focused, client service in a new more dynamic way, and things are going to have to change. We've got to keep up with the times.

**Peter:** [00:45:15] Yeah, we need to keep up with the times. As I say you know for many, for a long time, the P in CPA stood for procrastination, when it really now needs to stand for progressive - being in front of it versus behind it. You know we're always working on yesterday. Now if yesterday's gonna be done by maybe a machine or some type of program then I need to be able to look forward and do more predicting versus procrastinating.

**Erin:** [00:45:46] Yeah. Strategy. But that doesn't really work with the CPA. I like your word.

**Peter:** [00:45:53] Exactly. But to your point I think I see more and more firms start to really embrace this and start looking at it, and recognize that they need the change. They need to do something different. So how do we? And as you have grown your business with your leadership and coaching those people skills... Same way with myself, because during the recession I was just teaching all hardcore accounting. That consists of maybe .113 of my business today because there is that need that continues to grow. So that's that's a good sign. And there will always be those who won't believe in it and will be just stuck in the ways. And for those who I've talked to, those are the ones who probably won't be around much longer.

**Erin:** [00:46:46] Mhm. Yeah I think we have to embrace it. You know just like I'm telling candidates embrace the CPA exam. I see a lot of firms that are resistant, you know whether they're one and two individuals up to multi-office larger firms. We're all resistant to change right? It's uncomfortable, we're moving into the unknown. So there is that level of unease I guess with not knowing. But I think we do have to kind of lean into it and embrace the opportunity that's there, versus seeing it as something wrong or seeing it as a negative.

**Peter:** [00:47:25] Right. And I love how you said lean into it. Because we tend to be like a little bit like this, versus leaning into it and taking the challenge on - and failure is an option because when we fail we learn.

**Erin:** [00:47:40] Mhm.

**Peter:** [00:47:40] And so crazy ideas and crazy failures have led to you know bigger and better things down down the road. I think that's one of the other challenges that we struggle with is accepting failure because a lot, and I believe this is changed, but back when I was in a firm there was like was a lot of finger pointing when you screwed up, and a lot of fingers were pointed at that person, that guy, that girl... I'd say I did that pretty well because I was on the receiving end of that finger a lot. But those mistakes... you know it's just like giving somebody some rope. They can either build a bridge or hang themselves.

**Erin:** [00:48:18] Yeah.

**Peter:** [00:48:18] And I've hung myself a lot. I've got some really good rope burns on my neck, but I learned a lot from that and I will never let that happen again.

**Erin:** [00:48:29] Mhm. Well and to your point you know it's one type of culture that would point the finger of failure at somebody else. You know that's one dynamic in an organization and I think that it's a place that companies should look. If they're taking on these major shifts, their business will look different five years from now than it does today, but that's going to take something. And I think that they're going to have to be in it together and it may highlight some of the issues they have with their culture. They may also want to take some proactive steps to really build their team you know team connection and build that culture up so that they can go through this change more smoothly.

**Peter:** [00:49:11] Exactly. I will share this with you: that one of my attendees in a class just recently was talking about change we were talking about this at a point of we're we're we're we're competent, we're comfortable... that was the word: we were conventional. Things were the same. And then we've got unconventional. The whacked out, the crazy idea that we're afraid to say but we need to say it to get it out there. And as you said, in between this is where the opportunity is.

**Erin:** [00:49:47] Mhm.

**Peter:** [00:49:47] My face just fell off when he said that. I went oh my god opportunity is somewhere between conventional and unconventional. We have to we have to allow ourselves to be unconventional and say crazy things because somewhere in between... that's where we're going to change, and that's really the sweet spot.

**Erin:** [00:50:05] Yeah. And I think it's creating the culture that makes it safe for people to throw their ideas out there. You know, if it's a judgey culture, somebody might be sitting there with a brilliant idea that's going to save that business and really take it to the next level, and they're going to maybe die with that idea. Because they won't tell anybody.

**Peter:** [00:50:24] Well said. I was doing that creativity course for a company in Maryland and they brought their emergent leaders from the U.S. and Latin America in. And one of the things was how can we increase profitability within the company? And let's just brain storm, and I had set the stage: Say anything. Bad ideas are just bridges to good ideas - no ideas lead to nothing. It comes from improv. After a while, this one guy from Latin America says "I tell you what we're going to do my friend. This is how we're going to increase the profitability within. We are going to kill all of our competition salespeople. That's what we're going to do.

**Erin:** [00:51:06] [laughs]

**Peter:** [00:51:06] And the whole place erupted in laughter and then we all got a little bit nervous, and I went OK guys if I'm going to walk the talk here and say bad ideas are pitchers to good ideas, first thing's first: I'm going to take murder off the table.

**Erin:** [00:51:21] [laughs]

**Peter:** [00:51:21] But let's think a minute. look at that. Let's identify the competition's top sales people and let's go poaching. Let's go give a \$40,000 increase with a signing bonus. We might catch one or two without having to kill anybody! Would we have gotten to that point if the guy didn't have the courage to say something completely wacky? I hope he was being completely wacky. I hope he really wasn't serious about that. But I'm not sure if were the guy without that crazy idea.

**Erin:** [00:51:54] Yeah. And it's being willing to try things out, and maybe fall on your face. But if you don't try it, you're going to get left behind. And it does take courage to share the ideas and it takes courage as an organization to be willing to take a flyer on some of these ideas.

**Peter:** [00:52:13] Yeah. It does take a lot of courage. Erin, we could be here for two more hours and time would fly by - as it has again. So here's what I'm going to ask of you: here in the near future, another Skype call, another interview, because there are so many - I didn't think, in preparing for this, I had no idea about the CPA exam thing so I just took.. I was not going to back away from that, so I still probably have eight to 10 more questions back here that I'd love to ask. But out of respect for your time and everything, will you come back and do another episode with me?

**Erin:** [00:52:54] I'd love to come back. Yes.

**Peter:** [00:52:56] Oh that's great. Is there anything that you can leave our audience with that you haven't already said? One more nugget of wisdom that they can run with?

**Erin:** [00:53:07] I'm actually just sitting here at my desk and I have this quote I love, so I'll just need to share that with them. It sorta ties into the work that you and I are both talking about, and the quote is: "In the absence of a created future, the past looks enticing. In the absence of a created future, the past looks enticing."

**Peter:** [00:53:27] Who is that from?

**Erin:** [00:53:28] I have no idea.

**Peter:** [00:53:30] Anonymous?

**Erin:** [00:53:32] Anonymous.

**Peter:** [00:53:33] Wow.

**Erin:** [00:53:33] I think it's so cool though because it's true. [00:53:36] We really have to create where we're going as individuals and as a profession, because otherwise it does look really enticing to just do tax returns how we've always done it. [14.2]

**Peter:** [00:53:51] This is one of the few interviews my jaw has dropped three times, if not more. That's deep and profound - you nailed it. That's great. Oh my gosh. I may just say let's just keep plowing through because I don't want to miss anything that you got to share. But once again, I've had a blast talking with you. I've got to go you a little bit better. I love what you do. We will have how to contact you on the Web site. I will mention it in the outro. And you know that if I can be of any assistance, do not hesitate - contact me. This has just been a really fun and informative interview, and I thank you so very much for carving out this much time for me.

**Erin:** [00:54:37] My pleasure. It's been so much fun!



**Peter:** [00:54:39] Thank you.

**Erin:** [00:54:41] Of course.

**Peter:** [00:54:42] And oh, by the way, enjoy your sunny southern California San Diego weather out there.

**Erin:** [00:54:49] I will. I sure will.

**Peter:** [00:54:52] Thank you so very much, Erin.