

Darren LaCroix: [00:00:00] You'll learn more from the experience. Get in the game. Whatever new skill set you want to work on, you're going to make some mistakes. But get in the game, you'll learn faster.

Peter Margaritis: [00:00:21] Welcome to Change Your Mindset podcast, formerly known as Improv Is No Joke, where it's all about believing that strong communication skills are the best way in delivering your technical accounting knowledge and growing your business. An effective way of building stronger communication skills is by embracing the principles of applied improvisation. Your host is Peter Margaritis, CPA a.k.a. The Accidental Accountant. And he will interview financial professionals and business leaders to find their secret in building stronger relationships with their clients, customers, associates, and peers, all the while, growing their businesses. So, let's start the show.

Peter Margaritis: [00:01:07] Welcome to Episode 43. And my guest today is Darren LaCroix. Now, his bio starts out with this, he felt invincible in high school. He failed as a business owner. He worked in a cubicle for over a decade. Today, he's a world champion speaker. What made the difference for him can make the difference for you. Now, Darren will outline his background for you during our interview. But there's a part of his background that we didn't cover.

Peter Margaritis: [00:01:37] Darren is currently the only speaker in the world who's a CSP, that is Certified Speaking Professional and AS, an Accredited Speaker and a world champion of public speaking. Darren always stresses, "Don't go for the designations to get the letters after your name. Do it for the professional you will become in the process." He's also the co-host of Unforgettable Presentations podcast.

Peter Margaritis: [00:02:05] Darren works with presenters eager to learn what it takes to connect deeply with their audiences. He's the founder of stagetimeuniversity.com, the ultimate online program for presenters. Now, during our interview, listen to his journey of highs and lows, of his struggles and successes. What you will hear is an entrepreneur who works every day to become the best. As I've said to my audiences, is that in order

to enact change, I mean, true change, you have to apply it every single day and baby steps.

Peter Margaritis: [00:02:40] An analogy to enact change recently happened to me on September 9, 2019 when Dan Thurmon, CSP and immediate past president of the National Speakers Association, came and spoke to our NSA Ohio chapter. At one point, Dan started juggling, which took me back 40-plus years ago when I used to juggle and really haven't since. This kept me inspired so much that when I got home, I grabbed three tennis balls and tried to juggle.

Peter Margaritis: [00:03:08] Whoa, I dropped more than I kept in the air, but I did juggle 23 times without dropping that day. I made a commitment to juggle every single day. And as of November 19th, I have juggled 72 days with a high of 365 times without dropping. I have dropped many and I have failed more than I succeeded, but I'm enacting change and getting a little bit more confident each and every day. Listen to Darren's analogies and think about how you can enact change every single day a little bit at a time.

Peter Margaritis: [00:03:47] And as he says, "Just get in the game." As you know by now, Change Your Mindset is part of the C-Suite Radio family of podcast. It's an honor and a privilege to be amongst some of the more prevalent business podcasts, such as The Hero Factor with Jeffrey Hazlett, Amazing Business Radio with Shep Hyken, and Keep Leading with my friend, Eddie Turner. You can find Change Your Mindset and many other outstanding business podcasts on C-Suite Radio by going to www.c-suiteradio.com.

Announcer: [00:04:20] This podcast is part of the C-Suite Radio Network, turning the volume up on business.

Peter Margaritis: [00:04:26] Many of you don't know that I'm a type 1 diabetic and I do volunteer my time at the Central Ohio Diabetes Association, which is part of the Life Care Alliance organization here in central Ohio. Here's a short commercial about the upcoming Santa Speedo Dash on Saturday, December 14th and all the proceeds from

the dash will help to fund the Central Ohio Diabetes Association summer camp for children with type 1 and type 2 diabetes. If you'd like to register or donate, please go to www.lifecarealliance.org/programs/coda, that's C-O-D-A, /santa-speedo-dash.

Kathy: [00:05:08] Hey, Anthony. What's with the bells?

Anthony: [00:05:10] Hey, Kathy. I'm putting my outfit together for the Santa Speedo Dash.

Kathy: [00:05:13] Love the red leggings too. So, you're going to run in the Santa Speedo Dash on Saturday, December 14th to support Camp Hamwi?

Anthony: [00:05:20] You betcha. Will you be there?

Kathy: [00:05:21] Of course. It's the only day each year I'm allowed to wear a bathing suit to work.

Anthony: [00:05:26] Help us gift kids with diabetes the experience of a lifetime. Proceeds from the Santa Speedo Dash support Camp Hamwi. Register or donate today at www.santaspeedodash.org.

Peter Margaritis: [00:05:39] Now, a quick word from our sponsor.

Sponsor: [00:05:42] This episode is sponsored by Peter A. Margaritis, LLC a.k.a. The Accidental Accountant. Are you looking for a high-content and engaging speaker for your next conference? Do you want to deliver a story to stakeholders that will transform data dumping to engaging business conversations? Do you want to feel that the value a speaker provides your audience far exceeds the dollar value on their invoice? Then, book Peter for your next conference, management retreat, or workshop. Contact Peter at peter@petermargaritis.com and visit his website at www.petermargaritis.com. By the way, one of his Fortune 50 clients actually made the comment about the value he brings to your audience.

Peter Margaritis: [00:06:30] Now, let's get to the interview was Darren LaCroix. Hey, welcome back, everybody. Man, do I have a guest for you today? Buckle up. I'm interviewing Mr. Darren LaCroix, who, I'm going to let him tell a story because I can't do it justice other than he came to our NSA chapter last year and blew us all away. I've heard stories. I've heard, there's this story about him or I've heard about him for a long period of time and I finally got a chance to meet him. And man, is he good.

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:08] So, I'm not going to give the good stuff away, Darren. I'm going to let you do that because you can do a lot better than I am. But first and foremost, Darren, it's 11:30 here, Eastern Standard Time. I'm talking to Darren, who's in Las Vegas, where it's very early in the morning. He had to get another cup of coffee before we get started, which I appreciate. So, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule and early morning to spend time with me on my podcast.

Darren LaCroix: [00:07:32] Hey, glad to be here. Thanks for having me. Appreciate it.

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:37] He's got the voice for the radio, he's got the face for the stage.

Darren LaCroix: [00:07:41] It's all special effects.

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:42] So-

Darren LaCroix: [00:07:45] Turn the bass way down. Hey, I'm Barry White. How are you doing?

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:48] I'm doing just fine. I'm dealing with kind of Morgan Freeman lately to see if I can have a soothing voice to be effective. I always said if Morgan Freeman would read an IRS letter, it would make you want to be audited by the IRS. It would feel so good. So, Darren, tell me a story, because it is incredible at the least.

Darren LaCroix: [00:08:10] Well, you're very kind. I grew up, you know, parents, "Got to go to college, you got to go to college." And I really didn't know what I wanted to do, but I did know that I wanted to eventually be an entrepreneur. But I'm like-

Peter Margaritis: [00:08:23] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:08:23] "Why am I going to college if I want to have my own business?" I went to business school four years, Bryant College, Smithfield, Rhode Island, now called Bryant University. But I was really excited and I decided because I couldn't really get a business loan right after college having no experience and no money. So, I ended up going with a franchise. So, I bought a Subway franchise and I was so dreaming I was gonna be a multi-store owner, going to have five units, going to be a multimillionaire, have everybody do the work for me. And man, back then, Subway had 5,000 stores.

Peter Margaritis: [00:09:04] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:09:04] Literally. And they actually had a 98 percent success rate. I really got to screw up to be at that 2 percent. You've got to be good at messing up. And honestly, I don't want to sound like I'm bashing Subway because I'm really not. I made a lot of bad mistakes and it didn't work. So, I had the store for about a-year-and-a-half. I sold it at a loss and I just was at the lowest point in my life. And I'm just living at home with my parents.

Darren LaCroix: [00:09:30] I still had the business loan, even though I had no business because I sold it at a loss, had the college loan, living with mom and dad. Woohoo, dreams, only in America. Only in America can you be an entrepreneur and earn less than minimum wage and it's legal. So anyway, my buddy gave me this motivational tape because I was so down and I loved it. It was like encouraging and made me believe in myself.

Darren LaCroix: [00:09:58] And I'm driving down the road and I hear this man named Brian Tracy say, "What would you dare to dream if you knew you wouldn't fail?" And I

thought about it because I was at this such an open point in my life where I'm like, "Tell me anything, I'm in." And when I answered the question, what would I want to do if I knew I wouldn't fail, I was like, "I would be a comedian. That would be the ultimate. I mean, making people laugh for a living, that would be perfect." All of a sudden, this little voice of reason said, "But you're not funny, Darren." But that wasn't the question.

Peter Margaritis: [00:10:33] Right. Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:10:34] It's truth, but it wasn't the question. So, I just challenged myself and I said, "You know what? It wasn't a dream", but I said, "What if Brian Tracy's right?" So, I forced myself to do it just once. And when I told my friends and family, they're like, "You, a comedian? Number one, you're scared to talk in front of people. Number two, you're not funny at all, like not even close. You're a nice guy."

Darren LaCroix: [00:11:00] "People like you, but that's because you shut up and you don't talk." And so, you know, I realized in listening to these motivational tapes, Brian Tracy said, "Go to people who are where you want to be and listen to them." So I said, "Well, let me ask a comedian", because when I told my friends and family, they compared me to Jerry Seinfeld, someone just thinking about it to someone at the top of their profession. And that's not fair.

Peter Margaritis: [00:11:26] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:11:26] It's the nature. I get it. I understand it. But it's not fair to compare you and where you're at, if you're just beginning a new skill set-

Peter Margaritis: [00:11:34] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:11:34] ... to somebody who's one of the most accomplished person in the industry. You know, when you sit back, "Oh, yeah, of course. Why would you do that?" But in the moment, you're like, "Comedian, not you." Okay.

Peter Margaritis: [00:11:43] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:11:44] Next, pick another dream, buddy.

Peter Margaritis: [00:11:46] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:11:46] And so, I went to this little comedy club. And I had never been to a comedy club in my life live at that point. I went to this little comedy club in Wister. And I worked up all the courage I could to walk up to the comedian. Because again, I'm a shy, quiet kid who has no business being onstage, never mind talking to a comedian. So, I looked up to him after the show. And he seemed pretty approachable. So, it wasn't horrible, but it was still a stretch for me.

Darren LaCroix: [00:12:12] And I said, "Hi, my name is Darren. I want to try this. What do I need to do?" And he asked me a question, he said, "Are you funny?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Good." I'm like, "Good? What do you mean, good?" And he went on to explain that people who are naturally funny, like class clowns, your friends, and your family, like that's one skill set around your family. If you handed them a microphone and put them in front of a group of 100 strangers, they couldn't make them laugh.

Peter Margaritis: [00:12:42] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:12:43] He said, "That's a different skill set." But then, he said, "That skill set can be learned." And I was like, "Oh, you need me." And he said, "Two things, Darren. Number one-" and this is for anything but it spoke to me, he said, "Number one, you need to get the book." I'm like, "Book? There's a book about stand-up comedy?" Well, of course, there's books about everything, but I wasn't thinking that way. So, number one, get the information, get the book. And he said, "Number two, you need to go to open mic nights, then watch other people who are just starting out." Well, duh, now, I would be comparing myself to someone else who's starting out rather than someone at the top of their profession. That made sense.

Peter Margaritis: [00:13:24] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:13:24] So, I went out and I got the book. I read the book. I studied the book. Went through the exercises. And I think that's one of the other problems for us as adult learners, I'm still guilty myself now, that we think we know everything. And so, we're not truly open to new ways. And even though we say we want it, we have a problem, we have a challenge. But fortunately, back then, I was wide open.

Darren LaCroix: [00:13:47] So, I went and got the book, did the exercises. And then, on Sunday night, I went to this little comedy club called Stitches, right outside of Fenway Park in Boston. And I walked in and you could feel the sticky floor, you could smell the stale beer. And it was like cool. It was like coolness. And I so didn't belong in coolness, but I was there. And I watched people go up for the very first time and they were horrible. And I thought I could do that. I could be that horrible.

Peter Margaritis: [00:14:19] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:14:20] These people were embarrassing. I'm like, "I've embarrassed myself before, I have no problem with that." And so, I committed that, "You know what, I'm going to do this." I'm going to try it just once, though. It wasn't like this dream and I didn't think at that moment that I was going to live the life and become a comedian and then, go on to be a speaker. But just once, because I couldn't live with the regret of wondering what if.

Peter Margaritis: [00:14:41] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:14:42] What if Brian Tracy was right? I'm in such a malleable state right now in my life. If I don't try this now, I'll live my life regretting. So, I studied the book for two months. I went to Stitches every Sunday night for two months to be re-inspired by horrible comedians. And it was April 26, 1992, Stitches, Boston, Mass. And I went up on stage. I was so nervous. I was literally shaking. I have it on video too. And when I give speeches, I actually show a video clip of it. And it's horrible and I can show it now, if you want.

Peter Margaritis: [00:15:21] Let's make sure-

Darren LaCroix: [00:15:21] I don't know if it will translate, but-

Peter Margaritis: [00:15:25] Give me the clip and I'll put it into the show notes. People can watch it. Because I remember, you showed it at the chapter. And I'll be honest with you, I get goosebumps. Because I remembered what it was like being in an open mic night and having that fear, having that intimidation and getting up there in front of 50 people, whatever, and telling jokes and trying to make them laugh. It just gave me the good goosebumps, not the bad goosebumps.

Darren LaCroix: [00:15:56] The good goose bumps, not the bad ones.

Peter Margaritis: [00:15:59] Yeah, yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:16:00] Well, through the miracle of Zoom Stop Share.

Peter Margaritis: [00:16:05] We're gonna see if we can get this thing played. Here we go.

Darren LaCroix: [00:16:09] Does anyone here live in New England?

Audience: [00:16:12] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:16:14] I figured, atheist. Let's see, does anybody ever notice like any every other small town in New England takes one little small historical fact, makes it the greatest event in the world? Sorry for my voice like fluctuating a little bit. A lot of towns like this. And then, I was doing some research, like places like Lexington, you know, the first revolutionary skirmish happened there. What's his name?

Darren LaCroix: [00:16:48] I can't remember his name. Obviously, he was real famous. Eli Whitney lives in Westborough, you know, born in Westborough. I was doing some research. I discovered that the actual first dentist to use ether actually happened in Charlton, Massachusetts. And the interesting thing about this was he actually fermented

himself. You know, nobody else had done this before. And he started with animals and he used his own dog.

Darren LaCroix: [00:17:15] Yeah, it was painful. And that wasn't even the worst part. There was a moment that I told you about where I was so nervous that what I was saying and what I was doing with my body, it was not in sync because obviously, when you're nervous-

Peter Margaritis: [00:17:31] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:17:31] ... that's how it is. And so, I was telling this one joke about Dr. Robert Goddard, who launched the first liquid fuel rocket in history in my hometown. And I was talking about the rocket because it only went 41 feet high. And I said, "The rocket took off and it went vertically", but I did horizontally with my arm. And I was just disgusted with myself. And I just reacted. I'm just like, "Oh, shoot." It's not the actual word I used, but, "Oh, shoot." And everybody laughed. And I was like, "What's going on?"

Peter Margaritis: [00:18:04] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:18:04] "Why are you laughing? That's not where you're supposed to laugh, but I'll take it."

Peter Margaritis: [00:18:08] Right. Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:18:09] And as I walked off stage, one of the other comedians put his arm around me to console me. He's like, "Don't worry, man. It's just your first time." And I remember thinking, "Don't worry, it's just my first time, did you see what I did? I got a laugh." I don't care that it was a mistake. I can make more mistakes in that five minutes of time, I have one thing that worked. And even though it was a mistake, if I could reproduce that and get rid of everything that didn't work, I could do this.

Peter Margaritis: [00:18:34] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:18:35] And I just said, I'm in. I got every mentor that I could. I read every book that I could. And in fact, that's what my mentor said. "Stage time, stage time, stage time. Any day that you don't get onstage is a day that you don't grow." And I think for everyone, in your conversations, trying to persuade people or educate people, we need to be better at it. And the more we do it, the better we'll get, but especially if we have some world class tools to do that.

Darren LaCroix: [00:19:03] So, Stage Time University is now, because of that story, that's what I do. I train people, but I love what I get to do. But here's the cool part, is that stage time is important, but if we're not trying to improve, like my mentor said, any day that you don't get onstage is a day that you don't grow. And I was like, "What? I thought I had to be good to be onstage." And he said, "No, no, no, you have to go on stage to get good."

Peter Margaritis: [00:19:35] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:19:36] And it's very different. And so, I couldn't get stage time. As a wannabe comedian, there's only three comedy clubs in Boston at that time, and there's one hundred wannabes vying for those spots. So, it was hard to get stage time. And that's when I found Toastmasters and NSA in a couple of years or a-year-and-a-half later. And I found Toastmasters as a great place to make mistakes and get that stage time.

Darren LaCroix: [00:20:02] I'm like, "What do you mean? They're gonna clap no matter how bad I am? Like that's not like a comedy club at all." And so, I just dove in and I did both stand-up and speaking for many years. And then, fast forward to 2001, I out-spoke 25,000 contestants from 14 countries to win the World Championship of Public Speaking with a very funny speech. And I had a great coach. And it was the coach, I just did the work. But most people aren't willing to do the work or get a coach.

Peter Margaritis: [00:20:35] And you make some really good points throughout the story. As one, you just don't become a world champion overnight. Two, you don't

become funny overnight. And you've done the work. You've demonstrated that it takes every day. And so many times, people want to do here, but they don't want to put in the work.

Darren LaCroix: [00:21:00] Right.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:01] And they get frustrated when something doesn't happen because it's like I said, when you-

Darren LaCroix: [00:21:04] Or happen quick enough.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:06] Right. When you're wanting that change, you have to take small steps.

Darren LaCroix: [00:21:10] One of the things I love to point out is there are those people who are naturals.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:13] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:21:15] That those 2 percent that are natural-born presenters, naturally born funny people, guess what? I hate them too.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:24] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:21:24] Because for the rest of us, it's work.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:26] Right, right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:21:27] It's work.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:28] Yes.

Darren LaCroix: [00:21:28] And then, the other thing that frustrates me is people who have a natural gift, but it's good. And they could be great or unforgettable if they'd just be willing to be more open and be a sponge. Because they got those natural talents and they could ride on them and be better than most, but they could be unbelievable if they just got some world-class techniques in whatever industry they're in.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:54] Well, that goes to a coach, and we all need coaches, but also goes to-

Darren LaCroix: [00:22:00] Even you? What?

Peter Margaritis: [00:22:01] I love improv. I mean, that's my love and I have an improv coach. And we meet once a month. He's out in LA. He's part of the Second City faculty on LA. And we're looking at it from a business perspective, but he's inspired me that I should probably get it once—I've never been on stage for improv. I've done stand-ups.

Darren LaCroix: [00:22:21] What?

Peter Margaritis: [00:22:21] But he's inspired me to be onstage. And I said, "Well, I guess at this point in my life, I've been doing the assisted living circuit, which is fine."

Darren LaCroix: [00:22:32] Now, there's always that one token old person.

Peter Margaritis: [00:22:34] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:22:35] Like you and me.

Peter Margaritis: [00:22:37] Yeah. But-

Darren LaCroix: [00:22:37] Like, "Oh, look at the geriatric improv player of the year." But here's the cool part, and this is why I love Patricia Fripp and I can't wait till I'm at her age, whenever that would be, because I can't wait to get away with the things that she can say.

Peter Margaritis: [00:22:53] Well, true.

Darren LaCroix: [00:22:53] See, if the old guy says something even remotely risqué, it will kill. Peter, get up there. I'll join you. The two old guys.

Peter Margaritis: [00:23:06] I'm gonna hold you to that now.

Darren LaCroix: [00:23:09] I'd do it. I love doing improv.

Peter Margaritis: [00:23:12] But we all need coaches. We all need help.

Darren LaCroix: [00:23:13] Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:23:14] And you said, we need to be open. We need to be open to other ideas and basically park our ego. And you know what? And you make a point, there are some people who are really good, but if they want to be outstanding, they've got to take the feedback and accept the feedback. Be a sponge.

Darren LaCroix: [00:23:31] Be a sponge. Be a sponge.

Peter Margaritis: [00:23:33] And ego get to the way and it doesn't allow some folks to be that sponge. I like feedback and I hired Judy Carter as a coach at one point to help me. And I said, "There's some footage." I said, "I want it straight between the eyes." "What?"

Darren LaCroix: [00:23:52] And I bet you got it from her.

Peter Margaritis: [00:23:54] I did. And once she was done, I said, "Thank you." And I didn't get defensive. Well, I said, "I asked for the feedback. I can't get defensive if I asked for a feedback and if this is the way that I want it." Says, "You're weird." I said, "Thank you. I am that way, but I'm open to the feedback." Now, what I do with that

feedback is my decision. But you see this all the time, people will ask for feedback and then, as you're giving it to them, they're being defensive about everything.

Darren LaCroix: [00:24:28] Yeah, they don't actually want the feedback.

Peter Margaritis: [00:24:29] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:24:31] They actually want the pat on the back.

Peter Margaritis: [00:24:33] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:24:33] Rick Valentine says, "Some people come to us for education and some people come to us for validation." And I think more people come for validation.

Peter Margaritis: [00:24:44] Validation?

Darren LaCroix: [00:24:44] Right. And I was guilty of that myself when I met my coach. Let me just jump in on this super quick, because it makes a point.

Peter Margaritis: [00:24:51] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:24:51] In 2001, I had been doing stand-up for nine years. I was a speaker for seven years, I think, at that point, it was '94. And so, I thought I was pretty good. And in the Toastmaster world, I was like king of my club. I wasn't world class, but I was king of my club in the perfect bubble world.

Peter Margaritis: [00:25:12] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:25:12] And don't get me wrong, I love Toastmasters. It's a great place to grow, but it's not reality, you know. But we need that in order to be better in reality. So, I thought, "If I just got a coach." So, I joined this speech contest to work on the stories I was telling in my professional career. So, I didn't join it to get the trophy. I

entered the speech contest to work on the stories I was already telling to make them so good someone would pay to hear them. And that was advice from one of my comedy mentors. He said, "Darren, take the stories you already have." He said, "Stop-" because I was like that little creature from Lord of the Rings, you know, "Precious, precious". I was lusting after that story that would be, in our world as a speaker, Peter, we want that signature story.

Peter Margaritis: [00:26:01] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:26:01] That story we're known for. And so, I kept trying to find it and find it and find it. And he said, "No, Darren. Stop." He said, "Take one of the stories you already have and make it so good someone will pay to hear that." And that was like an aha switch of the mindset because I didn't realize there was a world-class process that you could follow to go deeper. I just thought you just told the story and you tweaked it a little. No, no, no, no. You got to dig deeper into the story. You got to find the right elements, put them together in a great way, and add dialogue and enhance it and show the emotional shift. I was like "What?" I just thought a story happened, you recognized it, and you reported on it and it was-

Peter Margaritis: [00:26:41] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:26:41] ... wrong. So, when I first met Mark Brown who was the 1995 world champion and my coach, I was so excited that he agreed to work with me. And I said I wanted coaching, but secretly, I just wanted validation. I just wanted him to tell me how great I was. And so, I took the first version of my championship speech because he had to write a different one at three levels. So, he helped me out right on the last level. That's when I met him.

Darren LaCroix: [00:27:11] And I had about 77 days before the contest. So, I drove with version 1.0. I didn't want to bring it ahead of time or send it ahead of time because I wanted to see the joy and the impression on his face. So, I drove from Boston to New York to work with my coach. And we were in this little corporate training center where he worked at Reader's Digest. And I was so thrilled. If you don't know Mark Brown, he

stands about 6'2". He's got a heart of gold. He's a native of Jamaica. And he's got this beautiful, booming laugh, like the guy from the old 7 Up commercial, "Hahahahaha."

Darren LaCroix: [00:27:49] And so, I handed Mark the speech. I mean, this was the greatest speech in the history of Toastmasters. When I handed it to him. I thought it was so good, you could hear choirs of angels. I handed it to Mark. Mark took the speech. "Oh, Darren, we have some work to do." "What? I did everything you told me to do. I wrote the greatest speech that I could write from the level I was at." But you don't know what you don't know. And it's that moment after I absorbed the feedback and got out of my own ego's way, I realized that if you're not coachable, there is no cure. If you're not coachable, there's no cure.

Peter Margaritis: [00:28:37] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:28:37] No one can help you get to the next level.

Peter Margaritis: [00:28:40] And that's a great quote. And it's so true. How coachable are you? How do you look at coaching? And some people, to your point, they look at it as validation versus educate me. Tell me how I can get better, how can I stretch myself?

Darren LaCroix: [00:28:59] You've got to be confident to say, "Rip me apart."

Peter Margaritis: [00:29:01] Yeah. And-

Darren LaCroix: [00:29:02] Mean it.

Peter Margaritis: [00:29:04] Yeah. And mean it. And I was confident with myself. But here's what I knew, I knew that I didn't know everything. I knew in order to get better-

Darren LaCroix: [00:29:13] What? You're a man. We're supposed to know everything, aren't we?

Peter Margaritis: [00:29:17] We're supposed to, but if we're honest with ourselves and want to continue to get better, you've got to search out those folks who have established that level and learn from them. You know, some people say, "You're really good." I say, "Well, thank you, but I still have a long way to go." "Well, you've been doing this for 17 years." "I still have a long way to go. I still have a lot to learn." I-

Darren LaCroix: [00:29:42] Yeah, it's a mindset thing. As Mike Rayburn says, it's like the "virtuoso mindset" that you're constantly trying to become the best and you'll never achieve it.

Peter Margaritis: [00:29:53] Right, right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:29:53] But if you're not constantly trying to improve, you're stuck in a rut and you're making the rut deeper by not picking up new tools, new mindset, new perspective.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:05] Exactly. And this goes to anything that we do. Anything we're trying to get better. We're trying to become a better leader. You don't learn leadership in a workshop. You learn leadership and applying it every single day. I've-

Darren LaCroix: [00:30:16] It sounds great in a workshop.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:19] Yeah. And, "Oh, cool. I can do that." But well, hello, it doesn't work that way because we got to put in the work. And I think a lot of times complacency sets in. We just don't want to do the work. But then, we're not seeing any results. That's-

Darren LaCroix: [00:30:40] Or growth.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:40] Or growth. Right, right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:30:40] We might get some results, but not the true growth that we're looking for.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:44] And so, you went from a scared guy doing stand-up, who your parents and friends thought you're not funny, doing stand-up for nine years, you travel the country, you're a professional speaker, a World Champion Toastmaster, member of National Speakers Association, but the one thing I have learned about you is you don't stop.

Darren LaCroix: [00:31:08] What?

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:08] How many-

Darren LaCroix: [00:31:09] It's not in my vocabulary.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:11] How many-

Darren LaCroix: [00:31:12] I get exhausted and pass out on occasion, but the next day, I get up and keep going.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:16] How many revenue streams do you have?

Darren LaCroix: [00:31:19] Eighty-two.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:20] Okay. And it started with one.

Darren LaCroix: [00:31:23] Just for clarification, some of them are just trickles. So, I'm not a multi-millionaire. And he says that because I did a program on multiple streams of income. And I looked at my taxes and my accounting, and I literally added them up. So, a couple of them are like some MP3 that I created and tried to sell and it didn't go well. And it's like \$4.52 for the year. So, just to be clear, some of them are trickles.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:53] But they're there.

Darren LaCroix: [00:31:55] True.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:56] And you continue to evolve and you continue to grow and add new things. So, you got the Stage Time University. I thought that Darren been doing podcasting for a while, but he just started a podcast about a-month-and-a-half ago and the name of the podcast is?

Darren LaCroix: [00:32:12] Unforgettable Presentations, we- Mark Brown, my coach, and I, we interview some of the most unforgettable presenters. In fact, Peter, you're at NSA, correct?

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:23] Correct.

Darren LaCroix: [00:32:24] So, we just interviewed Jia Jiang, who was the rejection guy.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:29] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:32:30] What I learned from 100 days of rejection.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:33] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:32:33] And by the way, if you're listening to this and you haven't seen that Ted talk, you've got to check it out. It's so insightful, so funny, so inspiring. And so, Mark and I just released last week our interview with him. It was fascinating.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:46] Yeah. He's got a really fascinating story. And I did one day of rejection and I went, "Okay, that's enough."

Darren LaCroix: [00:32:51] "I'm good. I'm good. I've been rejected." But that's not the point, though, Peter.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:57] Right. If I want a hundred days of rejection, I'll go back into stand-up. I mean, that was rejection city, right?

Darren LaCroix: [00:33:02] I'll start dating again. Guys, by the way, I'm not married. And yeah, I got no interest, like I'm on a mission. I ain't got time for that.

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:14] Yeah. Well, 82 streams of income. You've got a boot camp coming up in March?

Darren LaCroix: [00:33:21] Yeah. I got one coming up in December and one coming up in March. So-

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:25] And those boot camps are?

Darren LaCroix: [00:33:27] So, the one in December is called Unforgettable Presentations, ironically. So, it's a two-day event with Mark and me live or virtually in Vegas. And then, in March, it's my big event, which is called Stage Time LIVE!, where my whole faculty is there, Ed T., Ford Saeks, Kevin Burke. And it's two days with a whole bunch of crazy speakers who want to get better.

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:51] Cool and coaching and doing but-

Darren LaCroix: [00:33:56] Yeah, we do live coaching.

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:56] Yeah, yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:33:57] So, we show people, like everyone thinks, "Oh, here's what to do." But when you see somebody deliver it and then, you see a coach step up and say, "Okay, try this, this and this." And then, they do it that way. You're like, "Oh." You know, I wish more people would just see the experience of coaching. And anyway, I love what we do in helping people help people.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:20] And so, when you think about coaching, and so, if I'm thinking about my audience and they'll go, "Well, you know, I've got my continued education from-"

Darren LaCroix: [00:34:31] Yeah, check off that box.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:32] Yeah. That's a thank you for a better-

Darren LaCroix: [00:34:33] Now, you're better because of it.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:35] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:34:35] That's the question.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:35] Or are you just collecting eight hours of continued education? But what are you doing to get better? And that's the challenge at least with my audience with is, okay, you finish this. What are you going to take away? What are you going to work on? What are you going to get better on? And how are you going to plan it? And there might be one or two people that will take that actually serious to stick around and talk about it after the fact.

Darren LaCroix: [00:34:59] But that's what you were there for.

Peter Margaritis: [00:35:01] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:35:01] So, you were there for those two.

Peter Margaritis: [00:35:02] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:35:02] It's a mindset. You can't make people be coachable. You can't make people be a sponge. But for you and I, for what we do, just to have the intention to help people. And it's sad that more people aren't open to growth. They say they are, but they're not actually.

Peter Margaritis: [00:35:20] Why do you think that is? We say we're open for growth, but then, we actually don't do it. Is it because of the demands of our jobs or demands of corporate America, demands of family, or we're just naturally lazy?

Darren LaCroix: [00:35:34] I think it's all of the above. I think we're naturally lazy. And I think when you say get a coach, there's also bad coaches out there.

Peter Margaritis: [00:35:44] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:35:44] So, if you've had a bad experience with one coach, that doesn't mean they're all bad. That means maybe you should have done more due diligence. Do you know Rudy Ruettiger?

Peter Margaritis: [00:35:55] I know of the name, but I don't know of the person.

Darren LaCroix: [00:35:57] So, the movie, Rudy, was created around his story but-

Peter Margaritis: [00:36:03] Okay.

Darren LaCroix: [00:36:03] ... he's like my hero. So, I like stalked him until I could get to meet him. Had lunch with him. It was like a little kid having lunch with Santa Claus. I'm like, "It's Rudy, it's Rudy." Anyway, he said one thing that I thought was brilliant. He said that people aren't afraid of hard work. They're afraid of hard work, not pay enough.

Peter Margaritis: [00:36:25] Okay.

Darren LaCroix: [00:36:26] And because sometimes, they worked hard, but maybe in the wrong direction.

Peter Margaritis: [00:36:29] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:36:30] So as a result, they didn't get any results. So, they thought it's not worth it. But when you find the right coach, the person that you're open to.

Unfortunately, when we have something in our life that happens. Like last year, and I'm just being honest here, even though I have a staff of four, last year, I literally had to pull my staff aside and say, "Look, guys, I made some mistakes. I've been trying to correct them. I don't know if I'm going to hit payroll next week."

Peter Margaritis: [00:36:56] Whoa.

Darren LaCroix: [00:36:56] And so, yeah, if you need to get other jobs, I understand. And some of them panicked, which I understand, but they all at least knew the truth. And I wasn't going to BS. And, you know, it was scary. And one of my assistants said, "Why would you tell us that?" I'm like, "Well, why would I not? Are you kidding?" I'm a hard worker, but sometimes, we let go of the numbers. You know, we don't keep track of the numbers and what's happening.

Darren LaCroix: [00:37:25] Even though I have money coming in all the time because of my different streams of revenue, I wasn't paying attention to what was going out and what was coming in. And that seems so obvious to everyone listening. I get that. But we're not perfect. And so, because I wasn't paying attention to my numbers, sometimes, like that, for me, this inciting incident happens that forces us to be open and coachable. So, as a result of that, I became a sponge. I went to an event with Russell Brunson, who owns ClickFunnels-

Peter Margaritis: [00:37:57] Yeah. Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:37:57] ... and his team and I just became a sponge again. And I was open and eager. And I'm like, "I got to find a way." And through that mindset, I found a couple people who would help me and coach me and one woman who was still newer, but she was willing to sit down with me and just take a look at what I was doing. And she said, "Dude, you have this huge list that you've been building for years. You need to just do a webinar. So, here's Russell's webinar format. Just go through that and start doing webinars." And I had nothing to lose. Well, I started doing webinars and now, it's my number one way of acquiring new students. And it works. But if it wasn't for that inciting incident, I wouldn't have been coachable because I thought I knew what I was

doing. You know, I got four employees and, you know, 400 students around the world, but you can't hit payroll next week.

Peter Margaritis: [00:38:52] That's an eye opener. Everybody in my audience, if they're a driver, they just hit the brakes when you said you couldn't make payroll. They just came to a complete stop. But it also goes to the fact of you got to pay attention to those smaller details because we see it coming in and we get the checks and-

Darren LaCroix: [00:39:16] We're like, "Oh, everything's fine."

Peter Margaritis: [00:39:17] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:39:17] "I've got money coming in."

Peter Margaritis: [00:39:19] "I've got checks in my checkbook. I'm still good. I'm not out of cash yet." And I think that's one of the things in our business because a lot of speakers aren't fiscally sound or financially savvy that they see it coming in, but they also don't pay attention to what's going out. And next thing you know, they can't make payroll or they're broke or out of business because this is a business.

Darren LaCroix: [00:39:45] Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:39:46] And-

Darren LaCroix: [00:39:46] So, telling that story, like some people say, "Why do you tell that story?" Well, it's transparency and it's truth.

Peter Margaritis: [00:39:53] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:39:53] And if we truly want to influence others, we've got to be open and honest, in my opinion. And so, that's why I tell that story, because I think it's important. It's important for people to hear the truth. And for all of us, we don't want to admit some of our mistakes and some of our shortcomings. And like SEO and keeping

track of how much traffic is going to your website and what converts. And I hated Google Analytics because even though I love numbers, I just like glazed over. So, that's one of the reasons I moved over to ClickFunnels because it's more Darren-friendly. So, I can see the numbers and keep track and see what's working. And that's what I needed to do, but I wasn't doing it because I thought I was good.

Peter Margaritis: [00:40:36] Well, it's interesting you just mentioned Russell Brunson's book, it's Expert Secrets, right?

Darren LaCroix: [00:40:41] Yes. Yeah. That's one of them. He's got a few.

Peter Margaritis: [00:40:43] You actually mentioned that at our chapter and I just went out and bought the book and became a sponge. And I just soaked it all in. Now, I haven't wrung myself out and applied it. It's always, I'm like-

Darren LaCroix: [00:40:55] Oh, so, you wonder why more people don't do that and only 2 percent of the people who listen to you do that, but-

Peter Margaritis: [00:41:03] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:41:03] Huh?

Peter Margaritis: [00:41:04] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:41:05] Isn't that funny?

Peter Margaritis: [00:41:07] Yeah. And open and honest and transparent and vulnerable and all that other stuff. But yes and-

Darren LaCroix: [00:41:16] It's okay. I get it. I love you, man. I'm a fan.

Peter Margaritis: [00:41:19] And as we say in improv, yes, and it needs to be done. It's on the list. And you have four people. I have a staff of five. Unfortunately, all five of them are in my head.

Darren LaCroix: [00:41:33] Well, fight it out.

Peter Margaritis: [00:41:36] Yeah, that's what they do.

Darren LaCroix: [00:41:37] Oh, but that's the thing, like Patricia Fripp says something brilliant, she says, "It doesn't matter how much you bring in, it only matters how much you keep." So, there's an advantage when I heard about Ford Saeks and what his payroll was, and I don't want to mention it-

Peter Margaritis: [00:41:51] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:41:51] ... without permission. But I was like, "Whoa!" And I looked at my payroll and my payrolls is like five grand every two weeks. I was like, "So, you, all you got to do is take care of you and pay you." I'm like, "What are you bitching about?" You know?

Peter Margaritis: [00:42:04] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:42:06] "So, shut up." No, I say that in jest. Because it doesn't matter what level you're at.

Peter Margaritis: [00:42:12] Right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:42:12] Doesn't matter if you have it four and you're like, "Oh, well, just get rid of one." Well, I have a big business. It's not quite that easy. Now, do I have to re-evaluate? Absolutely.

Peter Margaritis: [00:42:22] Exactly. In closing, what else can you share with my audience that will motivate, inspire them to continue to do the right things, to continue to

take those baby steps? A story that you have to help demonstrate that. What else can you share with them that they should go, "You know, I remember listening to Darren and he said this"?

Darren LaCroix: [00:42:44] Well, a story and two little ideas that will answer that, I think, perfectly. Mike Rayburn, who we interviewed on our episode 2 of our podcast. You know Mike?

Peter Margaritis: [00:42:57] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:42:57] He's a world class speaker. He's amazing on XM Radio.

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:00] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:43:00] Brian Tracy was his personal mentor and he said, for years, he thought he was good. And he said, you know, because he was self-taught. And Brian Tracy asked him, he said, "Have you committed to being the best?" And he said, "Well, I'm doing pretty good. I'm playing. I'm booked all the time." And he said, "No, no, no. That wasn't the question."

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:20] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:43:22] And Mike self-reflectively said, "Well, no, I haven't actually committed to being the best." And Mike said that, "If you're self-taught, the problem is the teacher is not that good." You know, it is brilliant that it is right there, bam. So, if you're not getting the results you want, then something's got to change. Your perspective has to change. You go for the perspective first, because the perspective leads to new habits, leads to new results.

Darren LaCroix: [00:43:54] So, if you're not getting the results you want, okay, pick one area, like we can't do 12 things. We don't have time. I get time. But pick that one area that we want to work on. So, I live in Las Vegas and I've lived here for 11 years. I'm not a gambler. I'm not a partier. But I love living in a convention city being a speaker. So, it

was embarrassing to me when people would ask me or question or something and I don't understand the game of craps at all.

Peter Margaritis: [00:44:26] Like I don't either.

Darren LaCroix: [00:44:26] I don't understand it. It doesn't make any sense to me.

Peter Margaritis: [00:44:29] Right, right.

Darren LaCroix: [00:44:29] So, one of my friends was at this fundraising party in Beverly Hills and I was out in California and she invited me to go to this. And she's like, "I'm volunteering, so I got to run around. But here, come enjoy the party." So, I'm at the party and then, there is a craps table there. And I was like, "Okay, I don't know anyone. I'm an introvert. I'm going to go learn craps. This is a perfect opportunity."

Darren LaCroix: [00:44:53] So, I'm sitting there at the edge of the table and I'm watching what's happening. And I'm asking some questions to, I think it's called the dealer, the person who rolls, but I don't even remember. And so, I'm asking questions and I'm watching and I'm watching. And this little old lady kind of scoots up next to me and she reminded me of my grandmother. She had these arthritis hands and she put them on the edge. She was cute, but she had this scowl on her face.

Darren LaCroix: [00:45:19] And she looks at me, realizes I'm not playing. She looks at me and she looks back, she goes, "Young man, what are you doing?" And I said, "Well, I'm learning craps. And I'm just trying to understand. I don't even know how to bet." She goes, "Ah". And like 10 minutes go by and I'm still like asking questions and learning and trying to understand it, she goes, "Young man, young man, if you want to learn craps, get in the game."

Darren LaCroix: [00:45:47] And she wouldn't go away. She was just like looking at me. I was like Catholic guilt. I'm like, "Okay." So, I put some money in the game just to like shut her up and leave her alone. And she was right. I don't remember her name. I never learned her name, but I'll always remember the lesson. You'll learn more from the

experience. Get in the game. Whatever new skill set you want to work on, you're gonna make some mistakes. But get in the game, you'll learn faster.

Peter Margaritis: [00:46:17] Wow. I did not see that coming. That boom, so I get-

Darren LaCroix: [00:46:23] I didn't either.

Peter Margaritis: [00:46:23] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:46:24] This little old lady taught me one of the most important lessons and it's the same thing that I teach.

Darren LaCroix: [00:46:29] Oh, get in the game. Darren, I can't thank you enough for taking time. I love when after an interview with one of my guests, I can walk away with stuff that I need to rethink and redo and reapply. And I appreciate that. I thank you for that because I need to get back in the game with a few things that I've kept myself out of that game for full transparency. And I want to get back in the game.

Darren LaCroix: [00:46:57] We all need the reminders, Peter.

Peter Margaritis: [00:47:00] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:47:00] Myself included.

Peter Margaritis: [00:47:02] Yes. And those reminders are very important. Once again, Darren, tell people how they can find you.

Darren LaCroix: [00:47:11] Well, if you want to check out our events, just go to stagetimeworkshops.com, if you want to know about either the December event or the March event. And I'm doing another one coming up for pastors as well, an online class because teaching them better stories, better sermons. And so, check that out if you like online learning. You want to stay connected, we have live calls every single week,

where we do live coaching inside of Stage Time University. So, first week of the month, we work on content. Second week, stories. Third week, humor. Fourth week, delivery.

Darren LaCroix: [00:47:48] So, it's an online experience like you've never seen before. It's stagetimeuniversity.com. You could check out darrenlacroix.com. For people who really want to work on storytelling, just check out storytellingwebinar.com. It's free. And you'll watch Mark and me teach you the insiders of using stories to be able to help influence you and your decision or the audience's decision to come on and have your perspective or be convinced of what you're trying to convince them of. So, check out storytellingwebinar.com.

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:21] Go check out all of Darren's websites and it will be well worth your time and effort. And Darren, thank you so very much. Hopefully, our paths will cross sooner than later. And I need to get to Vegas.

Darren LaCroix: [00:48:35] Hey, come join us for the event.

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:37] Yes, I may have to just put that-

Darren LaCroix: [00:48:40] Get in the game, Peter. Get in the game.

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:42] Get in the game. I'm already getting in the game.

Darren LaCroix: [00:48:42] I'll give you the Darren special discount.

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:46] I'm going to take him up on that, I believe.

Darren LaCroix: [00:48:48] No matter what we do, even if we're good at what we do, and that's what I love-

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:53] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:48:53] ... about people who are the best. They're always rethinking and re-evaluating-

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:57] Yeah.

Darren LaCroix: [00:48:57] ... to build on what they already have.

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:59] Exactly. And we need to continue to keep building. So, thank you very much. I appreciate it. And-

Darren LaCroix: [00:49:05] And let me know when we're gonna do improv together onstage, the two old guys.

Peter Margaritis: [00:49:11] I think we should convince them that we should do it at Influence.

Darren LaCroix: [00:49:18] Alright.

Peter Margaritis: [00:49:18] Cool. Thanks, man. I would like to thank Darren, once again, for his time and wisdom that he shared with you, my audience. Thank you for listening. And if you're enjoying the podcast, please take a moment to leave a review on i-Tunes or whatever platform you download your podcast from. Also, please subscribe and share this episode with a friend. Make today your best day and remember to juggle a.k.a enact change a little bit at a time every single day.

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