

Brian Walter: [00:00:00] That's how we see our way through it, that we extend each other grace, and we realize that perfection is not only not an option, perfection is not even pursuit.

Peter Margaritis: [00:00:18] 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 Accident 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: [00:01:03] Welcome, everyone. I recorded this episode on March 31st and waited until April 26th to write this introduction. New York appears to be on the other side of the coronavirus peak, which is good, but cautious news. In Ohio, we're starting to open up for business on May 1st, but full details have not been disclosed as of this recording. As we hopefully begin the slow process of opening up our economy, anxiety and stress will still be amongst us for an undetermined amount of time until proven therapies and a vaccine has been developed.

Peter Margaritis: [00:01:35] This episode, I wanted to focus on leadership as we begin to transition out of the shelter in place order issued around this country. My guest today is Brian Walter, who is the co-founder of Extreme Meetings Inc, providing customized infotainment to make meetings memorable. For over 25 years, he has specialized in transforming meetings from boring to exciting. Brian is also the past president of the National Speakers Association Board of Directors from 2017 to 2018.

Peter Margaritis: [00:02:08] Brian brings his approach, knowledge, and leadership style into our discussion of leadership during a pandemic crisis, and how to keep a positive attitude. Brian is based out of the Seattle area, which is one of the first states to deal with the multitude of issues in trying to keep the people of Washington State safe.

Here's some more information on Brian. He is a past Guinness Book of World Records holder for producing the world's shortest TV commercial.

Peter Margaritis: [00:02:38] He hosted the elite certified speaking professional designation CSP from the National Speaker's Association. And he was inducted into the Professional Speaker's Hall of Fame in 2013. He is a 20-year member of Meeting Professionals International. He is an award-winning video commercial and podcast producer. And his website is extrememeetings.com. Now, before we get to the interview, just a couple of housekeeping items.

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Peter Margaritis: [00:04:37] Now, let's get to the interview with Brian Walter. Hey, welcome back, everybody. I'm really excited today. I've been chasing this guy down for,

it seems like, over a-year-and-a-half to get him on my podcast. I think it took a roll of toilet paper for him to agree to this.

Brian Walter: [00:04:53] I thought it was the six-pack, but okay.

Peter Margaritis: [00:04:56] All right. It was a roll of toilet paper and a six-pack of beer.

Brian Walter: [00:05:00] I was hoping for a six-pack of toilet paper, but that's okay.

Peter Margaritis: [00:05:04] I'll make sure you get the six-pack of toilet paper. If you don't recognize that voice, that voice is of Brian Walter. And thank you, Brian, for being a guest on my podcast.

Brian Walter: [00:05:12] It's fun. Let's do this thing.

Peter Margaritis: [00:05:14] Let's do this thing. Brian's got a very unique background. And you've heard some of it in the intro.

Brian Walter: [00:05:19] Unique is generous. I like that, unique, which is code for strange, or odd, or twisted, but sure, let's go with unique.

Peter Margaritis: [00:05:27] But I wear my uniqueness as a badge of honor because I want to be strange. I want to be odd. It makes us different. And I mean, you've got a wide variety in your background, but the thing that really stood out to me was you are the past president of the National Speakers Association Board of Directors.

Brian Walter: [00:05:46] That is correct. Yes. You're not a liar. Your research is true. Yes, exactly.

Peter Margaritis: [00:05:51] Yeah, exactly. And that year that you had as president of the board of directors probably went by quicker than you ever thought it would go by, but you're always dealing from a board of directors' perspective, from a strategic planning. What does this association look like?

Brian Walter: [00:06:09] Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:06:10] Five years from now. And correct me if I'm wrong, but you were at the transition between Stacy and Mary Lue.

Brian Walter: [00:06:19] That is correct. That is correct. My wife says, I can't remember anything. Look at this.

Peter Margaritis: [00:06:23] See, there's at least two right there.

Brian Walter: [00:06:26] I'm good for a while. So, as I think about it, we're recording this on March 31, 2020 amidst the whole COVID-19 crisis going on. This will air on May 11th. And I want to talk about, as a leader, dealing with the crisis of any type, shape, or form, we can't so much get locked into today, but we need to start looking out forward, and how does our business change? What do we look like right now in this environment? What do we look like six months from now, eight months from now, a year from now, and going forward? And so, can you put your spin on how you would answer this question on how do we gain focus to look forward and not get caught up in the minutia of today?

Brian Walter: [00:07:16] Yeah, I would say the minutia of today has a power like super glue because it is so compelling because you can actually say, we are literally talking about life or death issues.

Peter Margaritis: [00:07:30] Yes.

Brian Walter: [00:07:30] And with that, we have to do both deal with that and compartmentalize it and also say, so how do I provide value? It reminds me of a conversation I had with myself back in 2009. I remember that was at the height of the Great Recession. The stock market was at like 6,000. And I remember asking myself this question, what do I know how to do? What is anything I know how to do that others

will buy in this environment? What's anything that I know how to do that others will buy in this environment? It really comes down to value.

Brian Walter: [00:08:13] And so far, so many of us have said, "Oh, we are speakers, we provide live events and experiences." And right now, that is not what people will buy. I mean, I actually got like humor-shamed at the bank yesterday. I actually got a check in the mail. So, that was a precious thing. So, I actually, physically went to the bank, gloved up, and then, I hand the check to the teller, and the teller looked at the name, there was two, which it was Extreme Meetings, and said, "Extreme Meetings, probably not getting much business, are you?" I mean, the bank teller is laughing at me.

Peter Margaritis: [00:08:51] Wow.

Brian Walter: [00:08:52] And they were right. They were right that those of us who are in the live experience business have to make a profound change. And what is to come? We don't know. Now, of course, we know that humans like to gather together, and that is something that's built into our DNA, and that's never going to change. There will be some sort of meetings, industry that will reemerge and perhaps even flourish, but it's going to be different, and we have no idea when that's going to be.

Brian Walter: [00:09:23] So, now, we have to look less at our experiential expertise. And now, what is our actual value? What problems do we solve? What do we make people feel? How do we make things better? Why would someone want to give us money? And that is a personal leadership and also a collective leadership if you are running a small company that we have to deal with. It's like, what do we know how to do that people will spend money for in this environment?

Peter Margaritis: [00:09:55] So, I can say back during the recession that we were still trying to sell during that period of time. Today's environment, it's much more dire. And it's almost like, I think of the approach of, I don't feel it's right to sell to companies right now because they're slashing budgets, they're laying off people, they're in hard times. But to bring that value, I think that I can bring some value to them, but offered at no

charge just to be there to serve the community and the clients. And when we get out of this, maybe this helping out will come back to me tenfold.

Brian Walter: [00:10:40] I would say there's multiple right answers and even more wrong answers. And right now, it's like, we're having a COVID sale, that's right, 19% off. Okay. That would be clearly wrong. But, yes, our industry especially as we are desperate, and we are scrambling, and living, and just throwing things against the wall. It's like, I don't think our clients want to hear from us. And I think that will come across as very tone-deaf. On the other hand, there are businesses who need help. And so, that's really, I think, the hard part. Can we truly help?

Brian Walter: [00:11:23] And the level to which we can help is that something that they are willing to pay for or simply accept on a volunteer basis. And for some of us, I think, okay, we actually have an expertise and value that businesses, with their limited budgets that they have, will still spend to get advice or to get counsel, or consulting, or support, or execution, assistance, that they will do that. Other times, they would be like, sure, that would be helpful if you want to record a video telling us to buck up, or blah, blah, blah, or if you want to create a free webinar for our people, the seven who could actually watch it to feel differently.

[00:12:10] So, again, really, I think it comes down to the categories. The value that we have at this particular time, is it merely, that's helpful, sure, sure, that's better than not doing anything? That probably goes in the category of just offer it and they will remember that. And I think there's the other category. If it really comes down to we have an essential skill that's needed by these businesses as they navigate these tricky times, then, yes, they will buy that. How we sell it, we'll probably decide whether we come across as a savvy professional or as a schmuck.

Peter Margaritis: [00:12:52] And that's a very thin tightrope we walk in doing that. It could either make or break our businesses, more so.

Brian Walter: [00:13:00] I would say, many of our businesses are already broken. And so, it is like, crash them into the ground and grind them up like ground glass or not.

Peter Margaritis: [00:13:10] Well, you-

Brian Walter: [00:13:11] Are we going to call this the Chipper podcast? Are we going to-

Peter Margaritis: [00:13:16] Yeah. We will it The Uplifting podcast.

Brian Walter: [00:13:19] Yes.

Peter Margaritis: [00:13:19] Well, I know a lot of people are struggling because now, they've been thrust into their home. So, used an office, as a school, and now, we've got the whole family here. I mean, you and Karen have been together, working your business for—so this is no hiccup in your world at all.

Brian Walter: [00:13:35] Yes. This is called Tuesday. Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:13:36] This is called Tuesday. So, for myself, my wife, and my son, who's 19, apparently, Peter Margaritis LLC picked up two FTEs last two weeks ago. We had a stay-at-home order. And I've got to put both of them on morning and performance review because one sleeps too late, and I delegate to the other one. She's got this other job she's trying to work. People are really struggling with this balance at home. What advice do you give to a group of folks who are listening, going, yeah, this is—I had a coaching call with the client and he was at his house. And he upfront said, "I'm sorry. My dog barks. My kids and wife will come walking through." And lo and behold, they did.

Brian Walter: [00:14:24] I think that there's a word that we don't use very often that I think is the one that will see us through all of these types of things, and that word is grace, that there's nothing more powerful right now than extending each other grace. And grace, I define like the terms like grace and mercy. Like mercy is I will avoid you getting consequences you deserve. But grace, this is my interpretation, grace is

extending favor, or extending patience, or extending kindness to someone regardless of whether they deserve it or not. We are all on edge.

Brian Walter: [00:15:04] It's like people are saying, our income is either dramatically reduced or it's vanished, and we don't know when it's going to be. It's like, generally, Americans have not prepared for that type of thing. They thought, well, it's like, I might have a setback, but they weren't expecting the zombie apocalypse. So, because of that, it's like, okay, everyone's working at home. A lot of people in a very small space constantly together, making noise. So, our rules and our business etiquette get thrown out the window.

Peter Margaritis: [00:15:44] Yeah.

Brian Walter: [00:15:44] And so, we just have to accept the grace. It's like, again, right now, just in a silly, small thing, it's like, our youngest adult daughter is, yeah, working because she has a studio. And so, she's working during the day from our house because it's bigger. So, we're taking care of her cats. So, we have two cats in a small house. But her cat is like, this is my desk, like all these people, I can walk on top of your keyboard. Is that a door? Why is that door closed? Trying to open it.

Brian Walter: [00:16:15] So, now, again, two months ago, it would be, let's lock up the cat, let's give it a sedative, everything must be perfect. The phone will not ring. It was all about the etiquette perfection. Now, we have to give each other grace. We're going to get this raw, real type of thing. And that's going to be hard for us, but I think that's how we see our way through it, that we extend each other grace, and we realize that perfection is not only not an option, perfection is not even pursuit.

Peter Margaritis: [00:16:48] I thoroughly agree because my coaching client, he gets so upset when the dog was barking and so upset when the kids came through. And I said, "You told me upfront. You said this is going to happen, so it's going to happen." To that grace aspect, don't worry about it. And if you're on a call with your team or the organization and this happens, you're not the only one, I bet. The world has changed, to your point. There's no such thing as perfection right now.

Brian Walter: [00:17:19] Yeah, there's that. And also, I think the need for us to embrace the stressful transformation that we're in, like there is no going back to normal. There will be going back to different.

Peter Margaritis: [00:17:34] Right.

Brian Walter: [00:17:35] And we, probably as a society, like a lot more of us will work from home after this because we just proved we could.

Peter Margaritis: [00:17:44] Yes.

Brian Walter: [00:17:44] And there's all sorts of changes, again, taking place. But all these changes are stressful. And I think that there's going to be a lot of marriages and relationships that get a lot better, and a lot of them, as soon as those lawyers' offices are open, they will get some business, it's like.

Peter Margaritis: [00:18:03] Yeah, one of my colleagues, she has a coaching business. And she has really large clients in the Cleveland area. And when this all happened, she was able to not miss a beat and conduct all of her coaching calls and stuff through Zoom with the client and kept the business moving forward. But then, at the end, she's going, "By the time I'm done, I'm completely exhausted because I'm adjusting to a new medium here, as well as I have the stress of the family that's here. They're always here. Now, they never leave. And the fact that what we're dealing with this crisis." By the time she's done, she's completely wiped out. And I'm like, you know what, you're right. I am too."

Brian Walter: [00:18:47] Because it's new. Because it's new. Years ago, in the '90s, I worked for a company called the Effectiveness Institute. It sounds almost like a Saturday Night Live skit, but it's not. It was an actual place. And one of the founders, a guy named Tom Shampoo, he created this concept, this model that he called rotating the iceberg. And so, he said, "Imagine the iceberg at rest." He said, "Now, we all know that's like 70% or 80% of it is underwater, but it's almost like a big triangular shape."

Brian Walter: [00:19:17] And he said, "That is like our behavior or personality, the way we normally are." He said, "Now, we can show different sides of it above the waterline by rotating it, but we have to use effort, like, okay, now, I'm going to show this side of it." And he said, "Now, if you're married, it's like when your mother-in-law comes over, do you change your behavior? Of course, you do. You're on your best behavior. And you can do it for about a weekend. And then, as soon as she goes home, you're like, wow, oh, my gosh."

Brian Walter: [00:19:52] Because rotating the iceberg, showing different behavior, engaging a different style the way we've definitely done, we can do that, but it takes energy to sustain us in a place where we don't normally operate in. And so, that's with all this Zoom stuff, there's an intensity of everything is different. We can do these other behaviors, but we have to be aware of, it costs us way more energy than before. And so, people are going to be exhausted, and cranky, and short, and all these things. What's the solution for that? Grace.

Peter Margaritis: [00:20:32] Yes. And how long can we sustain that? Because emotions do come into play, things do happen. And yeah, we're already seeing a little bit of that here in Columbus, Ohio, on the news about some domestic violence, occurrences that tend to increase over the past week to 10 days since we've been in this shelter-to-place type of thing. And I mean, we're cramped up, and people are stressed out and got to find some levity. I mean, you're a funny guy. We've got to find some levity. You provide a lot of optimism, a lot of humor.

Brian Walter: [00:21:10] Not so far on this podcast though, right?

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:11] Yeah. Really, I'm trying to suck all of that out of you now.

Brian Walter: [00:21:14] Is this the pivot point you're going for? Okay.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:17] Well, I've been told if I say the word, pivot, I'm going to get shot at, so-

Brian Walter: [00:21:20] Well, I said it. How about I just change it to inflection point? It's so much better.

Peter Margaritis: [00:21:25] Yes. This is the inflection point where we bring the humor out that we've addressed all the other stuff. And how do we bring that humor and help folks, help teams, help organizations, help the members of the National Speakers Association?

Brian Walter: [00:21:40] I think part of that is that we accept that we need the humor. And that's because humor relieves tension, humor acknowledges uncomfortable truths. We use humor to express uncomfortable truths. And we see that a lot. When you think what are the safe things going on now that we're able to joke about, we joke about toilet paper. You joked about toilet paper right at the front end of this.

Peter Margaritis: [00:22:07] Right.

Brian Walter: [00:22:07] In the entire United States, everyone is comfortable joking about toilet paper rather than I'm terrified when I walk into a store and I see empty shelves because I've never seen that in my entire life except for right before a hurricane. But rather than do that, we can talk about it, really, it's like, do you have irritable bowel syndrome because I mean, that's a lot of toilet paper, I mean, that's like a five-year supply. So, we can joke about that. We can joke about like, okay, I went to the grocery store and all of the chicken and chips and salsa were gone. Lots of vegetables are still there.

Peter Margaritis: [00:22:50] Yeah, lots of cans are being-

Brian Walter: [00:22:51] The Oreos are gone, but the garbanzo beans are still in fully stuck. Now, we can joke about that. We joke about Zoom. Everyone is suddenly using video conferencing for the first time. And yes, we see your nostril hairs. You forgot to turn off your camera and you were in the bathroom. And I mean, so all these things start happening. And these are all super-duper healthy things because it gives us something

to laugh about. What we're not doing any humor about, of course, is stuff going on at hospitals.

Peter Margaritis: [00:23:26] Right.

Brian Walter: [00:23:27] We don't do that. Now, we'll joke about masks, but we'll joke about the type of masks that we wear, and things that we're putting on because that can be funny, funny shapes, funny pictures, funny effects, wearing it wrong. Somebody is wearing a mask, and then they have to cough, so they put it down, and then cough, and then put it back on. I mean, like hello. So, those are the type of things that we must and should laugh about.

Peter Margaritis: [00:23:55] Yeah. We do have to take a little lightheartedness in our day. I participated in a virtual improv class workshop two weeks ago. And I have an improv coach, his name is Jay Sukow. And actually, I interviewed him for this podcast couple weeks ago. And we were in this improv using Zoom. There's the cat.

Brian Walter: [00:24:18] There's the cat. I've got to say, this is an audio program, yes? Okay. When you say, there's the cat, they can't actually see the cat, Peter, just saying.

Peter Margaritis: [00:24:28] Right. But if I happen to put this out on YouTube, would be able to watch it, they can, oh, that's where the cat jumped in.

Brian Walter: [00:24:35] Yeah. So, thank you for letting me know because I would have shaved had I known that this is going to be a video, but, oh, that's awesome.

Peter Margaritis: [00:24:41] Why would you want to shave right now? I mean, you have the freedom to go-

Brian Walter: [00:24:44] To increase the number of follicles on my head because now, there's seven.

Peter Margaritis: [00:24:51] So, I was in this virtual improv workshop and just having a blast. And after it was done, I went up and was talking to my wife, and she was watching our governor do his press conference around 2:00, and we just had our first death in Ohio. And I went, "I forgot all about this for that one hour. I remove myself from the world, from the situation, from my environment, and went to this place of fun and happiness, and enjoyed it." And as soon as I heard that, I want to go back and say, "Okay, guys, let's do this some more. Can we do this all day?" Humor is a great way to-

Brian Walter: [00:25:30] But there might be something else you need to do during the day, but yes, more, how about-

Peter Margaritis: [00:25:33] Yes, more, but-

Brian Walter: [00:25:35] Like work that all-value thing.

Peter Margaritis: [00:25:39] Yeah. It's just that opportunity to escape. It's so critical right now for people to be able to have the moment to laugh, and have fun, and binge-watch favorite shows or whatever people are doing. I've never really got into binge-watching. I'm not schooled in this. I just watch-

Brian Walter: [00:26:00] It's a skill you can pick up fairly quickly. The barrier to entry is quite low. You just keep watching, yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:26:08] Just keep watching. Just keep watching.

Brian Walter: [00:26:11] Yes. Next episode in 37 seconds, boom, there it is.

Peter Margaritis: [00:26:15] Well, it sounds like you're a professional in this area.

Brian Walter: [00:26:17] I've been testing it. Yeah, really. Well, it's interesting when you talk about the escape. I absolutely think there's an escape component and there's how it makes us feel, but also, it helps our body. It helps our psyche, because, again, I'm not a psychiatrist or psychologist, but I know that if we're in perpetual stress, that hurts our

health and reduces our ability to respond to things. And so, by having humor, crying, laughing, and exercising actually change our mental, and physical, and emotional states.

Peter Margaritis: [00:26:55] Yes.

Brian Walter: [00:26:55] Those things, generally, like I just wish I could cry more during the day. Most of the time, we don't think about that. Exercise, exercise. But laughter is the most accessible way to change our emotional, physical, mental state. And we should continue to do more of that.

Peter Margaritis: [00:27:17] So, how do you keep humor in the house, in your business, with your clients?

Brian Walter: [00:27:21] Well, one, never let it leave, just like tie it up, put it in the corner, sorry, you can't leave. You kidnap humor and you keep it in your house. You hold humor hostage.

Peter Margaritis: [00:27:31] Right.

Brian Walter: [00:27:32] I think part of it is, I mean, there's people who are just naturally humorous, not that they're telling jokes all the time, but they have that perspective. So, again, we talked about that rotating the iceberg. For some people, it's like you just keep being you. For those who are not as naturally humorous or seeking out the things, I think it needs to be more of a conscious act, which is like, okay, like if you're going to binge-watch, watch more comedies instead of British crime chest or don't watch, it's like, Murder Inc, it's like, America's Top Predators.

Brian Walter: [00:28:08] I mean, like maybe don't watch those as much, but seek out comedies. Facebook has made a huge resurgence in that because everyone was like, "Oh, Mark Zuckerberg sucks, I'm going to get off Facebook." And now, we're stuck at home, "Facebook is my friend. I love Facebook." And I mean, all sorts of great means.

There are tons of humor that's going out there. And we have to filter it because there's also conspiracy theories that political diatribes going on.

Brian Walter: [00:28:43] So, we have to filter that out, but that was there before anyways. But find the funny, seek out the humor, share the humor. And so, like right now, if anyone listening here, I would say, it's like, go on to your Facebook group, and find three funny things, and post them on your timeline or actually, this is even better, message them to three people. And that active, it's like, oh, I'm going to find three funny things, and I'm going to message them, direct message them to three different people, that forces you into a very easy humor task, so it's not like, oh, my gosh, this is so hard, I can't find anything.

Brian Walter: [00:29:27] Well, yes, you can. You can find it very easily. And again, it's not even hard. It's like, that's a funny meme, hahaha, click on it, it's like share to one of your message contacts, Peter would love this. Peter, oh, my gosh, this made me think of you, click. Do that three times, you've added humor to yourself and added humor to three others. Now, what are they probably going to do? Share it with someone else. What are they probably going to do next time they see something funny? They're going to share it with you.

Peter Margaritis: [00:29:58] And there's a lot of funny stuff. I'm getting stuff all the time. But I've also challenged a few other people. Now that we're in this virtual world, these virtual meetings, we all should just get dressed from the waist up, right?

Brian Walter: [00:30:13] Yes.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:14] Right. The CEO of-

Brian Walter: [00:30:17] As long as you don't stand up, but yes. Okay.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:19] That's right. As long as you don't stand up. The CEO of the Maryland Association CPAs posted on Facebook and LinkedIn yesterday that he was,

well, jacket, shirt, tie, and then he got up from behind his desk, he had a pair of State of Maryland boxer shorts on.

Brian Walter: [00:30:35] I've wondered that because it's like, I wouldn't feel comfortable that way. I mean, it's like sartorial mohawk or something. It's like, okay. It's like, yes, I'm wearing this here, but I'm wearing this blah, blah, blah, I'm wearing pajamas underneath. It's like, do you feel comfortable doing that? To me, I feel like mismatched.

Peter Margaritis: [00:30:57] Oh, what I've been doing dressed for the waist up is I go in through my closet and finding shirt.

Brian Walter: [00:31:03] All right. Peter, can you stand up right now? Can you stand up?

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:05] Like I'm wearing a pair of scrubs.

Brian Walter: [00:31:08] Can you stand up? Let's see. Come on. Let's see.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:12] Hold on. Hold on.

Brian Walter: [00:31:12] I'm now commentating this. He's now standing up, he's lurching up here. He is wearing scrubs. He is not a medical professional, people. I don't know why he has scrubs, but he's wearing scrubs. Now, where did you get these scrubs? These hopefully weren't cast off from the local hospital in the burn, do not wear section, oh, my gosh, it's such a deal.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:36] It was such a deal. No, my sister works in health care in Florida and I was visiting couple of years ago. And she knew when I was a kid, I used to love to wear scrubs, so she got me a pair.

Brian Walter: [00:31:50] There you go.

Peter Margaritis: [00:31:50] Now, I was going to start off today in Atlanta State inspired by a guy who I know, I did put on my University of Kentucky boxer shorts, and I was going to go through the day like that, but I got a little uncomfortable.

Brian Walter: [00:32:05] That's good. Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:07] That's why I needed to put the scrubs on. But just doing something as crazy as that, just add a little levity.

Brian Walter: [00:32:12] Add a little levity.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:13] Just don't stand up.

Brian Walter: [00:32:15] I'm wearing slippers. I mean, that's nothing.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:18] I guess, of course, are you wearing pants right now?

Brian Walter: [00:32:21] Well, you know what, it's funny that this day and age, that's actually not an inappropriate question. As a matter of fact, yes, I am wearing jeans because I was going to like respect you by actually being fully dressed, not shaving, because it was supposed to be audio only. But thanks for that. But yes, I am fully dressed.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:42] Fully dressed. Oh, good.

Brian Walter: [00:32:44] Didn't take a shower, but fully dressed.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:46] You did take a shower. You did?

Brian Walter: [00:32:47] Well, yesterday, but yes.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:50] Now, you're located in Bellevue, Washington.

Brian Walter: [00:32:53] Very good. Bellevue, Washington. That's right.

Peter Margaritis: [00:32:55] Yes. Actually, the Washington Society of CPAs is located in Bellevue, Washington.

Brian Walter: [00:32:59] I've done work for the Washington Society of CPAs.

Peter Margaritis: [00:33:02] So, Brian, Seattle is one of my favorite cities. Bellevue, Seattle, love the food, love visiting, but you guys were one of the first epicenters of this crisis. Has things kind of moderated over time or is it just starting to accelerate as it is on the East Coast?

Brian Walter: [00:33:23] A little of both. It's like, we dealt with it early and we're in kind of western Washington. I think there's the western Washington experience and the eastern Washington. It's almost like we have two states the other side of the mountains. The east side is a little more like Idaho. It's much more open agrarian. And our governor was very aggressive early on with social distancing. And we don't have like Fort Lauderdale beaches. So, it's not like, not with me. So, I would say, as I said, we embraced it better than most. Not better than anyone, but that better than most. And we're seeing an effect of it because it was very real to us very quickly.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:05] Yes.

Brian Walter: [00:34:06] And I mean, we started like, okay, here is this assisted living center, and they have all these cases, and they have deaths, and it's spreading. And so, we got into the response early. So, we're starting to see some positive benefits, but has it peaked for us? We don't know. Probably not.

Peter Margaritis: [00:34:32] Yeah, yeah. And I think that whole goes to the psyche, and the mindset, and thinking about what we do because we don't know. We have no. well, we had no idea when we'd come out of the Great Recession, but we could go look on history and go, okay, stock market goes up, stock market goes down. These are points,

18 months, two years. And it just adds to the dilemma that all of us are feeling with our jobs, with our lives.

Peter Margaritis: [00:35:05] And I don't know, I've just been spending this time trying to figure out how do I transform? How do I make the business look different when we get out of this versus the way it looks now, and trying to use different thought process and stuff, and just trying to keep my mind busy, and not focusing on the outside of this house, just focusing on what I can do on the inside of this house, what I have control over. I think it's helped me maintain some bit of sanity during this process.

Brian Walter: [00:35:34] To me, one of the things I'm working on is making sure I have concern versus worry. And here's how I make a difference between that. I said worry is a mental spinning. It is anticipating all of the worst-case scenarios that could happen, and it results in me being paralyzed, like I'm less likely to take action, or to think, or to be too creative, or to be flexible because I'm constantly spinning, spinning, spinning on what could happen.

Peter Margaritis: [00:36:10] Right.

Brian Walter: [00:36:10] And worrying is debilitating. Concern is still anticipating. Okay, here are the things that could happen, but realizing, okay, I'm going to focus on what I have control over. So, I'm not going to be obsessing. I'm not going to be debilitated by it, but that doesn't mean I'm clueless, or tone-deaf, or like, hey, you know what I love about the coronavirus, it's like I eat whatever I want. Well, yeah, that's funny, but it's like, okay, then you're just sticking your head in the sand, and you're ignoring the realities.

Brian Walter: [00:36:45] It's like, and I could be on 80% less income for the foreseeable future. That would be concerning. That would be concerning. But a concern is like, that could happen. I don't know if that will happen, but that could happen. So, if the government has brought these programs, do I qualify? If I get rejected, can I apply for somewhere else? Can I refinance my house? Can I control expenses? Can I defer things?

Brian Walter: [00:37:09] I mean, there's ways that action to respond is something, whereas worry is, oh my gosh, the government probably won't even give us money because we're in a higher income bracket, and you have to prove it. We haven't actually lost it yet, but we'll be losing it. And you spin, spin, spin, spin, and you don't actually take action. And that's debilitating. So, to me, that's what I've been focusing on, like, okay, when things get darker or when things get scarier, how can I say, okay, I can have appropriate concern and I take action versus to the extent possible, I'm going to choose not to worry because worry does nothing except hurt me and those I love.

Peter Margaritis: [00:37:50] Great advice. It's, focus on things that you have control versus the things that you don't have control to some degree. And transparency, I think early on, I went to worry. And I didn't realize it because it was so new, so fresh.

Brian Walter: [00:38:07] Sure.

Peter Margaritis: [00:38:07] And I've gotten myself out of that back into the concerned mindset, but I think my concern is that as this continues to move forward and we're spending more time at home, and away from jobs, and away from income, that the concern for others may move from concern to worry to spinning out of control, and that's a major issue, I think, that we will have if people start going into that out-of-control spinning mode.

Brian Walter: [00:38:43] Yeah. And when we start talking about, for future, what can I do? What is anything I know how to do that others will pay for in this environment? Those who can keep their head, those who can stay in the concern mode and not be in the worry mode will have more opportunities to contribute and actually get paid than those who can't. And I mean, I don't want to sound harsh, but it's like, okay, worry will never help in any circumstance. Now, again, don't get me wrong. Concern, appropriate, proportionate concern, it's like I am super concerned about what is happening.

Brian Walter: [00:39:26] I am super concerned what is imminent. I am super concerned about what is here. It's like okay, how do I translate that concern? What can I do? How can I think? How can I behave to minimize, to argument, to circumvent, to take

advantage of, to contribute? That's a different reaction than paralytic worry. And I believe also that being calm is also able to spread. And it's also able to have influence. Again, in your household, it's like, how can I be the best partner in my household? It's like, okay, by spending more time not in worry mode.

Peter Margaritis: [00:40:09] Exactly. And we were talking about binge-watching. And I guess if you see your spouse binge-watching Criminal Minds with a notebook handy, you might want to leave the house.

Brian Walter: [00:40:20] But you can't leave the house.

Peter Margaritis: [00:40:20] That's true. Yeah. But you can't leave-

Brian Walter: [00:40:25] You self-isolate in the garage.

Peter Margaritis: [00:40:28] Yes, you've been relegated to the basement. I watch the-

Brian Walter: [00:40:33] When they come back from the grocery store with a shovel, that's not a good sign. Are you watching Dexter? I mean, what's with all the garbage bags, it's like, and the duct tape? I don't understand.

Peter Margaritis: [00:40:46] That's a good one. Yes. What's going on here? I did watch pieces of the NSA video with a very Banther and Mary Lue Peck, and I forgot the other two who were on there as well. But when Barry was talking about what you can do, and talking about the bill, talking about what are your fixed expenses, and what are those variable expenses, and what can you eliminate. And I'd already kind of set that up, but I went back and revisited at the end and kind of looking at that, going, okay, oh, by the way, do I qualify for to collect unemployment benefits because I'm a sole provider? It's just me. And yes, so wanted to go down through that. So, I'm starting to put some of those things in place because that's something I have control, that's something I can do. And I guess in this bill that banks are willing to. Allow you to miss payments, mortgage payments, and not affect your credit, I believe. There are some things in place that the programs-

Brian Walter: [00:41:50] They say that, but I don't believe that. They say that, it's like, but what I do think is a reality which is tenacity is going to be our friend, meaning like, okay, so was it Saturday or Friday, whatever, not sure, is when they passed the 2.2-trillion-dollar stimulus package. I mean, they call it whatever they're going to call it here. And they pulled that together and basically a week, and they said, "Oh, and who's going to administrate portions of it?" Banks. Banks will.

Brian Walter: [00:42:27] When did the banks find this out? Same time you and I heard that. It's like that. So, they don't know. I mean, it's like, all I know is that the money is supposed to go out and get distributed to people. So, my thought is, apply. I mean, Barry talked about this thing. And so, the deal is like everyone who's listening to this podcast, it's like no matter who you are, no matter what your job is, especially though if you are a sole proprietor or you have your own business or something like that, apply for this, call the bank.

Brian Walter: [00:42:58] And if they can't help you, call a different bank because whatever the criteria are, it's going to evolve and change, because they're making it up. They're making it up. There's no hard-set rules yet, they're still figuring out, but what is the purpose? The government isn't giving money to the banks for the banks. That's a different fund. They're making money available to somehow in some process to be determined to get to us so that we can make our mortgage payments, and we can buy food, and we can keep up with insurance payments, and tuition, and all these other types of things. So, I thought it's just, go for it, go for it, and go for it.

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:41] Absolutely. And by the way, they did it on the week, and it's only 880 pages.

Brian Walter: [00:43:48] Yeah.

Peter Margaritis: [00:43:48] I actually pulled it up. I was kind of scanning and to your point, there's a lot of stuff in there they're going to figure out how to administer and get out. And also, trying to get the checks to those who need it, but only if you have a direct

deposit on file with the IRS. You'll get it in two to three weeks. Otherwise, you'll get a paycheck or a check. And that could take a month. Yeah.

Brian Walter: [00:44:19] And my deal is like, we'll still need it in a month.

Peter Margaritis: [00:44:23] True. We will.

Brian Walter: [00:44:24] So, it's not like, well, all I need was one month and I'm good, I'm good, everything's fine, it's like okay. So, yeah, I mean, part of the deal is I mean, this is unprecedented, and this is where grace comes in, and like we give patience with each other, and you got to make decisions. Like let's say you have a cleaning person that comes to your house twice a month. Well, I'm guessing they're not coming in this month.

Peter Margaritis: [00:44:54] Right.

Brian Walter: [00:44:55] So, that person's going to be tighter financially than you or me, do you still pay them for a month or is that part of your, got to cut all nonessential expenses? And so, those are judgment calls that we're all going to have to make as we take care of ourselves, but we also try and take care of others, and it gets complicated.

Peter Margaritis: [00:45:18] Yes, it is. It's very complicated. I got two virtual assistants that I'm trying to maintain their hours, but then, I have to have a conversation, that we'll probably have to reduce some of the hours, not eliminate them, but reduce them as long as I can because I still want to support them, and they've been supporting me, and see how long I can go with that.

Brian Walter: [00:45:42] How much do you pay because I might interview for that?

Peter Margaritis: [00:45:44] Okay. Well, it's about \$15 to \$22 dollars an hour. You up for some additional side work?

Brian Walter: [00:45:52] Well, it's safer than working at Amazon, but that's okay. that's okay.

Peter Margaritis: [00:45:55] Exactly. Well, I greatly appreciate your time, and your knowledge, and your wisdom, and your thoughts on stuff as it relates to the current environment out there. I mean, it's so complex. It's so complicated. It's so diverse. It's changing every single day. I know that the information that you provided my audience, they'll be able to take nuggets of that, apply it to their lives. And if anything, I think the key piece of all of this is be grateful. That's the one that we all can use that superpower.

Brian Walter: [00:46:32] And let's kind of fast-forward and mention, I mean, you noted in this that we're recording this on the last day of March, but the time this is being heard, this is May. Things could be very different by the time it's going out, so I just want to acknowledge that whatever you and I have said, let's interpret that in the context of how we are thinking and feeling at the end of March. Things could be getting somewhat better. There could be a light that we're pursuing. We could have just gone through some pretty scary scenarios with a thousand people a day dying. We don't know at the point that we're recording this. So, I hope that all those listening will extend Peter and I some Grace in what we were saying, that this is a moment in time. We think everything we said is timeless, and that it applies, but we don't know for sure.

Peter Margaritis: [00:47:30] Very good point. And what I've been doing with these episodes, they're due to the team that produces this for me, I write the intro and do it right at the point that it's due. So, I will put the disclaimer on and recast the landscape as of mid-April, towards the end of April on where we were at the time we recorded this and the current events, and hopefully, that we are getting better, hopefully, that we're starting to come out of this when this year airs. I guess that's my wishes, hopes, and dreams.

Brian Walter: [00:48:03] Now, you put it like, Brian now lives in a bunker in Alaska, it's like, with the supplies that he hoarded over a period of two months.

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:16] Exactly. And we haven't seen Brian, but we did hear that his wife, Karen, was out buying shovels one day, and that's-

Brian Walter: [00:48:22] Yeah. It's like, it's a compound or something, yes.

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:24] Yes, yes. It's a nice compound. So, I wish you and your family all the health and safety, and that we get to the end of this, and everybody's well. And there's a brighter tomorrow.

Brian Walter: [00:48:38] Cheers to brighter tomorrow.

Peter Margaritis: [00:48:40] Cheers to brighter tomorrow. Great. Thanks, Brian. I really appreciate it. Beginning with my next episode and moving forward, I will be interviewing with less of a COVID-19 focus. And my next guest is a friend of the show and a friend of mine, Jodi Pasar, who is the VP of Strategy for Botkeeper. Botkeeper combines artificial intelligence and machine-learning technology with high quality of skilled accountants to deliver a full-suite bookkeeping and pre-accounting solution to accounting firms and their clients. Now, I'm going to sign off by saying, please, everyone, be healthy, practice social distancing, be safe, and implement a couple of tips that Brian gave us in order to help deal with the stress and anxiety that we see in our daily lives. Thank you.

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