S4E41 Brian Comerford

SPEAKERS

Brian Comerford, Peter Margaritis

Peter Margaritis

One of my favorite guests is back, Brian Comerford. And this time it's just Brian and I. We've decided to shed Nick and Roxanne, and just have a conversation one on one, because I don't know if you feel this way, Brian, but it seems like when the four of us together Nick and Roxanne just monopolize the conversation.

Brian Comerford

Oh yeah, I'm always worried about that with them.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, I hope they both listen to this episode. I'm going to get an earful when we're done.

Brian Comerford

Well, I just hope that you and I can allow one another to talk. It will be a challenge, and I've been working on my interrupting skills by interrupting more. No I'm just kidding. We were sitting here thinking about what do we want to talk about today, and Brian said how about The Great Resignation. Yes.

Peter Margaritis

Tell us why... I never heard, I haven't heard that term yet, so that's new to me. So, can you put some context around The Great Resignation.

Brian Comerford

Yes, this is something that I keep seeing coming up in business publications, and coming up in circles for some of these advisory groups that I'm part of. It's a real thing. I think there's a couple of different factors. The pandemic sort of turned on a lot of folks to the idea of remote work, who had not ever really been a part of that before. Some of the people that had turned on to it were organizational leaders who suddenly realized, 'Hey, actually, we get some pretty good productivity out of folks who are not in the office.' But, but for a lot of folks who have been called back into their office setting, they're making a move to do something different and go elsewhere. And sometimes that includes starting your own business. Right? And, and for some folks, they've just kind of resigned themselves, to, to, maybe, maybe it's a good time to just kind of ride things out and not even have a job until everything kind of settles with whatever's happening with the global pandemic. Wow, that that just scares me to death. And the new word that I learned when I was a Victoria's Secret, I got off-boarded. That's a nicer way of saying fired or laid off or whatever, but rarely I was only a small period of time that I was ever without a job, it just didn't feel right. I can't imagine going, you're my boss, well, you know, I don't have a job. I don't want this job. I'm gonna go find another job. You know, I'll tell you what if I, if you were bringing

together the phrases Victoria's Secret and offboarding into the same sentence I, you know, it might conjure a different image for me than what you just described. So, that one does have an unhappier ending, then what I envision by the way. Actually yes. Their company here and based out of...we're based out of Columbus, Ohio, and sometime I'll tell you this story about how that all just dissolved, for the most part. But back to The Great Resignation. Yeah, so, you know, I think part of the first sort of intimations that I heard around this were related to folks who are suddenly, quote unquote, making more money by just taking their unemployment benefits and whatever the added stimulus was on top of that, because, you know, in sum total, they were suddenly making more money by not going back to work than they were actually being part of the workforce. So, disincentivize them from actually finding new employment after having been off-boarded. You know, but I also guestion, how much, how much of that is true. You know, I mean I guess if it's in your own economic interests to just keep, you know, cashing the checks that are coming in, and you're doing better than you were. You're getting ahead faster than you were by actually being employed, then that makes perfect sense. But ultimately I also have a belief that people like to be engaged in something that makes them feel like they're contributing to something meaningful. So, I think there's probably as much of that dimension to the choices folks are making right now, because they've had a little bit of time to reflect and they realize, yeah I don't feel like I was contributing to something very meaningful in what I was doing before. I'm just gonna take this time to figure out what that could be. Okay so, but what about the white collar corporate power, individuals who I can still remember hearing, you're not going to be productive if you're working from home. The perception is that you're all eating bonbons and watching Oprah or Ellen or whomever, and then all of a sudden we were shoved into that, okay, everybody's got to go home, and work from there. And it's like, it's to your point, I'm okay. We are productive. And this is working. It took a while, but now we're telling people to come back to work. They're going, "No!" I like to eat bonbons in between Zoom meetings.

Peter Margaritis

I like Zoom fatique.

Brian Comerford

Yes that's and that ties into a different theme which is The Great Weight Gain, that for many of us with combination to Zoom fatigue. I remember the Freshmen 10, but I put on the COVID 19. That's what 19 stands for. The minimum amount of weight you're going to gain during the pandemic. Yes. Oh my goodness, yes. If 19 is where it stopped, you know. I said the minimum amount. Well, you know, it's interesting that you bring that up, Peter, because before the pandemic, you know, Nick and I obviously co-produce a podcast on leadership and technology, and remote workforce was always this topic that we heard, you know, continually criticized for the reasons that you stated that, you know, executives tend not to have a belief that you're going to get anything done. If you're actually doing that work from your home. But in the tech industry in particular, a lot of the workforce has already been sort of attenuated to the idea that, nah, I get my work done. And I get it done, you know, on my time, as long as the work's getting delivered, you know, that success. And, as an entrepreneur myself, you know, in, in years past, home was my office, and part of the challenge that I experienced then is actually what I experienced as a rerun during the pandemic, which is working from home, can leave you in a place where you never know when to turn off. Right? And so, the productivity may just keep going and going. So, there has been an upside for certain companies that are now measuring that and realizing, Hey,

this is... actually this is a pretty good thing. We're getting some, some pretty good productivity out of people. But I think Nick has said it many times in other conversations that we've had that people are going to figure out how to goof off inside the walls of your office building just as easily as they can at home. So, if that's their proclivity to do so, then that's a different challenge. Right? It's like a management challenge, you know, versus a location challenge. It's an ego challenge. It's that control factor that I wouldn't, I wouldn't have that control over the masses or whatever and I want them back in here because it's my belief that the belief of my people, but it's my belief that they're going to be productive here, even though they've shown me we see the research that they're probably more productive working from home, but it's a lot of that control factor that goes into it and not really. I just talked to... There's a CPA firm in Boston, I'm doing some work for, and they said that their interim partner, the Executive Committee, basically surveyed all of the employees. What do you want to do? Work from home, hybrid, come back in? And basically everybody said we'll do a hybrid model. We'll come back, but maybe for one to two days and three days home. Nobody is well, you have natural attrition, and accounting firms, but it hasn't hyped itself up versus a firm is bringing people, making them, demanding them that they come back, and people bolting from that point. Well, here's the challenge with corporate demands at this point. There's enough companies out there who are willing to have that kind of flexibility for their workforce that for people who are being told, you're going to have to come back and in the office or you're going to have to be in four days, and we'll entertain letting you work remote for one day. Or we're going to change your base salary structure, because you're now working from the countryside, versus being in a municipality. Folks who hear that kind of message, you know, where there's, there's a demand. Right? I think are saying, Okay, well I'm going to take a hike then, because there's a bunch of other companies here who are going to give me the flexibility that I would prefer. So, it's, it has shifted. I think, you know, sort of the preferences to the labor force versus the corporate marketplace to dictate that. Right, and, but it just ceases to amaze me that manage... senior management are making demands without even surveying the people. And it's got to be my generation that's doing it. It's the Baby Boomer generation, that in some probably some older types of long standing companies. Who haven't evolved into today, even though what we had what we were forced to do, we still lack trust in the people that we hire. Well, it's true. Yeah, and, you know, again I think that's a, that's a leadership challenge, right? That's a reflection of a leadership style that I think really started to disappear at the end of the 90s. And when you think about it that's right around the same time that you started hearing a lot of sort of this corporate strategy shtick, right? Where employee experience became this new phrase that was introduced, and suddenly there's corporations all over a variety of industries, "Oh yeah we've got, we've got an employee experience initiative. That's one of our, you know, strategic objectives." Well that's great and everything. And you kind of think about where much of that came from. It was, it was sort of companies like Apple and Microsoft that started that trend, right? It's not just jeans on Friday. It's jeans everyday. It's, it's dress for your day, you know, we trust that you have a level of awareness as a professional that if we've got clients coming in the office, maybe you're gonna suit up a little differently than if you're just spending the day working on a, you know, an RFP response or something right? Right, just thinking about that, it's just that, that overall lack of trust, which is... why, why do you why do you hire people? Why, you know, I'm gonna hire you. Am I just hiring a number or just a body to put in place? Or if I hire somebody that's actually gonna fit in this job, fit in this, do what we need to do, until they prove me wrong, and I can't trust them. I'm going to trust them. And to Nick's, we all goof off the great resignation I had the great distractor Amazon, bottom line. I thought you're gonna say Netflix but yeah Amazon is up there too. For me it's more like

Wikipedia, you know. I find myself going down these trails of things that are fascinating to me. Maybe better yet, YouTube. Yes, yes.

Peter Margaritis

I've, I've watched hours at times throughout the day. Just, hey what's on Youtube? What can I find? Oh, cool. This is cool. I'm gonna this, I'm going to watching this funny cat video.

Brian Comerford

Right. Well, and that's, you know, much of that is this era of, you know, what we've called Web 2.0. Right? An emergence beyond the static, right? Where, where the contents, just being served to you and you're consuming it to more of this preference orientation, right? We're, we're moving through things in the way that we want to that's where the whole kind of cut the cable movement came from. It's not that you're watching less junk and consuming to your screen. It's just that now it's a preference based consumption of junk. That ala cart version of junk. That's right.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, I can choose on because of my interest, if I'm going to take some time to compile. This is what I'm going to do. But I think it still comes back, that associate, employee still knows they have a deadline. They still know they have a project that they have to do. So, they might now be saying, instead of cutting out of work at five, they may have to work those six. But I think there's much more flexibility in that working from home than being in the office. It depends on the overall corporate culture that maybe everybody left at five. I mean, cleared out. Well, if everybody's doing it, I might, I might as well do it. If you go home. We used to take our work home with us. I don't think much of that is happening because we are home. That's true. Well, you know, And honestly, my personal productivity has fallen because, you know, I used to take the commuter train to and from work, and so that was, that was 30 minutes of quality 'me time' that I got, you know, each direction, you know, a couple times a day. And, and that disappeared because I don't have the commute. And so, so consequently, I have to be deliberate in finding that, Just as I have to be deliberate, you know, whether it's my, my health monitor chiming and telling me it's time to get up and move around, or it's just me looking out the window and realizing it's kind of a beautiful day, you know, I'm going to take 15 minutes and walk around the block, and get away from a screen, right? Those become part of the new pattern that you have to invoke, I think, to, to kind of shake up, you know, what otherwise for a lot of us just keeps us tied to the desk.

Brian Comerford

So, out of curiosity, when you were commuting to and from working at 30 minutes there, 30 minutes back, what we what we listened to? What were you reading? What were you doing? Or were you just napping? So, dependent on the day. You know I do a lot of writing. It was always a good opportunity for me to write, but it was also a good opportunity for me to read and then occasionally, you know, I would get hooked on a podcast like this show. And it would be the kind of thing where I'd find myself staring out the window listening to a couple of guys like us jabber on about something that was apparently interesting enough to hold my interest.

Yeah, when I had those opportunities that I was commuting back and forth, especially if it was like 30 minutes or so, I would, well, we didn't call them podcasts back then, but it was just like the radio, or just reading the newspaper or the Wall Street Journal. Big thing then just say there, and just consuming the day's news. The day's business news. We're going from, but yeah, I.. Do you do much that? I mean, I don't, I'm not inclined to pick up a paper and look at the paper anymore or even go to a news site. I have kind of lost that interest as well. There's a lot of reasons why I probably lost my interest but...

Brian Comerford

Yes, you know, probably like most people, I've got RSS feeds, set up that have their own algorithms behind them that have determined, here are the things that I tend to veer off on when I'm looking at digital content, right? So, it keeps trying to serve me up more of that as if that's, you know, that's... I mean, perhaps for some people that's, that's what they do. They just get into one groove and they kind of stay there, but I'm, I'm more all over the map. And I think the detriment to that, and we've seen a lot of this, especially in the last few years, you know, we now have entirely biased based content that is being served up in this unlimited fashion, and those algorithms are part of what just keeps scooping up another helping, you know. And so, I think the variety of perspective has continued to narrow into things that a lot of folks, you know, they, they'll just ignore everything else because they only want to consume these things that validate, whatever their biases are already.

Peter Margaritis

Right. Yeah, and that that in itself is, I think being the big, great divide within the country is, you know, I get all my news out of CNN. Okay, well then you're going to have as we used to call it back in the day, the Clinton News Network. Then you get Fox over here who's, who's on the right, and we'll get all my news from there. And it is very bias based. And but do you think that bias based the speed of information is also part of why people are going, I'm out of here. I just can't work at this place because of XY and Z. Do you think that is part of as well?

Brian Comerford

You know, that could be I mean, we've certainly seen a lot of this urban flight, right? Where people are now no longer feeling like they need to stay in an urban center for their work, and particularly if their work is of a certain level, where they're, you know maybe they're more consultative or, you know their day is made up of producing office product for clients versus having to physically put your hand on something, you know, for your clients. And so, so those folks have, you know, a lot of them, especially in Colorado where I live, we've seen this explosion of, you know, the real estate market up in the mountains. Because people are like well, you know, I used to have a mountain home, and I lived in the city. And, you know, and the mountain home was the place that I'd go to occasionally, but now I can get great internet access in the mountains, and so I'll, I'll sell the place in the city and I'll live in the mountains, or I'll turn the place in the city into a rental or whatever. And, you know, now it's like why not, why not have a lifestyle that's, that's based more around these things that I would prefer to be spending most of my time doing versus feeling like, you know, I'm rowing on the slave ship.

My niece works for the corporate office for Macy's. And she lived in Queens in Astoria. She had an apartment, like, eight, nine years rent controlled whatever. Well, when this all came down, she was working from home. This was a New York City apartment. You know, I could, I could touch all four walls at the same time without moving two inches, you know. So, she ended up moving back home, and moved back in with her mother. And I mean, it's been over a year and they've survived each other. But, so why won't like, I love to. I love New York. Don't get me wrong. But why am I going to pay those dollars when I go rent free, but, you know, go someplace that it's not everybody's on top of everybody. Be able to kind of spread out. Yeah, that's part of this great resignation.

Brian Comerford

Oh, no question. And why would I continue, you know, I think we were touching on this at the beginning. We've seen this lull in people returning to work, who have been unemployed or have been furloughed or whatever it is. And again, I think it has as much to do with the time, people have been allotted to be able to reflect on what is the purpose of what they're delivering through their work. Because I truly do believe people are purpose oriented. I mean, yeah, we all need some form of income, right, to get all the bills paid. But if suddenly you've got an opportunity to take that time and to reflect, you know, we've also seen a lot of these very creative businesses that have propped up. And more and more, I think there's an orientation for folks to think, you know, maybe this was a blessing because, you know, being a server in a restaurant it's lucrative and, you know, gave me flexibility in my schedule and everything, but it's still just a j-o-b right A, a just-over-broke, so maybe I can... Maybe I can move on to something that's more rewarding and take a little bit of time and take some classes, a certification and then I can go work for a company where I do have some kind of remote work opportunity that's afforded to me. That's, that's true as well.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah I think so too, and thinking, thinking about that. It also, I find it funny haha that okay we're gonna furlough half of our employees. Were not off-boarding them, we're furlough them. Just let them. But when things turn around, we want them to come back.

Brian Comerford

For the same wage, by the way.

Peter Margaritis

For the same wage. That the same company that just laid me off, and I had to collect unemployment or whatever, but then they turn around and said we want you back. I don't know maybe it's just me but I'm not saying that so that's it goes up against leadership as well, because nobody saw the pandemic coming. We all agree about that, but there's so some companies that still are able to keep their employees because they went through the PPP law. They didn't have to layoff.

Brian Comerford

Sure. Yeah.

And I think, I think part of that could be the shortsightedness of our economy when, especially if you're a publicly traded company, you're poorly bound.

Brian Comerford

Right.

Peter Margaritis

Versus thinking out, you know, strategically over the next two or three years, and I some I even said this by the end the recession when CPA firms are letting people go. You don't go back. Very rarely do you leave a CPA firm, go to work in industry, and you come back. Rare, like maybe 1%. I have no very facts and figures on it. Then when the economy goes back to go back to the people saying, you will come back to us? And they're going, "Hell no." And that you know that that's been, that's been the model all along. And why would you let them go? Figure out a way. Take a less, so you keep your people, because if they walk out the door, they're not likely to come back.

Brian Comerford

You know, it's interesting too that part of what you described, Peter, I think is, you know, the United States, in my opinion has been a victim of a lot of very capitalist oriented, decision making approaches, even though we're actually a socialist capitalist economy. And if you don't believe that, then just, you don't have to rewind very far to remember the too big to fail era of banking bailouts, you know. You're truly a free market economy. We've seen, you know, massive disruption in our economy as a result of what happened with the, the mortgage meltdown. But part of the reason that I bring that up is, you know, I'm married to someone who's from another country. And, you know, so a lot of the information that I receive isn't just US biased based, right? And I've also traveled all over the world and I'm seeing how other countries operate. And there isn't a developed nation that isn't a mixed socialist capitalist economy. And there's varying degrees to how that functions but I think it's, it's also interesting, as a world to the countries that aren't so hung up on this idea of being number one, right, and declaring it openly and often. And yet, you look in economic rankings, and you see that they're actually positioned in the top 10 economies in the world. It's like, well hang on a second, but they've got all these other things that I've heard would bankrupt this country if we were to, you know, make those contributions to society. And so, I think there's, you know, I think we're starting to see sort of a forced, you know, rethinking of some of this simply because, as I mentioned before, there is strength in numbers with the labor force right now that in many ways is helping to reinvent the way that companies offer compensation and life balance benefit to its to its employees.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, it's interesting to watch this whole thing play out and this is just really starting right now, and ultimately going to play out. We're gonna see this through 2022, maybe by the end of 2022 when, hopefully, we are COVID in the rearview mirror, but we've learned how to live with it. Accepted it, whatever, whatever that may look like. I mean just still but the corporate footprint was a nice large.. That one accounting firm in Boston, because of what they...what the people said, prior to the pandemic they were getting ready to build, lease out and build out their space. Well, then go back to the architects make it smaller. You see that corporate footprint and these large urban areas starting to.. And what

does that doing to the commercial real estate market? I mean, back then this pandemic is the ripples just keep coming.

Brian Comerford

Yeah, that's absolutely true and, you know, at the same time that we've seen the disruption to the commercial real estate market, we've seen an increase in all of this other real estate investing. And part of that is attributed to the fact that the Fed has kept interest rates as low as they have for as long as they have, and took some folks a little longer to catch up with the idea of that but they start to realize, well, wait a second, this is actually a good time for me to leverage using someone else's money, a mortgage company. And, and rather than getting this trickle down effect of what the interest rate is providing to me with the stack of cash I keep in the bank. I'll put it over here and something that's actually got a higher appreciative yield. And, you know, the amount of interest that I have to pay out against the loan is actually insubstantial compared to what I'm getting as a result, economically, from what I'm receiving. So, it's a housing market in Denver similar to what it is in Columbus? Where you, you put your house up for sale, let's say, \$300,000, you have a showing and by Monday morning people have made offers a \$400,000 on your house. Yeah, yeah I don't know a market right now where it's not happening to a degree to that effect.

Peter Margaritis

Think about that. So I just, I, I decided to just put my house up. I'm going to reap the benefits here. Okay, so I just sold my house, I mean \$100,000 more than I thought I was gonna make. Oh, crap, now I've got to go find a house.

Brian Comerford

Yeah, I can see now that you're living in a broadcasting closet.

Peter Margaritis

It's because I couldn't find anything, because everything was so I was getting out of bid the whole time. So, I had to find a place to live. The apartments market that rental market has also exploded.

Brian Comerford

Right, yeah. Yeah, you know, I don't know if you knew this about me but real estate investing is as one of my side passions. And it's as an investor what it's done is it's actually forced me to go a little outside of my comfort zone, looking at much larger properties. And so, consequently instead of looking at the types of properties that I would typically invest in, now I've been looking at things that are, you know, like 12 unit, you know, buildings, or I've been looking at empty parcels of land, and have been talking with, you know, potential partners to do development. Because all of a sudden, the inventory doesn't exist, but there's still such high demand. And I think part of the shift that we're also seeing with some of the commercial real estate here is a lot of it's getting rezoned and repurposed to then accommodate for the demand in the residential housing. So, well, I think we're gonna see quite a bit of that, you know transition here in the next 12 to 18 months.

Peter Margaritis

So, your real estate investments are primarily single family homes?

Brian Comerford

Yep.

Peter Margaritis

My buddy in Lexington has been doing it. It's somewhere between 15 and 20 homes, And he just retired, and that was going to kind of be his retirement. Go, hell no, I'm gonna cash out my equity. He's depleted his inventory from twenty to I think maybe down to 10, with the goal of he might just keep five just to have something to do to get out of the house.

Brian Comerford

Right. That's a good goal. Yeah.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah. I think he's I think he's done in some aspects. We've had a conversation, he didn't mention, well, you know, I could go after some bigger properties. I think he's I think he's really just wants to, you know, check out. Live in Lexington, Kentucky drink bourbon on his porch and enjoy life as it comes. He's got a couple grandkids.

Brian Comerford

Yeah, that sounds pretty good too but I probably would have kept those other handful of properties to make sure that my passive income was at a certain level. You know, I could continue to live that way worry free.

Peter Margaritis

Right, exactly, exactly. Well, do you think we've shared anything there in this conversation?

Brian Comerford

Oh, you know we've, we've shared, I think our own reckless desire to go entertain ourselves.

Peter Margaritis

Yes, we have done that.

Brian Comerford

There's I think there's been some, you know, gratuitous creation of content that we're trying to throw in front of other folks to help with their great distraction.

Peter Margaritis

Absolutely. You said that so profoundly. But I think that this conversation have gone on for a while, and we'll come back and revisit it maybe we'll let Nick and Roxanne join us next time. Why not, Yeah, yeah.

Brian Comerford

Why not? They're good for some laughs.

Very, very much so good for some laughs. But I thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedule because you do have a full-time W-2 job to go along with your multiple part-time 1099 jobs.

Brian Comerford

That's right.

Peter Margaritis

One job, whatever that may be, and you have a family and you have one child.

Brian Comerford

I do. Yeah, yeah, we got one, one little guy who got crossed the threshold into the teen years.

Peter Margaritis

Oh no. You know what happens now. You are so cool in the single years. Now you, oh my god you're going to be so stupid. You're gonna be so fricken stupid.

Brian Comerford

Yes. Yeah, I'm already there.

Peter Margaritis

My son, yeah, he's 21. I don't know how he made it there, Brian. I really don't know. And, but he's, he started not to cusp into those early 20s. Where he's kind of going, 'Dad might have been right on some of this stuff, ' and it's just on the cusp of that. I can't wait, because the last 11 years of have been hell.

Brian Comerford

Yeah, it's a with all things come change, right? Impermanence is a, it's just something that we all have to learn to live with. And for those that those of us that continue to age, we have to try to age as gracefully as possible.

Peter Margaritis

Yeah, I told you I I turned 60. I'm coming up on 61 in December. And I tell ya, 60s like to the new 30s, but it's just some things you can't do that, like touch your toes that maybe you were be able to do in your 40s and 50s. It's, yeah, but, but if somebody told me the 60s were going to be like this I would, I would have believed them. Man, I do love this, this next 10 years coming up. Now the 70s I'll reserve my judgment until I get a little bit closer there.

Brian Comerford

It's never too late to start with some yoga, and that way you know by the time we get to your 70s, you might be appreciative that you spent your 60s doing a little yoga routine every day.

Peter Margaritis

That's not a bad idea because I know somebody who teaches yoga. I said, Do you have a class for older guys who are as flexible as a two by four? You think I'm kidding And she goes, yes, because we,

we treat everybody the same. And if you can't touch your toes go as far as you can, and eventually you'll see them at some point, if you stick with it. Maybe I should take up yoga.

Brian Comerford

Yeah absolutely, you know, and there's, there's something to be said for yoga pants too. But what the response that I thought you were going to give, was that the yoga instructor said, you know, Peter, for a price, anything is achievable. And when someone's getting up into your age bracket, the the same yoga routine costs twice as much, and it's just because I know you've got more disposable income.

Peter Margaritis

I have to send her... I have to send her a link to this, to say, make sure you at least listen to the last part of it.

Brian Comerford

Don'tgive her any ideas.

Peter Margaritis

Well, Buddy, I'll let you get back to being a W-2 guy for the remainder of the day out when beautiful Denver, Colorado. I thank you again for your time. I really appreciate it. Good seeing you. And the four of us have to get together in DC, or somewhere, and spend a few days. Because I think that would just be an absolute blast.

Brian Comerford

I'm with you. I agree with that. Well, thank you very much, Peter, it's always a pleasure and it's an honor to be your guest thanks for having me today. Oh, now I owe him another 20 bucks. I want to thank Brian for his time and discussing The Great Resignation, and the ramifications it can have on how we work in the future. I will conclude this with an improv, quote, I think it's fitting for this interview, and it's very short and concise. "Improv takes place in the present tense." Thank you