S5E1: Kathy Klotz

SPEAKERS
Kathy Klotz, Peter Margaritis

Peter Margaritis
Welcome back, everybody, to a brand new year. Happy New Year to everyone. And my guest. I'm excited today. This was the first time we've met. We were introduced by a very good friend. You may have heard me speak of him. You know, the improv coach of all time, the Mr. Improv himself, Jay Sukow. And Kathy, thank you so very much for taking time out of your busy schedule to be on my podcast.

Kathy Klotz
Oh my god, of course. Happy to be here.

Peter Margaritis
So Kathy, we're gonna just jump out of the gate and go strong. Okay. And the one big question we'll start this interview off with is what is the biggest challenge organizations have today?

Kathy Klotz
I think everything stems from fear and uncertainty. Everything else is a manifestation of that, change, you know, ambiguity, of unlearning. All of that comes from uncertainty and fear.

Peter Margaritis
Expand on uncertainty and fear. I have an idea of, I think, what you're speaking about, but...

Kathy Klotz
I think, you know, Covid is just such a big example of it. There's smaller versions that we we talk about stakes and raising the stakes. I think he can't find a bigger example of tremendous stakes than COVID. And I think what happens in times of great uncertainty, fear. Fear takes over, and it can keep people from moving forward. It can keep people stuck. It keeps people in old patterns that have to be unlearned. And I think leadership looked a certain way for many, many years. And that's not the way forward. So, I think that these patterns of the way we used to do things might have worked in a prior time. And I think where we're at and ambiguity and uncertainty, all these different things can keep people from embracing a different way to move forward. So, I really think that not having all the answers is typical leadership. It's just I think leaders thought that they had to have the answers or fake that they knew the answers or pretended to their people that they had the answers. And everybody all the people were like, Yeah, we already knew you didn't have all the answers. We know that. We know you're human. We didn't need you to tell us. They just want you to admit it.

Peter Margaritis

Oh, we're talking about the ego, are we?

Kathy Klotz

Humility and yes, all of that stuff.

Peter Margaritis

And I think a lot of goes to the culture of the organization as well. What type of culture have we created? I mean, you talk about fear, ambiguity and uncertainty, but leaders should be communicating to help them with the uncertainty to help them to become... Get them part of the organization. Moving in that same direction. But it goes to change. I mean, this is a very complex piece, but you're right there with it. How do you get people not to fear things?

Kathy Klotz

I think this mindset shift has to happen. I think when we reframe leadership, and we reframe collaboration. We suddenly realize we don't have to have all the answers. We're not going to have all the answers. We're not expected to have all the answers. And so much of it can't be the answers. We plan, and then we let go when we need to. And that is that improvisational mindset that I know that you and I, and so many, and Jay and all of our friends subscribe to. It is understanding that yes, you plan and sometimes you have to let go. And it's teaching people that it will be okay. It will be okay. You know, when we let go. Doesn't mean you're weak. Doesn't mean you're, you know, vulnerable, bad and I think there's these old models of leadership out there that, you know, are just very, very entrenched in a lot of organizations.

Peter Margaritis

Very, very archaic. I think also leaders create some of that fear. You talk about it. Can you tell our listeners when you talk about the "Shut Up Signals" that leaders give their team. I read that and went, "God, I love the way you framed that."

Kathy Klotz

Yeah, well, I'm to be fair, I can't remember the woman's talk. I just want to be very direct. There's a woman who first used it in a TEDx talk, and I'm blanking on her name. And so I apologize. She has this talk, you can Google it. And it's the first time I heard her. I called it silent signals. She called it Shut Up Signals. And it was brilliant and you have to Google because I'm sorry. I just her name is escaping me. But I the first time I heard her say that, and I really related to that. I think it's exactly that. So, you can Google it. And you should because it's a very good talk. And she only says it like once or twice in our talk, and it's in passing. And I thought no, no, that's the genius in your talk. You need to highlight that. But it speaks to the larger issue of Yes. I think and I see this all the time. I see this all the time. Well, Kathy, you know, we tell people to go innovate. We tell people to go do this. We tell, we tell people, we tell people. And they're not realizing that these send these silent signals or shut up signals that that are unintentional. And, you know, like will tell people to go innovate. And then we also tell them, I believe 20% Return guaranteed. Or go innovate, and don't rock the boat. Go innovate, and yet do not fail. Don't fail! So, we're constantly sending these conflicting, contradictory messages, which really are shut up signals, and I... it is, you know, again, I see this every day. And I think if we don't do something about

honoring the way people learn, and the way people check for credibility in an organization and honesty, then we are just shooting ourselves in the foot over and over again, because we're doing the same things expecting that it's going to be different.

Peter Margaritis
I write in a new book that innovation should be broken up into two pieces. Idea generation.

Kathy Klotz
Yeah.

Peter Margaritis
Divergent thinking. Where everything's accepted. Nothing shot down like that stupid idea. That's a crazy idea. No, you can't say that during that because now you're creating that fear. And then after we get all of the ideas, then let's go be critical. And then figure out which ones we can do. And it's so much more. One, it's a fun process when you do it, right. When the organizations do it right. But there's something about it that just rubs leadership wrong. I think is giving up that control, and bringing the ego in.

Kathy Klotz
Yeah. It is risky. It's experimental. You can't contain it or control it, and that means you're going to have to let go and trust, and it is a collaborative thing. And you can't guarantee it, and all the risk feels so palpable. And yet, if we don't let people go experiment and know that it's safe to fail, or try or at least what the parameters are, they're not going to go do it. It's how humans are wired. And I think leaders still lead in this very old, you know, kind of MBO leadership by MBO. And it's like, I, this is not how humans work.

Peter Margaritis
Not one bit.

Kathy Klotz
No. No.

Peter Margaritis
You said a very important word. You said trust. Leaders, leadership needs to trust their people. And there's this huge lack of trust. And people go there's always been a lack of trust. You're just a number. We treat our people well.

Kathy Klotz
 Yeah.

Peter Margaritis
On paper. In our Mission Statement. In our core value. But the way we act on it is actually just the exact opposite, and goes back to something that you've talked about. Even talking before we got started. You

said these two words, psychological safety. How do we created an environment that really draws upon that psychological safety within an organization or even within a team?

Kathy Klotz
You know, we got to model it. We just have to model it. I think we're way past talking. You know, it's really about just modeling it. And having the open conversations, letting people know what those parameters are for experimenting. I mean, you take it for granted that when you say go innovate, that people know what that means. They may not. I mean, you know, does it mean that I can go to social media and put stuff out there without permission, and like 20 layers of bureaucratic, you know, signatures what does it what does it even mean? So, I think we take for granted that it's clear. It's not. Break it down. Break it down for your team. Make it safe to fail. Have crazy ideas, um, do it often. If it's... have organic laughter, like if an organization that doesn't laugh, like run, run, that's it. That's a culture in crisis, like don't walk away like run. Get out of there! That's like that's like cultural, you know, Chernobyl. It's gonna blow! Get out of there! It's like, it's, you know, these are very, very important things and you can't fake it. So, it's gonna have to be organic. I think you're gonna have to let people fail, experience. True. It's okay. There's there has to be stories where people failed and nothing happened to him. And I think you really just have to model it and create that kind of net under people. You got to build that net.

Peter Margaritis
And you're talking about that, about failure. I was raised by a father who didn't believe in innovation, make mistakes. Especially with his children. So, it took me it took me until I walked into this beautiful world of improv to realize that failure is just an acronym, first attempt in learning. How did you get introduced to the concept that, Kath, it's okay to fail?

Kathy Klotz
You know, it's interesting. I really don't think I learned how to fail until, you know, improv and comedy and I did that right out of college. So, right out of college, I went and in LA and just did stand up. I just, you know, threw myself into open mic nights and then pretty soon showcases and pretty soon I was doing comedy, you know, at clubs. And I, I had to get over... so I threw my, I jumped into the deep end. That's basically how learned. And I learned really quickly that if I could not handle bad nights, I was never going to make it. I was never going to... I was never going to make it. And I realized that part of, you know, growing that muscle was to be okay with failure, to see it as a learning thing. To not take it personally. To be able to what did it teach me, and it's just a data point. And really to sort of and this is hard to do. It's really hard. I didn't learn this for about four or five years, but the first four or five years really helped me distance myself from a personal perspective, and just go it's a data point. It just means I need to write this joke better. I mean, I just need to do this better. And then after doing stand up and then sketch, I then after about five years, moved into improv. And by then, and I loved improv, it blew my head. My mind was like what? What? I don't have a script. I don't have a setlist. I don't have jokes. What, what, what? But the beauty is, by the time I did that, I sort of already had a primed pump that said your failures are not a bad, four letter 'F' word. It's not. It's really not. And I think having started in improv, I don't know that I would have been able to take those lessons and let it roll off my back. And I think honestly, coming from like, open mic nights and failures at open mic nights and learning, that's

how I did it. So I get it. I think it's like being thrown into like the deep end by my Marine dad. That how I learned to swim. Yeah.

Peter Margaritis
Yeah, I mean, I did some time to stand up and I had just one humongous failure. But I wasn't at that point mentally that it could just roll out my back. It had a major effect on me. And it took me a number of years to get past this. What awfully helped me get past it is I found my way into the world of improv. And I'm like, okay, it's okay to fail. You want to fail so you can learn from that failure. But it was such a hard mindset of mine to change. But when it changed, it changed me 2,000% as a person, as a leader as whatever, and my view on life. As it was, and probably do for you as well.

Kathy Klotz
Isn't... you just said exactly what I was feeling I think it's so true. It's like, it took me about four years to make the shift. And then when I finally lightbulb moment of like, oh my God, all we're doing is playing and experimenting. Nobody knows what they're doing. We're just figuring it out as we go. And the difference between people who succeed and the people who don't is people who succeed, keep trying. It keeps showing up and I went, "Oh my god lightbulb moment." And it did. It change like you said. It changed everything for me. Yeah.

Peter Margaritis
Yeah, it does. But, you know, it's been a while since I did stand up, but you probably know this long time joke about what the different stand up and heroin is? You can quit heroin.

Kathy Klotz
No. True dat!

Peter Margaritis
Once you get that belly laugh, and I've had it. You continually chase it. And still to this day, if somebody asks me if I still to do stand up, I went, well, sort of I do it in my presentations. I bring humor to everything that I do. And my why is I get up there going, I want to make people laugh and have fun. However, there's a serious side. There's a learning aspect, that motivation to it. And you know, to your point organizations need to learn how to laugh. Quit taking yourself so seriously.

Kathy Klotz
Quit, quit, quit taking yourself so seriously! You know, I get it. And there's so much I think hurt and you know, the way that we're talking about failure, you know, multiply that over millions of people. Millions, billions of people out there corporations. I think we've all had that planted in our head. Don't fail. Don't make mistakes. And that is such a sad thing because it gets in our way. It gets in our way of trying, exploring, experimenting, and being more playful and showing up, and you know, really connecting and laughing. And if you're in an organization that really is not conducive to laughter, sometimes the sad reality is you got to leave and find a place where, you know, humanity and laughter are wonderful things.

Peter Margaritis
Because of course, you talk about this template mentality. Can you expand on that template mentality?

Kathy Klotz
Well, I think we have a template mentality about how things are supposed to work. And, you know, I was in tech for 15 years and of course, I was doing stand up and improv on the side. It's almost every night. I mean, I was living for the evenings and weekends. But I was in tech leading teams, and I think we do have this template mentality. This is how it's supposed to work. I do this, I get this result. You know, my husband is a techie. He's a scientist. So, it's like very...things are binary, ones and zeros. Things work. You put in this. This is the formula, and this is the output. And that's not how humans work. And that's not how life works. And if we're busy copying what other people do or expecting, this is the input and this is the output. We're leading in a science way. And the reality is, is so much of what we're talking about is the bravery and the boldness and the art of learning to show up human and make mistakes and grow and learn and improve. And it really requires us to use this muscle of trusting the process. And we don't like to let go as humans because we want to be in control. And it's scary. Right?

Peter Margaritis
Right. I'm a control enthusiast a lot of reasons, but I've learned to try to let go of that control because you know what? It makes life interesting. And quite frankly, my ego would get in the way because I thought this is the way the world should be. I never should feel the same way. But that's wrong. I haven't... we all have opinions. We need to be able to respect those opinions, and just kind of move forward. But at least be human. Have empathy for the person next to you. For the organization you're with. For your team. For yourself. And as we begin to wrap this up, you've got a wonderful background before we get started. I'm looking at I'm looking at myself. Sounds a lot better. Looks a lot better, but that's okay. We are aligned in that thought process. I'm glad we met. But if there was one small thing those who are listening could do tomorrow to begin to change and let go and move more into an improvisers mindset, what would that be?

I think it's really this... lead with compassion. And that starts with yourself. And that's why I have in my office, as Peter can see, and those of you if you hear this you won't see it, so I'll paint the visual for you. Every day in my office, I have a sign that says, "Yes and You," because I think we are taught as improvisers to yes and other people. We're going to show up and yes, and other people. Make your partner look good. These are very important concepts. There's no question. But Peter to answer your question. I think it starts with us. When we have compassion and empathy for ourselves, we're going to radiate that outward to other people. Well, we can't be expected show up and be compassionate to other people, when we don't have an ounce of compassion for ourselves. And I think to cause that shift, give yourself permission to play, to be human, to make mistakes. And if you are doing that for yourself, you are more likely to show up that way for other people. And if you can be the person for somebody else that you wish somebody would be for you, man, I think we can spark a little bit of a little change. We can spark a little movement here. Just showing up and you don't have to be perfect. You just have to try and you just have to by doing that you will automatically make it safer for other people to connect with you to be around you to let their guard down to experiment around you. That's how you do it.

Peter Margaritis

Wow. That is powerful and that is truth. Kathy, how can people find you?

Kathy Klotz

Yes, you can connect with me on all the socials. You can go to KeepingItHuman.com. That is the primary place to interact with me. Primary. I would say that. I'm also active on Instagram @Koltzguest. You can find me on LinkedIn. Please LinkedIn with me. I love great conversation. And I love meeting folks who have like-minded or at least open to be like minded.

Peter Margaritis

That what I say when I tell people about my book. I said some of you won't like this, but at least have an open mind.

Kathy Klotz

Yeah.

Peter Margaritis

I can take criticism only in the fact that you've read it and then these are your thoughts. Not just a guess. And I can't thank you very, so much for trusting Jay that I'm an okay kind of guy, and to be on the show because we've changed this format but you just ended the show in such an impactful way. Thank you so very much.

Kathy Klotz

Hey, Peter. Thank you. Thank you.

Peter Margaritis

I want to thank Kathy for sharing her thoughts about the challenges that organizations face and solutions on how to handle those challenges in a non-conventional way. I will conclude with this improv quote. "There are people who prefer to say yes, and there are people who prefer to say no. Those who say yes are rewarded by the adventures they have. And those who say no, are rewarded by the safety they obtain." Thank you all for listening. Stay safe.