

# S5E29-KarlAhlrichs

## **SPEAKERS**

Karl Ahlrichs, Peter Margaritis

### **Peter Margaritis**

Hey, welcome back, everybody. My guest today is Mr. Karl Ahlrichs, and he has been on my podcast in the past, three times. And he's now the first person to be a Four-peater. I'm looking forward to our conversation today because he's, he is the HR guy, inside and out. He's also certified speaking professional, and a good friend for many, many years. Karl, thank you for coming back. I know I had to bribe you to come back on my show, but I appreciate you taking the time to be on.

### **Karl Ahlrichs**

I would like to thank The Academy. Actually, your timing was perfect, because I have just been doing the preparation work for a global presentation at the SHRM, Society Human Resource Management, their global talent conference, and I have some fresh data on a couple of scary things, and three or four simple low-cost tactics, that if people were to, they may already be doing them. They can check them off. But if you're not, this is a way to resignation proof your organization. I don't care how large you are. There's a couple simple things if you do, you won't leave, you won't lose as many of your high performing people in the next year.

### **Peter Margaritis**

Well, then it's going to be interesting then. So, fill me in, what's your fresh data? What you've uncovered and starting to talk about fighting the great resignation on a low budget.

### **Karl Ahlrichs**

There you go. And this came, actually, the origins of my interest came from a, standing in line at a coffee shop, and eavesdropping on the ex-employee right in front of me. Ex-employee, not of the coffee shop, but of some organization that they had just resigned from, and they were talking about this with their friend who was commiserating about the resignation. No, they didn't have any new place to go. They just had to leave. They were confident in this job market that they could find a new place to go. And so, I'm listening to this trying to parse what triggered the resignation? Was it their behavior? Was it the job fit, that they didn't feel any passion for what they were doing? No, and it wasn't the money. It wasn't the money. It was because they didn't feel that their boss listened to them or cared about them. They were disconnected because their boss didn't check in with them. And part of that's Zoom fatigue. But also, it was clear that this person was a high performer. It was clear that this person was a good one, was one of the good employees. And so, the first point I want to make is that it's human nature, for the purposes of our brief conversation, I'm going to assume everybody listening has some supervisory duties. That you supervise somebody, asterisk, if you are in a relationship with somebody, everything I say applies. In general, if we look at a department, let's say we've got 20 people in the department because I can do the math on that. Yeah, Peter's a CPA, I am not. So, 20 people in the department,

you'll have if you do a standard distribution curve. And imagine me drawing a distribution curve in the air. You've got 14 people who work hard, don't hurt you show up every day. You've got three people that are low performers, who are struggling with their role or something. You've got three people who are high performers, and if you could get a basket of them, you'd be in heaven. Because they're hitting the ball out of the park on a daily basis, and they don't require much from management to do it. Okay, you're the boss. Where do you spend your time? Peter, you're the boss. Where do you spend your time?

**Peter Margaritis**

I should spend my time with the high performers. not micromanaging them. But staying in contact with them, but I'm probably spending most of my time with, of that 14, those who might be on the side of the low performers, who are going in that direction and more with the low performers versus the high.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Right. In general, when I present this to a roomful of operations people or CEOs, etc., nobody says high performers. And I bust them on that and ask them why. And they respond with, Peter, what would, you're a CEO. I've asked you, why aren't you spending time with your high performers? You already said they don't need my time.

**Peter Margaritis**

They don't need my time, their high performers. They don't need to be micromanaging them.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Right. Right. Right.

**Peter Margaritis**

However, they do need the contact.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Well, funny, you should mention that. Okay, we got a piece of paper here and a pen. Peter, what motivates high performers? Go!

**Peter Margaritis**

The work, the challenge.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

The challenge, recognition.

**Peter Margaritis**

Recognition.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Keep going.

**Peter Margaritis**

Money somewhere involved in that.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Okay, Cash.

**Peter Margaritis**

But one of the main motivators.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

A high-quality peer group.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yep.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Stretch assignments.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, I agree with that.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Okay. Here's what happens. What motivates high performers only comes from a quality relationship with a boss they respect. And that only comes from intentional conversation where the boss appears to listen to them. Do that. Here's something people can do. I got this from the best boss I ever had. I mean, everybody has a boss that they would work for less money.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Okay. Here's how to be that boss. I had a, I wish you could have been there, my best boss ever always had, and for visual graphics, I'm holding up a folded piece of paper that is an Excel spreadsheet. And my boss always had this single sheet of Excel tucked into his jacket pocket or his coat pocket. And he would fuss with it during the day. I called him on it, said, "What's that?" And he said, "This is why I'm the CEO." He had his intentional communications list printed fresh every Monday morning. And during the week, it reminded him, he had four columns. Person's name, how did they prefer to communicate, that was the second column. Third column was what were they interested in outside of work. And the fourth column was a checkoff spot that he got them. And by intentionally making sure by Friday, he had touched everybody on the list, especially the high performers. Everybody felt listened to. That simple action meant. I mean, in the 10 years, I worked for him, we never lost anybody. He didn't want to lose, because in his brief conversations, he had one key question he would ask. He'd make good eye contact, and by the way, this works great on teenagers. He would make good eye contact, and he would ask, is there anything I should know?

**Peter Margaritis**

It works good on 22-year-olds too.

**Karl Ahrichs**

It does. But it's not the money. Money is a very small part of why employees quit, asterisk, the further you get down the economic food chain, the more important money is. But the way to get a raise these days is to change where you work. Because internally, people have not done their compensation analysis and realize that they're underpaying a whole department. And people in that department are gonna get a raise by going across the street. So, do find, seek out a compensation expert. In fact, Peter, I have someone you could talk to and make them a part of your podcast. But make sure that this, in this time of inflation, make sure that you are tracking what the wage scales are. I, Peter, have you seen signs out front of a pizza joint offering money for drivers? Ah, yes. What dollar sign popped out at you? I saw one that was \$1,000.

**Peter Margaritis**

Was that like a signing bonus?

**Karl Ahrichs**

Yes!

**Peter Margaritis**

I haven't seeing that. But I've seen like \$15-\$18 an hour.

**Karl Ahrichs**

No, I saw \$1,000 Signing Bonus. National. Well, it probably caused that at a national firm, you know, but really, it's not, money is a component here, but the big point I wanted to make was that relationships are critical. If let's talk this whole extrovert, introvert thing for a moment, who makes a better modern manager an extrovert or an introvert, and why?

**Peter Margaritis**

So, I think the, I think everybody would position this question would be an extrovert.

**Karl Ahrichs**

And of course, that's wrong because I'm asking it.

**Peter Margaritis**

That's right.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Yes. What are, what are introverts really good at?

**Peter Margaritis**

Driving me crazy?

**Karl Ahrichs**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

But they're really just the data. They're really good at the at the...

**Karl Ahrichs**

They're really good at listening.

**Peter Margaritis**

You know what, that's a very good point. More than extroverts.

**Karl Ahrichs**

If I can teach an introvert to get out of their office and walk around and appear to be interested in other people...

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Operative term appear.

**Peter Margaritis**

Appear, yeah.

**Karl Ahrichs**

They will become a much more powerful leader. IF I can get an extrovert to pipe down and engage in active listening so the other person talks more, they will become a better leader. So, we need somebody with both skills. But there's another thing that has emerged during COVID. This is this is new, there is a hunger for empathy, you know, where the leader shows their team that they're invested in them as people, not just employees. I know, I know, on the surface level, empathy is similar just to listening. But it goes beyond attention. And it means being willing to say, I feel your pain without being judged or called out. Why?

**Peter Margaritis**

Could that be actually when I feel your pain, but it's sometimes people I think that is empathy, but it might be more sympathy?

**Karl Ahrichs**

Oh, interesting.

**Peter Margaritis**

Because I've always, I've always been taught or this is the definition of empathy is not putting yourself in somebody else's shoes but putting yourself to understand what that person feels in their shoes.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Wow.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, if I say, I feel your pain... Yeah. It depends on have you actually experienced that? Or are you just sympathizing with them?

**Karl Ahrichs**

Some, that's a good point. I hadn't thought of that. But what you have to be careful about, and this is where I'm an extrovert, I would then pivot and tell the story of why I feel their pain about when fluffy died or when you know, and that's, you can do a little bit of that. But anything more than 60 seconds of it is too much. The person needs to get back to telling their story. And this is where empathetic listening or sympathetic listening, maybe that'd be a good podcast, get a somebody who's really got some good book learning in this to explain the difference between empathy and sympathy.

**Peter Margaritis**

Let me ask you this question. along this path of path of empathy, who empathizes better men or women?

**Karl Ahrichs**

Wow, I would say women and here's why. Everybody knows the Myers Briggs Type Indicator.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**Karl Ahrichs**

One of the scales is thinking/feeling. Of the four scales in the Myers Briggs, only thinking/feeling has a gender bias. All of the other scales are 50/50 on the genders. Thinking feeling is 40% Males on feeling, 60% females. That was the that was the premise. Remember the book, I used to call it, Men are from Mars. Women are from Venus? I used to call it, Women are from Venus, and All Men are Idiots. Because if you read through the book, the basic theme was, you know, the heroic, the heroism of feeling.

**Peter Margaritis**

Did you happen to read the book, Humans are Underrated by Jeffrey Coleman, who is the managing editor editor for Fortune?

**Karl Ahrichs**

No.

**Peter Margaritis**

In this book, he was talking about automation, whatever. But in his book, he actually states that those who will be leaders in the future are those who are empathetic. And women make better leaders because they know how to empathize versus men.

**Karl Ahrichs**

And I think...

**Peter Margaritis**

Eight years old.

**Karl Ahrichs**

And I think it comes from what was spotted in the Myers Briggs where there is actually a skewing of thinking/feeling, r It's only a 60/40 split.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**Karl Ahrichs**

So, it's not like you can say all or most. You can just say some. Okay. I agree with that. Yeah. Yeah, people get too in love with these things and realize that you're painting with far too broad brushstrokes. Now, let me pivot from that to something that I really want to make important in today's conversation. The topic that is never discussed enough is mental health. When a person is in pain, all they can think of is the pain. When the person is not in pain, they can think about anything and everything. Offering...as a leader, you have to know your people, know your people, know your people. You have to be aware, when their behavior changes, probably because they're in pain. If what I've noticed happens when someone is having some kind of a mental health issue, they exaggerate their core behaviors. They become more of what they are. Someone who is very precise and orderly becomes compulsive. Someone who is already a risk taker becomes rebellious. Somebody who is very self-absorbed and quiet disappears. Never appears on a Zoom call. Never never, you know, may or may be listening, but never talks. Someone who is. Here's my personal favorite thinking of you, Peter, if someone is eccentric, they just become bizarre.

**Peter Margaritis**

You nailed it, man.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Oh, yeah. Know your people, know your people, know your people, so that when they exhibit an extreme behavior, somebody who on any day is very emotionally connected to work is crying in the bathroom, you know, or becomes an emotional butterfly, and any conflict causes them to crumble and cry and leave the room. Know your people, you are allowed to pull them into privacy, make good eye contact and ask, is there anything I should know? And, you know, keep your own mental reserves up. Make sure you look after your own mental health so you can be prepared for what's ahead. Because you need to be tuned in to the mental health of your team. You know, maybe today's a good day for,

you know, is there something I should know? I just lost my dog for 15 years. Wow, why don't you take a day off and be with your family?

**Peter Margaritis**

We grew up in an era in corporate America, that when we first got into the corporate world, feelings don't belong in the office. Keep the personal stuff over here.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Right. Well, and what happened was we blurred the line between family and office.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

And we blurred the line between work and play. And, you know, I could be on a ski lift answering client emails. I actually was recently, and the client doesn't care where I am. They think, they just think, I mean, think of ourselves. It's two in the morning and you've got a surprise medical condition. Are you able to reach an online medical resource through telemedicine and have somebody diagnose you at two in the morning? Yeah, happened in my household a month ago. You know, it started with 24-hour burger joints. And we just got used to getting everything we wanted anytime.

**Peter Margaritis**

You see these blurred lines occurred because of the pandemic or they've always been there?

**Karl Ahlrichs**

No. Everything we've talked about today started, I don't know, 10 years ago, and has just been climbing. This whole Great Resignation thing it started 10 years ago. It was climbing, climbing, climbing. You can see it in Department of Labor Statistics. They track resignations versus terminations. They've got a category they call it quits. I love it. Yeah. And that was trending pretty solid until it hit March of 2020. And then boom, and that's what we all freaked out about. But what we're seeing now is it's returning to the same slope. It's going up. People are I think COVID caused everybody to sit and think about what's the point in life? What's the purpose? What am I doing? And we're having, you know, bankers quit banking and open up dog adoption agency or something.

**Peter Margaritis**

It goes to the point that, and you said this earlier, listening to your people. Getting to know your people. It's showing your people that you have appreciation for what they do.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Yep.

**Peter Margaritis**

And I don't remember the name of the study, but I did quoted in and the book Off Script. 78% of people leave their job because of a lack of appreciation.



**Karl Ahrichs**

Yep.

**Peter Margaritis**

And the simple art of listening to somebody and parking your biases, parking your agendas, parking the distractions and be an active listener is a way of showing appreciation on a low budget.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Wow. That's why you're Peter. And I'm just the guest.

**Peter Margaritis**

Now, that's why you're the super HR guy.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Oh, yes.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Well, it's also interesting in our world, we have, it's like, we went through phases. There was, okay, let's, let's work with marketing and create great products. That'll cause us to be successful. Okay, that's working. Now let's work with operations and make an efficient organization. Let's do six sigma. Let's do Lean theory. Let's make it all of, you know, we're going to grow because we're efficient. Okay, that worked. And then what was next? It was the people, well, they didn't get it right. They didn't, you know, they didn't do a good job with that. We need to do a good job with that. And that will be why we become sustainable coming out of COVID. Is we'll get the people thing right.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, when I speak to accountants, CPAs, and finance, people at a conference, I'll ask them what business are you in? Audit. No, that's a byproduct. They go Tax, by...Consulting byproduct. And I get them to the point that somebody wants to come up and punch me in the nose. And I go...

**Karl Ahrichs**

Especially the auditors.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, especially the auditors. But that's, the business that you're in, it's the people business. First and foremost. Without the people, you have no business. And the looks I get on faces, like, I don't understand.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Yeah, they don't.

**Peter Margaritis**

Some get it.

**Karl Ahrichs**

No.

**Peter Margaritis**

But when you treat people like people.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

And communicate, and like people, and be empathetic, and show appreciation versus you're a number.

**Karl Ahrichs**

And I don't care what industry you're in. I work across all industries. I have been in beautiful offices with foosball tables and break rooms and light music playing in the background. And they're terrible places to work because of the bosses not getting the people thing.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**Karl Ahrichs**

And then the next place I visit, the next place I visited was a lead acid battery recycling foundry. Did you see the movie Terminator where at the end, they're in this place that was like, Manufacturing Hell? It had big vats of liquid metal. Yeah, I was there. Everybody's wearing moon suits. And if your pizza falls on the floor, it's not coming back. That place had the best managers and the most loyal employees, and was the most fun place to work. Because of the people. The surroundings were horrible, it was like hell, but the people got it.

**Peter Margaritis**

It goes to the leader. It goes to the culture that is being set by those at top and the board of directors.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Yep.

**Peter Margaritis**

And then we've got Jamie Dimon on the other hand, who at some point as people coming back to work demanded that everybody come back to the office.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Right? How'd that work for him?

**Peter Margaritis**

Not really well.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Well, and this attitude thing, it doesn't, look for those of you that are suspicious of this, let me use an example. Instead of just directly talking about the people, they talked about something very important to the people. They talked about safety. Go back 20 years if you want to Google Alcoa Aluminum Safety Culture. These articles are gonna pop from about 20 years ago. So, Alcoa was in real trouble, financially. They were, their productivity levels were down. The quality levels were down. It was a mess. They got a new CEO, and the new CEO held a briefing for investors on Wall Street. And he walks up to the microphone, and everybody in the room from Bloomberg and all the news media are expecting him to say the normal things. We're going to turn around our financials. We're going to get more efficient, and we're going to save this company. That's not what he said. He stepped up to the microphone and he says for the next couple of years, if you want any indication how Alcoa is doing, you look at our safety record. And they're like, what? Just write it down. Look at our safety record. If we get our safety record right, everything is going to follow. All the employees were like, finally, we've been telling him. People are dying in these plants. And like two weeks later, there was somebody killed in one of the plants, and call from the CEO, I'm coming right there. Shut the plant down. And the CEO personally led a full on Investigation of how could this happen? Two years later, Alcoa had a stunning recovery in the finances, in the quality, in the customers, but it was because of safety being a focus, which is a people-oriented thing. Anyway, you know, it's, so my point is it isn't just doing happy talk stuff, but it's doing things that are important to the people.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. You bring up, you bring up safety. And along those lines, if we're not working that type of environment, this is another type of safety out there called psychological safety.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Where... right.

**Peter Margaritis**

You can speak your mind and not get reprimanded for it.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Wow!

**Peter Margaritis**

There's a culture that allows diverse thinking, and because in the hierarchy world, if you're not, if you don't agree with something, well, you're just not a team player. And you're banished to a certain part of the organization where the other team players or you're perceived as a low performer. But just because you have different ideas, doesn't mean that the wrong.

**Karl Ahrichs**

Wow.

**Peter Margaritis**

And the ability to express those ideas in a manner that the bosses show respect to it, and you won't be reprimanded by it is another type of safety that can go a long way.

**Karl Ahrichs**

It's really true.

**Peter Margaritis**

Defeating this Great Resignation. Yeah. Or at least, I spoke two weeks ago to the town council of a small town. Have you seen the Andy Griffith Show? Yeah, I was there. And they had just had a resignation and a lawsuit because of a toxic work environment. And it was exactly what you talked about. It wasn't a safe place to be yourself. And I was 45 minutes into punishment lecture for the town council and all the managers, and the mayor, who look just like the one on Andy of Mayberry, said, "Sonny!" You know, Can I say something?" Sure. And I sat down, and he stood up, and he apologized for how he had contributed to this. And he promised that he would watch his sense of humor, and that he would be more respectful. And the two women in the room are like in the back doing a happy dance. Yeah, it's what that's a good point. That's what you said is real. So.

**Karl Ahrichs**

It is real. So, as we begin to wrap up, I'm gonna go a little bit in a different direction. Because of who you are, No, it's because you're ADHD but go on. What book are you reading these days? Oh, you'll be surprised. I'm well, first off. I'm reading. I'm reading a wonderful bit on using improv techniques in management by Peter Margaritis. Is it? This isn't supposed to be a plug for my book but like you anyhow. It's a good book, and I've given it to clients and they have loved it. What's the title of Mr. Margaritis? Off Script: Mastering the Art of Business Improv. Yeah, it's about flexibility. And this may sound silly, I'm rereading Business Management by Peter Drucker from 1956.

**Peter Margaritis**

Oooo.

**Karl Ahrichs**

He is, I don't care, any Peter, any Peter Drucker book is better than most corporate fad books. And then another book that's a wonderful explanation of how organizations work is Catch 22 by Joseph Heller. It's a war novel set in Italy in World War II. And everything in it is about the wackiness of people in business.

**Peter Margaritis**

Catch 22 by whom again?

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Joseph Heller. Joseph Heller. Put that up, put that on my list. Well, thank you for that. Thank you. I wasn't shooting for a plug with my book, but thank you, anyhow. You know, Karl, we could talk for hours, and we do, but we'll have to figure out. We're gonna do this like Saturday Night Live. You'll be the first five timer. Excellent.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, we'll start off we'll get jackets and stuff for those who are five timers.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Yeah. We're going to talk about the importance of tire safety in automobiles and the unknown benefits of proper wheel weights. We'll go to plan B. Okay.

**Peter Margaritis**

I can't thank you enough. But before we leave, how can people find you?

**Karl Ahlrichs**

I have a, it's easy because my name is unusual. If you go out there and type in A H L R I C H S and Karl with a K, you'll find me on LinkedIn. You'll find my webpage. My cell phone is there. I'm very reachable because my name is not easy to spell.

**Peter Margaritis**

And they can also find your email to.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Oh, well, it's Karl@expertspeaks.com I didn't use my last name because nobody can spell it. Actually, that reminds me. I think you were like an episode six was the first was back in 2016. I think I misspelled your name. Yeah, you did.

**Peter Margaritis**

You had to contact and go; the L & H are switched. I went...

**Karl Ahlrichs**

It's okay. The check you sent me cleared the bank. So. That's always good. Well, Karl, thank you so very much. It's always a blast. Thanks for having me.

**Peter Margaritis**

And look forward to when we can find some time to go to the Air Force Museum.

**Karl Ahlrichs**

I'm in!

**Peter Margaritis**

Cool!

**Karl Ahlrichs**

Talk to you later, man.

**Peter Margaritis**

I want to thank Carl for his vision and thoughts on how we can move forward and adapt in this volatile business climate. And remember, 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, I'm rewarded by the safety they obtain. Be a yes person. Thank you for listening.