

# S5E33 Stacey Rodgers

## **SPEAKERS**

Stacey Rodgers, Peter Margaritis

### **Peter Margaritis**

Hey, welcome back, everybody. My guest today is very low energy. It's gonna be really hard to kind of pull answers out of her, and so sarcastic right now. This, Stacey Rodgers, as you heard in the intro, and she has more energy than anybody I've known. And she's, she's, we have these great conversations. And when I'm able to get up to Cleveland, and we have time, we'll have lunch, and an hour goes by like this. And it's just banter, banter, banter, banter. And the last time I was up, I said, you've on my podcasts because you've got so much great information to share. So, first and foremost, Stacey, thank you very much for taking time out of your incredibly busy, busy schedule to spend some time with me on the podcast.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

Well, thank you for having me. This is quite the honor. And I appreciate the fact that we get to banter some and have others learn from it, if possible.

### **Peter Margaritis**

And I'm sure there's a lot to learn from what you're about to communicate with us and talk about, because you've been in the profession for a while. You grew up as an, correct me if I'm wrong, as an auditor in the firm for a number of years, and then you jumped over to the Learning and Development and the HR piece. I can imagine there's always been this three-legged stool in the accounting profession, and how that, has that changed? And you can describe it, that's, what your perception of the three legged stool is, and how it's changed, but still the same.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

Yeah, it's been interesting. You know, having spent 10 years as an auditor, you know, you have your, you kind of have your perspective on the world. And then when I had the opportunity to come into learning and development, and learn more about the firm, and the challenges of the firm more broadly, outside of my audit world, you start to put pieces together. And then when I had the opportunity to kind of move into the head of people culture, we call it, because HR is, you know, depends upon who you are. Sometimes that's a scary word. And I don't want it to be scary because what I have learned, Pete, is that, over the course of time, there are the three things that remain the same. We've got to hire the right talent. We've got to train that talent. And we've got to keep that talent engaged and excited about their careers. That has not changed. And it's interesting, now that I say that out loud, I actually feel like I'm saying the words of our founding partners. I play a video every two weeks for all of the people who are new to the organization, and they talk about that when they started the firm 45 years ago. So, it's, that has not changed, and even being in this seat, as the Head of People and Culture, that still is the three-legged stool that is critically important to any organization, public accounting or not. And it really

does boil down to the people and making sure that you have all of those things working together, versus putting too much energy and time into one area of that stool and ignoring the other one and letting it get weak. Because if you do that, it's a recipe for disaster. So, I have really found that, in my role, that's the balance is how do you keep that three-legged stool balancing at all times, despite what's happening around you, within your organization and outside of your organization?

**Peter Margaritis**

So, how did that stool react, that three-legged stool reacts on March of 2020?

Man, I mean, that was something that I wasn't in this role at that time, but it became very clear how actually stable our stool was. And that was, that was an interesting kind of revelation, in the sense of we had all of the tools in place to make that change in March of 2020, literally overnight. We emailed everybody Sunday, Monday, everybody was remote. All of, it was almost like we had planned for it but didn't, and everybody understood and trusted in the organization, which is an important component for Cohen & Company that we were ready for this, despite not being ready for it at the same time. So, we did switch gears. We really did focus and making sure that that retention leg of that stool was intact, and that everybody had what they needed and that we were focused on the people that were in our direct care. That's how we looked at it. Do you have what you need? Do you need time to navigate things with your children? Do we need to adjust your work schedule? Do you need to go part-time? Do you need additional tools to work from home, like how can we get you where you need to be? And so, that really was the leg of the stool that we spent a lot of time with because everything else stopped for that time period. And then we quickly shifted to, okay, how do we teach in this environment? What are the things we have to teach people that they don't already have in their toolkit about how to conduct a meeting virtually? How do you how do you check in your team intentionally when you don't run into them in the hallway? Those things don't happen naturally in this kind of environment? And man, how do you connect your air pods to your computer? How do you switch microphones? How do you? How do you do these things? And how do you leverage the technology to its fullest extent? We didn't get that opportunity to really force that the adoption up until that point. And so, we really quickly shifted. Once we made sure everybody was okay, and had what they needed, we then transition to, Okay, now, let's get everybody really comfortable in this setting. Because we don't know how long we're going to be here. And how do we how do we then really just stabilize both sides of that stool, because from getting the right talent, because we had done such a great job bringing the right talent in, it was a really stable stool going into it.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, I've had a couple of clients, one in particular on the East Coast. And they said one of the things they found out during the pandemic was their high performers in the office turned out to be not so high performers at home. And as this conversation started to build, it was like, well, how do we keep in contact? How do we, how do we make sure everything was okay without being overbearing or seemed like a micromanager? And it became even more difficult because of Zoom? Did you guys experience the same thing?

## **Stacey Rodgers**

I think we experienced it from that angle as well, recognizing that certain people were more successful in an in-office setting than they were at a home setting. And some of that had to do with the other the distractions that were taking place outside of work. I mean, I was very fortunate in the sense that I, when I was home, I was actually home by myself, because I had a support system around me that I was able to lean on, during, you know, with my children and with, you know, spouse, where we were all still able to kind of keep our autonomy. Not everybody had that situation, and even if you had a top performer who was minimally distracted, that may not be their best working environment. And so, we also saw the other side of it. Those who didn't perform as well, in the office environment, started to excel in the at-home environment because they weren't pressured, or didn't feel pressured to have those hallway conversations. They were able to focus on the work, and they were really able to find their stride in an at-home environment. So, I think what we learned in those moments, Pete, was that we needed to be more open to the different working styles of our people, instead of and we became much more people centric in our decision making going forward. And I think that what this did is it showed, and we ran the numbers, and we shared those numbers on the town halls of our productivity. And there was never a blip in productivity after we went fully remote, and as we worked our way through the pandemic. So, I think what we also learned is that that old mindset of you have to be in the office to be most productive, and to build relationships. It was semi amiss to some degree. Now, are those connections still important? And is it easier to connect with someone, one to one in person versus, you know, in 3D versus 2D? Absolutely. However, it wasn't the only way in which to stay connected to our people. And so, those who were struggling, we continued, we created a, you know, a way in which that they could reach out and get the support that they needed. And some came back to the office, you know, once things stabilized a little bit more quickly, I was one of those. I wanted to be in the office. That was where I found myself to be most productive. And actually, I found that nice mix of three days in the office two days home, and that actually created a balance I had never experienced before. And so, now that we're kind of back, you know, on the other side of this, and we have moved into a hybrid environment, where people have that choice, two to three days a week in the office two to three days a week at home. We've seen people embrace every day in the office, like that's what I need, or it's two days or three days or I've chosen fully remote. So, I think it really forced us to think differently about how people and how work gets done. And I think it's in a really positive thing overall.

## **Peter Margaritis**

That's outstanding for the firm because they're listening to the people. They're not mandating that you need to be back here in the office, which was part of the reason for the people say, for this Great Resignation. We are, accounting firms always have turnover. I mean, that's just, but has that turnover during this period of time as we coming out of this pandemic, has a turnover maintained? Or has it increased? Decreased?

## **Stacey Rodgers**

In our case, it's increased. I know that a recent survey that I just saw, it's been pretty consistent across the industry, that there's been an increase overall. And it, I think it goes beyond anything within the firm, to some degree. A lot of the research shows that during this time, people had the opportunity to step back reflect and really ask themselves questions that they used to avoid, like am, am I getting what I really want? Am I getting what I need? Is this really what I want for my future, etc, etc? And

opportunities opened up in a way that they've never been available before. I now compete from a talent perspective with the entire country. I don't compete just in my local markets anymore. And so, when all of a sudden, you've got Google sending you a message to say, Hey, you want to come be a part of our finance team? Wow, like, that was never something that I had to even, I couldn't, I would never have even fathom that was an opportunity. So, I think that everybody experienced that kind of increase, because of that changing market in that changing dynamic. And people really asking themselves, you know, questions that maybe they didn't pause to ask themselves before. Now, on the flip side of that, there is also a lot of research starting to come out. Actually, I was just, there's been articles shared today, actually, amongst the leadership of the firm, that shows that 12 months later, that 40% of people are regretting their decisions to change and leave because people were driven to leave for money, for, you know, stature for, like, whatever the case may be. And what they're finding is, is that maybe the money didn't make sense. Maybe, maybe there's more to my career, and it's not just a job. And maybe the reasons that I left weren't the right reasons to leave, and maybe I need to rethink my decision. And that's not going to be the case for everyone. But we have also seen a pretty large boomerang impact. And I anticipate that will continue in the coming weeks and months. As things settle down, the pandemic created so much disruption, it's unreasonable to expect it wouldn't disrupt in this way, as well. And so, I think that we're getting to a place now where that disruption will eventually kind of level out a little bit. It will, we'll never go back to where we were. But I think we're headed towards kind of a rebalancing over the course of the next year or so.

### **Peter Margaritis**

I think so too. And quite frankly, you know, people go, I wish we can go back to the way it used to be. I'm like, well, I remember being in elementary school, sniffing mimeograph paper, I don't want to go back to that point in time. I remember, I remember having a friend to talk to my girlfriend on the phone, but I had like a 30-foot cord. I had to walk around the house. I don't want to go back to those days.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

No. And I agree, and I don't want to go back to those days where I had to spend, you know, two full days traveling to even just see my team members and be able to have a meaningful conversation. There are times and places for that, but now I can do that right from my desk. And I can do that with any one of our 10 offices across the US. So, I think I actually have stronger and better relationships today, because of the adoption of technology and what it can do to enhance what you do day to day. Can you let it roll your day? Absolutely. There's always two sides to that coin. But I think if you find the right way to use it going forward and take all the lessons that we've gained as a result of this pandemic, you come out in a much stronger position than you did going into it.

### **Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. And there are a lot of lessons, and I get a little frustrated with people who always wants to bring out the worst things that happen. But, you know, when things like that happen, we all experienced something. What did we learn about ourselves as we went from one point to another point? Were we resistant to change? Okay, then when did I drop that and have to accept the fact that I need to change because that's the one constant in the world today is change. It just seems like it's getting more rapid and rapid and rapid, but that flexibility and that adaptability. So, let's twist the conversation just a little bit. Finding the right people. So, we used to make a joke back in days, like how do you hire your

people? Well, we put it with, do you have an academy degree? Yes. We put a mirror under the nose to see if it fogs up. Yes, they're hired. That's, I mean, it was it was kind of, you know, it's somewhat of a joke. But there was, there was some truth of it. Now, these guys are coming out of college, and you're recruiting them, when they come to work for your organization, they're coming in with an accounting degree, for the most part of a large majority of accounting. Most of them probably don't have the letters behind their name, CPA. Some may can be coming in with a Master's degree. In those early years, if I remember, you know, there's a lot of time studying for the CPA exam, to pass it. So, they had all the technical knowledge, at that point in their life that they needed, there's still a lot more to learn. What's missing from the new hire?

### **Stacey Rodgers**

Experience, just life experience. There's, you know, you got to learn how to communicate, both internally and externally. You've got to learn how to time manage, like, you thought that you were juggling a lot when you were in school and in college, and I was one of those people. I mean, I think at one point, I had three jobs, played sports and went to school. So, you know, you thought you knew what you were doing. From a time management perspective. This is a whole new ballgame. And then how you, and then the ways in which you communicate. What's effective? What's, you know, what does it mean when you know, someone comes to you and is very direct, and you don't know how to handle it? You don't know how to navigate that? What does that mean? You know, some people take it personally. And it's like, no, it's just a different communication style. Let's teach you about these communication styles so that you understand. And then writing a four-page email is not appropriate. If you write more than two paragraphs, you probably need to be picking up the phone and having that conversation. That is the real-life experience that you don't get in a college curriculum. And that's okay, like that's expected. But that continues to be what we focus on. When we talk about development with our, with our teams and with our people. And it's really just showing them how to operate in the business world. Some have had internships; some have had not. Some have worked in professional settings, some have not. So, and then how, then I think the thing that's been complicated more recently with the classes is that they spent two years, almost exclusively virtual.

### **Peter Margaritis**

Right.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

And how does that now get played and layered into life experience and your ability to communicate? And what is acceptable? And what is not? I mean, I have several examples that have already been brought to me, that make me shake my head, but how would they know any better? Because they haven't had the opportunity to experience that kind of setting. So, how do we support them in that transition, and learn those skills that are critical to success?

### **Peter Margaritis**

I was speaking at a conference, a tax conference, but I wasn't speaking about tax, because then that would have been really weird. And after my session was about something about leadership and communication, whatever. And this older gentleman came up to me after and said, you know, we should do away with the traditional internships in accounting. We should have those students who want

to come to work in public accounting and an industry, they need to do two or three years in the customer service business, restaurants, retail, or something to learn how to deal with people. Because that's really what we do, we learn how to deal with people. And I see, and I see those, you can almost tell the ones who've had some experience in a younger life doing that, versus those who haven't. They're 4.0 students, Beta Alpha Psi, all the, but the piece is missing, and, and as long as we can, as long as you catch them early. Because we let it go on too long. It's gonna be a hard habit to break.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

It's real. I mean, it's absolutely real. And it is, it is something that you, we I mean, we look for, in when we're having those conversations. And you know, people tell us all the time, they're like, wow, you know, my experience with Cohen & Company was different. And I'm like, why? You guys just wanted to have a conversation. Yeah. That's actually an interview style that we have. Can you just talk to me about something that is not on your resume? What's it, what do you do for fun? What is that experience like when we go through that? And so, I always ask the question, I get the opportunity every two weeks to meet with our new hires, lateral and right out of college. And I asked them the question, Why Cohen? You had so many options. And I know this, because I know this, what landed you here? And 90% of the them the answer is my experience with the people here was different. And it's because we really work to draw those kinds of skills out as a part of the interview process. Because at the end of the day, your, that tax partner was absolutely right. There is a difference when someone comes in with the ability to how to navigate a client problem, without me having to teach them how to do that or has a natural instinct to know where to go next versus ignoring it, because I've had that too. Where it's like, ooh, that feels gnarly. Maybe I don't want to touch that. And it's like, no, no, the less, the less, the more time between the time that you touch that, and the time it gets to me, not good. We have to address those kinds of things quickly. So, people with customer service experience, know that. And they know how to deescalate things in the right ways, naturally, as a part of their training. So.

### **Peter Margaritis**

I remember when I was teaching at Ohio Dominican University, I developed a relationship with the lawyer at the time. And I would get to the point where the head of HR called me and said, "Who do you got?" "Well, I've got this one guy, just trust me." Because this is back then. It was a long time ago. And ODU is just like a small of an institution, I'm fighting against OSU. So, you get this one kid. He was great. Next year, who do you got? So, this woman. Great. Next year, who do you got? Send another person. Next year, who do you got? No one. So, what do you mean, you have no one. I have no one who has thick enough skin to handle the world of public accounting right now. I could send you someone, but to not have to work out and my credibility is going right down the drain. So, ask me again in the following year.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

The next year.

### **Peter Margaritis**

Next year, because it is a different world. And you have to have a thick skin. But you also have to be driven and be able to communicate. And I think everybody realized that the I was being very sarcastic at the beginning. Because you have what three jobs, played sports, went to school. I mean, and you

keep yourself very busy, and you're very driven. So, it's fine. It's almost like finding, finding those high performers who are just not technically savvy.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

Right? Because in the, thing that I think is important for people to also consider is that many times you can teach accounting. I mean, every once in a while, you come across a person who just cannot put those pieces together. And that's okay. And they know that and we're not going to try it. But you can teach accounting, and you can teach the technical, and you can teach, you got to have a passion that goes beyond the actual literature and the technical nature of what we do. I think that at the end of the day, people who want to help people further their business, solve their problems. I mean, we give ourselves a hard time all the time that we're so focused on solving other people's problems, we never open, like the door to look at our own, and really deal with those at the same time. Because we are so hardwired always go straight to problem solving. That's just what we do. And those who really find a long-term career in public accounting, that's what they love. They love that, that ability to help and to solve and to just create a better end result for the people that we do this work for. And so, I think that if you can look past just the, did I get my accounting degree? Did I do those couple of other things that I have to check the box on to get my CPA? Yeah, that's important. But like you said, it goes beyond that. And it's that, it's what is driving you to want to do this kind of work. It's not because this stuff is sexy. You and I can talk about that. All we want and it's not. You know, reading tax code does not keep like people super engaged. There are those people, and I, they are they are a gem that you will hold on to very, very closely, but the vast majority of us don't wake up wanting to go do that. We don't wake up wanting to go read FASB like that is not what we do. What we do is we do it because we care about the people that we do it for, and we want to help them. We want to help solve their problems. So, I think that that really gets to the core of everything.

### **Peter Margaritis**

I think every accounting chair in the country should be listening to especially what you just said and begin to share that in the classroom. Because you know, we take a look at that we're serving our clients and whether we're in public or whether we're in industry, then we have clients whose internal clients, and we're there to help them solve the problems as well as we're the information gathering business.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

Absolutely.

### **Peter Margaritis**

And the only way to gather that information is to communicate, and ask the right questions, and fail at times, and learn from that, and just keep standing up and going back in. That takes, takes a bit of tenacity to work in the accounting profession.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

And I think people underestimate the power of communication and building relationships, and how critical that is to everything that we do. When I came into learning and development, I haven't had a lick of training, a lick of anything, but I knew how to network because of my career in public accounting. I had learned the importance of building a network of people around you who are way smarter. And who

can, I can lean on when I come across something that I don't know or understand. That is something that public accounting teaches you is how to surround yourself with those kinds of people. And so, when I came into learning and development, guess what I did? I built a network. And it literally overnight, I was able to build a network that has served me time and time and time again in ways I could have never imagined. And then, you know, the ways in which we all get connected is just it's so powerful. And then when I came into HR, guess what? I was leaning on my learning and development network to say, Who do I need to know? Who do I need to talk to? Introduce me to the right people. And literally 10 months into my role, I have, I wrote down four names today of people, I just needed to call and ask a question to, and I believe, wholeheartedly that they're, you know, the most important resources that are around me. So, I think that's the other thing that people miss in talking about public accounting, and the opportunity that it provides. It's there, there are life skills here that translate, no matter where you go, and where your career takes you. And I don't know many professions that give you this kind of toolkit that allows you to be successful in almost any industry. And so, you know, like when, when people ask, you know, how do we continue to get people to want to be a part of this profession? Let's talk about that toolkit. Let's talk about, let's not talk about the accounting knowledge and the tax knowledge, which are all very helpful. Let me tell you. The number of my family members who call me to ask me tax questions, even though I've prepared maybe 10 In my lifetime, but at the end of the day, if we know how to get, we know how to collect that knowledge, like you talked about, we know how to build those relationships, we learn how to communicate, those are life skills. Those are skills that will take you wherever you want to go. And I think public accounting is a beautiful way to get that started. And if you can find a firm that supports you in your career and where you want to be, you don't ever have to leave public accounting to get the opportunity to try it all out.

### **Peter Margaritis**

With a diverse experience working in public accounting, because of different types of clients, if you go work on the different things you can do. And I remember, I asked some of my students back in the day, they were seniors, what do you want to do? So, I'm gonna be my accounting degree, I'm gonna go work for a firm, but I really want to do is go work for the DEA and Carrier Con or go work for the FBI in the forensic side of stuff. But, you know, when I got into the profession later in life, it dawned on me rather quickly, like, Oh, my God, there's so many variety of doors that you can go through. And from, from the guy who's not really good at doing taxes and accounting but can apparently can take an exam and pass it, to find his way into a section of that profession, that I can't, I can't begin to pay the profession back for all that has given me.

### **Stacey Rodgers**

I couldn't agree more.

### **Peter Margaritis**

And I give a lot of, its, until you get inside of it until you can put away some of that other stuff, and to your point network. And I had the question I've got fused, what was it? How did, what did you, did you learn how to network prior to coming into the accounting world or did you learn how to network while you were in college and working three jobs and doing this. What was it that, because a lot of people hear that word and they go, Oh, I don't want to talk to, I don't like talking to people. What are the



introverted accountants say to the...I forget the joke. Never mind. I'll think about it later. But what was it anybody that knew that that was that was important?

**Stacey Rodgers**

It was, it was ingrained in our firm culture. And so, while I had a really big network just because of all of the different ways that I was involved, over the course of time, there was no intention there. There was no thought. There was no, and I can tell you that I probably don't rely on that network that I had leading up to coming to Cohen, just because I wasn't being intentional about that. At the firm, that was a critical component. Like you walked in day one. And there was an expectation that you were building a network. Now there's, you know, very clearly business development objectives that come along with that over the course of time as you continue to grow in your career. But really, what it boiled down to, Pete, and I've served on multiple panels for advisory boards and college levels that, you know, entry level, and I say, don't think about it as the scary word of networking. Think about it as building relationships, because that's all it is. Whether or not it leads to a business development opportunity. I mean, that stuff takes years to develop. But let me tell you, if you have a network of people you can trust, who know what you know, and who can lean on you and feel confident to call you in those moments, to say, 'Hey, can I run something past you,' that's where all of those opportunities develop from. And that's where your career opportunities develop. That's where you learn new things. You meet new people, Pete, that's how you and I got introduced. It was not, because you and I were being purposefully networking, and going out there with a list of I'm going to call 50 people that I've never met before. No, you and I met because of a mutual relationship, where we just trust that person to introduce us to other good people. And that is where I spend my time is with people I enjoy spending my time with and people who are experts in their field. And once you find and surround yourself with those kinds of people, you will build a network and relationships that will last you a lifetime that go well beyond the purpose of building, you know, business. And I think you could probably speak to that even as you went into, you know, your own business.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. But as you were describing, I just want to.... Richard Nixon, I want to make this perfectly clear. When you're building this network, it's not all CPAs in that network.

**Stacey Rodgers**

Oh, no, no, no.

**Peter Margaritis**

It's a very diverse, kind of an entrepreneurial network.

**Stacey Rodgers**

Absolutely.

**Peter Margaritis**

That a lot of times, we think of networking, and we're in a business, I tend to network with the people that I know and communicate with. And I don't venture outside of that. You limit. It's almost like a Click Network. You're limiting yourself to information and knowledge and help.

**Stacey Rodgers**

Absolutely, and diversity of thought is not there. And I think that if you if you go back to kind of what I originally said, it's surrounding yourself with people who are way smarter than you and topics that you don't know. That is building a network. And so, if I have an insurance question, guess what? I gotta a gal for that. And if I've got a legal question, I got like three guys and gals for that. And if I have, you know what I mean? Like, that's, that is what? And guess what, those are more fun people to hang out with anyway. You get to hang out with accountants all day, every day. Why would, why do you want to keep growing that network? I mean, and you should network internally, and I will, I'm gonna, I'm gonna draw a really hard line there and say, that is just as important within your organization, as much as it is outside of your organization. But how you go about that, internally is different than how you would go about it externally. You, but you still should be surrounding yourself with the people in your finance department, and the people in your marketing department, getting to know those teams, how they operate, how they function, your people and culture, HR function, like they are all important people to your continued career growth as well. So, it's all important.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, taking that story and going, okay. So, if you're working in an organization, that not full of accountants, and you're a CPA. You're working in the accounting and finance department when you go looking for information, and you walk into somebody's office, 'Oh, God, the accounts here.' They're always looking for stuff. They're always telling me. There's a stereotype.

**Stacey Rodgers**

Absolutely.

**Peter Margaritis**

There's an absolute stereotype for accountants. However, if you network yourself around that, around that building, with the sales, with HR, with distribution, and get to know them, all of a sudden you're not that CPA anymore.

**Stacey Rodgers**

No, you're not.

**Peter Margaritis**

You're Stacey from Accounting. Cool. What do you want to know? Because now, we've built that relationship.

**Stacey Rodgers**

There's trust.

**Peter Margaritis**

There's trust. Yes. And trust doesn't come overnight.

**Stacey Rodgers**

No, it takes effort. It takes intentionality. And it's just, it's a critical component to get done what you need to get done. And I think the most successful people are those who recognize that they can't do it alone. And if you think that you can accomplish all of your goals on your own, you'll only get as far as your own head and your own ego will take you. It's really when you start to expand and understand who are all the right people that I need to surround myself with in order for that organization to be successful. Make it not about yourself, and it changes the way you build approach new relationships, it changes how you think about your network. It's like, what's not just good for me, but what's good for the greater good, whether it's organizationally or, you know, just within your community. I mean, those are the things that change and change direction.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. And I'm glad you went down this networking path, because I, you know, we tend to push it aside a little bit, I think, Especially, actually in anywhere in our development within our careers. But that's something that needs to be taken on head on. First things first. If you can learn about it, if you're in college and stuff, there's networking events.

**Stacey Rodgers**

Right.

**Peter Margaritis**

Attend them.

**Stacey Rodgers**

Yes.

**Peter Margaritis**

And will people say, well, what do I say to somebody? Hi, my name is Pete, what's your name?

**Stacey Rodgers**

And the best advice I've ever heard and make it about the other person. Again, take the spotlight off of you. Go in curious about that person that you're talking to. Guess what? People love talking about themselves, like it's a natural human behavior. Use it to your advantage. There's no reason to not, and that it takes some of the threatening nature of it out of the equation.

**Peter Margaritis**

Since the information gathering business, what I've been doing over the years instead of tell me what you do. Hey, tell you what, why won't you tell me about yourself. Tell me about your business? What do you do? Are you the owner of the business? And just let them go. And you just picked it up nuggets left and right, left and right. And by the time it gets to you, well, you've got these nuggets that well, you know, this is something that I wouldn't be working on or that sounds really interesting I'd like to know a little bit more about it. It's, but just like you said stop making it about yourself, make it about them. Be curious. Have that, accountants should have curiosity as part of their DNA. And using that curiosity throughout your career, especially when you meet people. And also get when you get curious and meet

people that you'll get this gut feeling about them. Whether it's, Oh, God, you need to get away. But this person seems trustworthy. Go with your gut.

**Stacey Rodgers**

Absolutely. Your instinct, I just told someone on my team today. Trust your instinct. You said you felt funky about that. Your instinct was right because trust it. If you're if you're really getting to that place of, you know, just listening, and being curious, your instinct will always kick in, and you have one you have to listen. And you have to do it with intentionality and curiosity. And if you do that, it will serve you time and time and time again in networking, in getting the right talent in the door, retaining that talent really getting to the core of what's, what's getting at them, and also what their development needs are. I mean, that's the solution to any of our challenges is listen, communicate, and then do so with curiosity, intentionality, and you'll get to the right answer every time.

**Peter Margaritis**

I think I'm gonna stop there, because that was profound. And I mean, that was all sincerity. If those of you who listen to this rewind, God, sounds terrible, get your 8-Track Tape and rewind it. Just scroll back or whatever. And listen to that piece again because that's the secret. That's so simple, albeit so hard.

**Stacey Rodgers**

And it is so hard. And if it was that simple, everybody would do it. But it takes extreme self-control, extreme awareness, and an extreme intentionality and discipline to do it well. And so, it's really hard to quiet the ego. It's really hard to quiet some of the other things that distract us from being able to serve in that capacity. But when you create that time, you carve it out and you're intentional about it, that's when you learn the most. And I think that's when you can also make the best decisions and doing it from a place that is meaningful and impactful organizationally, and usually for the individual as well.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. Stacey, I can't thank you enough for taking time out. This was a blast. I gotta get you back on in a few months. I mean, we could go down 1000 different paths and stuff, but it's a pleasure having you on the show. Thank you so very much. I look forward to our paths crossing the summer at some point in time. And keep carrying the flag. Keep fighting the good fight there. Because you do such a great job with it.

**Stacey Rodgers**

Thank you very much, and thanks for continuing to keep me engaged in these types of conversations. This is so much fun and I just really appreciate the time with you, Pete.

**Peter Margaritis**

I want to thank Stacey for her stories on why it's important to be a well-rounded accountant and the urgency for accountants to become better and more effective communicators. 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 adventure they have, and those who say no or rewarded by the safety they obtain. Be a yes person. And thank you for listening.