

# S5E35 David Savage

## **SPEAKERS**

Peter Margaritis, David Savage

### **Peter Margaritis**

Hey, welcome back, everybody. You know, I come across a lot of people doing this podcast, and I get a lot of pitches from podcast bookers. But this gentleman here, I, the first time we were meeting. But he wrote a book. Breakthrough To Yes, and that immediately caught my eye. And I said, I gotta have David Savage on my podcast. So, first and foremost, David, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to spend some time with me on my podcast.

### **David Savage**

Thank you so much for having me.

### **Peter Margaritis**

I'm looking forward to this conversation. So, let's go back some years. And I think he says like 2016, maybe when you started writing this book, Breakthrough To Yes. So, what was it that you felt like you needed to write this book at that point in time?

### **David Savage**

I will say two things, Peter. One is in the years prior, I was befriended, I became part of connections with the people at the Harvard program in negotiation. And brilliant people, wonderful people. And I said to them, "This is great, but you've never actually been in business. I've been in business all my career. So, I'm gonna write a book." And they said, "Yeah, go for it." Second thing is, I really believe in teamwork and team building and organizational development and collaboration. When I looked around the field of collaborative intelligence, there wasn't very much in 2014 through 2016. And the books that I found, Peter, were published, were only ever published by one or two people. And I thought, how, how can you be in integrity, when you're writing about collaboration, and you're writing your own story? So, I reached out, and in my books, I've got 100 experts from eight different countries giving their insight, and I want to role model that that, in fact, I don't have to be the expert. I don't have to be right. Listen to all the voices, and many of the voices taught me that I've included in my book.

### **Peter Margaritis**

That's, that's awesome. I mean, that, what a way to walk the talk, by collaborate on this book. And I need to get the subtitle to it, Unlocking the Possible Within a Culture of Collaboration. So, do you feel through this collaborations of this book and these stories, do you feel, do you feel collaboration is something that's embraced? Or is it just a buzzword we like to use in the corporate world?

**David Savage**

Unfortunately, collaboration has become like sustainability, or ESG, or investor relations, or all of those things where they've just really been ignored and spoken without actually knowing what they are. So, often times people say, oh, yeah, we collaborated. But no, you didn't, you had a meeting. And oftentimes, the leader told you what she or he wanted to do, and tried to set it up so it looked like it was a team event. So, I really want us to go much deeper in how we lead. One of the things I offer in my Breakthrough To Yes: Unlocking the Possible Within a Culture of Collaboration is a 10 step process and essential to effective successful collaboration. And holding a meeting doesn't actually come until step five. That's fairly uncommon. But I want us to be really intentional, intentional as to bringing in all the voices, really being true as to what our goal is, and focusing on accountability. So, there's so much we can all learn. So much I'm still learning about collaborative leadership.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, you mentioned the 10 essential steps of collaboration. What's the first one?

**David Savage**

Sorry?

**Peter Margaritis**

What's, what's the number one step?

**David Savage**

Set intention, set intention. So, what is my true and honest intention? Am I trying to call a group of my people into a boardroom, and I've got this idea and I want them to ratify it.? Well, if that's the case, then I better tell them right away, because trust is increasingly weakened by weak leaders.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. So, do you mind walking through the 10 briefly for me? Because I'm curious about what the other night are.

**David Savage**

I'll just touch on some of them. And those 10 steps are on my website, DavidBSavage.com. So, anybody, any of your listeners can check that out. But, you know, setting an intention, you know, are you really being true and purposeful? Are you really open? One of the steps is embrace conflict. I love conflict. You know, conflict can teach me so much because you will not fight me unless it's something that you cared deeply about. And I need to understand what that is. And I've often in my career, made my shareholders a lot of money, because I listened and listened and listened. And we adapted and collaborated to a better solution than I would have come up by myself. The other thing is, there's some people that will pretend that they're really wanting to collaborate, but they're gonna sit on the sidelines. That's the most difficult thing about leadership is people that will just sit in the room and listen, and not really engage. Simple things like how do we design the collaboration? Where are we meeting? If every time a business or an organization meets, it's around a rectangular table in a rectangular room, that's probably not the best for creativity. So, little things like a lot of architects have been designing not only circles but designing opportunities for groups to get out in nature. You know, really, really let the heart

and the other side of the mind really engage that will not be engaged by spreadsheets and PowerPoints and all that stuff. And, of course, collaborative leadership, I'll say two other things, Peter, one is, in my steps, it's actually be completely open to whatever comes. Because always, it will come in a different form and with wisdom from very diverse perspectives, very different people. I really want to engage, you know, who am are clients, who are my clients that I'm hoping to gain? And then of course, collaboration and other we can just going back to it's a, it's a badly used word. Collaboration doesn't mean avoiding leadership. You know, once you get through the 10 steps, once you set your targets, then there is leadership and accountability and aligning rewards, aligning recognition, aligning resources to all those, and those people that exceptionally excel. Let's have a plan for that. And make sure they expect that and they've earned it. They can work toward it. They can trust me. Secondly, those that are not successful, okay. How are we going to deal with that? What are we going to learn, but those that just sit on the sidelines or naysayers are always throwing up the barriers and not working for getting beyond the barriers. But there needs to be accountability there. This needs to be a high performing team that trusts each other and mostly trust you as their leader.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. I kind of coined this, I said this at one point in time, the collective knowledge outside of your office far exceeds the collective knowledge inside your office. Bringing people in, listen to them, collaborate and get things done. Because, you know, you don't want to be the smartest person in the room. You want to surround yourself with very smart people.

**David Savage**

Yeah, be the smartest person in the room by listening to all the voices and then creating that recipe. Peter, you're a very smart guy. And as we've talked before this interview, if you come out as everything that comes out is yours and you're the smartest guy in the room as the President Chairperson, whatever, that's really not going to build a good team. In a lot of ways the top leader needs to be curious and needs to be a great facilitator.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. I witnessed this some years ago, I was working for Victoria's Secret catalog, not as a model, David.

**David Savage**

Good thing. Good thing.

**Peter Margaritis**

And my job was International Circulation Manager, and the team went over to Japan. And I remember my boss and I were sitting in on this meeting. and the leader didn't sit at the end of the table sit in the middle of the table. And he asked people to share what their thoughts were on this specific topic. I'm getting this translated so, and at what point is puts his head down, like, and I'm saying, 'Is this guy sleeping?' No, he was listening. He was attentively listening. And it gets all the way around the table, people share the thoughts and ideas. And he kind of looks up then basically says, first, thank you for sharing your thoughts and ideas. I've listened to all of you. Now, let's take that and see what we can

weave to create something. And I went, 'Wow!' That is, that is something that I've never witnessed ever again since that day.

**David Savage**

That's a magical experience when you experienced that.

**Peter Margaritis**

It was. It's exactly what it was very magical. But you know what, and prior to us talking. we talked about the word ego. And clearly this gentleman who was highest ranking official in the room, he has an ego because we all do. But it wasn't overdeveloped, and he, I think he was naturally curious about what everybody had to say. And just talking to you, that's I hadn't thought about the story in a while. And went, that's leadership right there. Well, how can we, how can we, how can we change the way leaders collaborate in a sense of being like that gentleman was in Japan, just listen to what everybody says, formulating stuff, and then let's go figure it out?

**David Savage**

Yeah. So, I want to ask you that question. Because you're an expert on leadership.

**Peter Margaritis**

For some reason, you took that extra pause. I said, I think this is coming back. How did I just lose the..

**David Savage**

...coming back.

**Peter Margaritis**

How did I lose the host? Oh, that's right.... You know what? I think I'm gonna use your book as an example, because you shared something with me beforehand. And I said, it's the ability to let one's ego sit on the sidelines. And you said, have you seen the cover of my book? And I'm looking right at, I pulled it up on Amazon. I was reading about it. And he goes, You know, there's there's some letters that are kind of partially they're kind of shaded out. What are those letters? Pete our E, it's Breakthrough to Yes. The E is kinda shadowed out, the G, the O, and the S. And then, wow, he shadowed out the word Egos.

**David Savage**

I don't know if you can see that, but...

**Peter Margaritis**

Yeah, yeah. That's what we're talking about. Unlocking the possibilities, and the only way to unlock the possibility of collaboration and getting to Yes is parking your ego.

**David Savage**

That's what we're talking about right there. Yes.

**Peter Margaritis**

And realizing that you don't have to be the smartest person in the room, as you said, but you have to be an excellent facilitator, to get people to more contribute, and two to be able to foster that conversation moving forward.

**David Savage**

To one of the things that I've really noticed in the last 15 years is the attractiveness of flat organizations, flat org charts instead of big pyramids. What I find is too often the elite there, where's the Chairwoman, the President's whoever. The quarterback. They do all the talking, they do all the visioning, they do. So basically, they've slimmed out the org chart, but they've taken away a lot of the intelligence from it too. One of the techniques that I've used in with some of my clients is, I'll sit in on their weekly operations meeting, and I'll just draw a line of communication. Okay, around that table, who talked, who listened, who talked back, and at the end of the meeting, usually 60 or 90 minute meeting, I'll sit down with the leader of that group, and just show them the lines. And way too often, those lines, 80% of the lines, are between her and her senior people. And the other people in the room are just kind of wasting 90 minutes. And everyone is reacting to her. So, I'm using her/him/they interchange here. But leadership needs to recognize that you actually have people on your org chart, in your staff, whether whatever level of responsibility and demographic they have, you hired them for a reason so let them give you back that reward.

**Peter Margaritis**

So, this reminds me of growing up, I remember, hear my father say children should be seen and not heard. I can still hear him saying that, but I witnessed that and from leadership. That if you're new to the organization, don't ask questions, don't make comments, sit there and be quiet and understand before you get involved, or you can't say anything until you aspire to a certain level within the organization, which is wrong.

**David Savage**

If I might, I love the free flow of this, Peter, so thank you for this. I'm co-chairing an environmental sustainability rotary action group from my district, Eastern Washington and Southeastern British Columbia and northern Idaho. And it's the young women that are teaching us the most. So, too often when he talks about environmental protection, climate change, climate justice, sustainability, everybody's guards get up because there's been so polarized, which is a ridiculous thing to do with our shared future. And when we open the mic, to the young people, the people in our interact groups, and in our district, these young men and women are actually teaching us. It's their future that we're actually designing together. And they tell me, this is the first place the first room where we have a voice, whether it's high school or university or our work, where I was told what to do. This is the first place. And the wraparound for me, is I get to learn from them. I get to understand their underlying fears and their interests. But I also see within Rotary, it's bringing new life to this Rotary International. Far too long rotary internationalists, bunch of Romeo's, you know, really old man who eat out. People that look like me and just sometimes get crabby in they're their intelligence. And these 16- to 18-year-old young leaders in our district are teaching. And they are bringing new blood, new passion, new ideas, new innovation, to Rotary. So, so Oliver from British Columbia, I asked him to, if they could artistically speak to what environmental protection meant to them. And what he did was, wrote and then recorded a

video, a song called Grow. And I've played that song to other Rotary groups. In fact, this weekend in Alberta, I will be playing it as part of a talk I'm doing there. And it just inspires people to say, Oh, my God, look at this young leader. Why aren't we listening to more of them? Where are they? Well, if you look, and you'll find.

**Peter Margaritis**

You know, I know you've written stuff. I'm gonna do my homework about the Great Resignation.

**David Savage**

Yes

**Peter Margaritis**

And I've interviewed a lot of people as to related to that topic. Because you just hit the nail on the head. They're leaving, not because they're looking for more money. They're leaving because they want to be heard.

**David Savage**

Yeah, yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

They want to be part, they want to be part of the solution. They don't want to be put in the corner. They want to be heard. And, and, you know, it's something so simple. But once again, the E, the G, the O and S are kind of muted out. That's where we need to be, but they're in bold, hard script in a lot of leaders, that if we can just do that and listen to them. The fine act of just listening to somebody's thoughts and ideas without shooting them down is a sign of appreciation.

**David Savage**

Yeah. For those of us that enjoy and somehow engage in sports, you know, whether you're a hockey player, a soccer player, you know, whatever it is, whether you're a racecar driver, if you focus on the barrier on the goalie, you're rarely going to actually score. If you focus on the back of the net or beyond the car crash, you will get there because that's your intention. So, let's focus beyond all the nonsense the polarization, the opinions. We have a very complex world which demands critical thinking and demands different perspectives, different ways of looking at this. So, I really feel that this is a simple strategic advantage for those leaders in those organizations, for profit, not for profit and government to say, while the rest of the world is worried about investor interest, worried about retaining their your staff, can't find new staff or are really understaffed. And they think that giving people, you know, a couple bucks an hour or more is going to change the issue, the challenge to attract those people. No, that's not good. No money helps. No doubt. You know, we all need to pay our bills. But if I feel that, Peter, you listen to me, and I'm important voice, and I can collaborate and innovate together and we can dream together, I want to be there. That's where I want to work.

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. And we need to focus more on doing that, versus the control mechanism that we can control people. And you said it earlier. Trust your people. You hire them for a reason. Trust them.

Remember, before the pandemic, you can't work from home and never get anything done. You'll be watching Ellen and eating bonbons. Oh, God, we all get to go home and work. Hey, it worked. We were maybe even more productive. But now that the pandemic sort of ended now we're demanding to come back into the office. It sounds like a still a trust issue.

### **David Savage**

Yeah. And of course, yes, when you and I can meet face to face and talk through things out and I learned a little bit about your son there. You learn a little bit more about my interest, you know, that I always improves the efficiency of our communications going forward. And the flexibility that saying, Okay, what are, what are the resources? What are the needs? What are the demands we have now? And how do we most effectively lead? That's the only way. You know, leading from the last century isn't going to attract a lot of loyalty. I'm a real strong advocate of business with purpose. And business with purpose means, why am I in business? What is the thing? What is my brand? What are people respect, and preferentially pay me instead of somebody else. You know, the old paradigm of quarterly earnings and quick, fast short-term profit without thinking about next year or 20 years from now, it doesn't work anymore. We have a very intelligent world, very connected world, very wise world. Whether you're, you know, a 12-year-old woman in Pakistan, or 112 year old guy in the Kootenays, of British Columbia, we all have access to wisdom. But why are we doing what we're doing? If I can attract people because they feel I'm serving their needs, confirming their dreams and helping them get there. That actually makes more money for my shareholders. Reduce the resistance, reduce the combat, improve the loyalty, reduce staff losses. Lots of reasons to be on purpose. And then if I might add to that, you know, we talked about the overused words of collaboration and sustainability, etc. You know, investors are demanding and proper ESG environment and social governance reporting from boards of directors. Well, that's nice, but that's a government thing. That's a governance thing. Sustainability is what we act. How we do, Purpose is, okay, what is the net benefit to you as my client? Are you better off buying, purchasing, collaborating supplying me? You know, supply chain issues, mid 2020-22 are huge for us. Economic uncertainty is huge for us. How do I become your preferred supplier or your preferred buyer? And it's because you believe that I will treat you fairly. We have the same sustainability goals. You can trust me with it, no matter what that says and legal massive document. You and I can sit down and have a conversation and figure it out. That's a real advantage today.

### **Peter Margaritis**

It really is, but there's one thing that I think sometimes we forget about. To get to that point of respect and trust with our suppliers, our vendors, our people doesn't happen overnight. It happens. It takes time, then it's not a transaction. It's building a relationship.

### **David Savage**

Yeah, it's not a trick.

### **Peter Margaritis**

It's not a trick. It's not a trick. But, you know, a lot of times, and we'll let you connect with somebody on LinkedIn. Next thing, you know, they're selling to you.

**David Savage**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

Like, you don't even know me. I don't even know who I know who you are, and I'm not gonna do business with you, because I don't really know you yet. But that's part of business has always been there that we, we build relationships. And we also in the way I've always looked at, if I've screwed up, I will be accountable and say, I screwed up. Now let's fix it.

**David Savage**

Right.

**Peter Margaritis**

But that just takes time. It takes time. It has to be on both sides of that coin.

**David Savage**

Now, it's the African proverb, if you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far go together. And I'm just realizing on LinkedIn, I've failed to do something that really frustrates me. If I send out posts or articles or emails or phone calls, And they never get acknowledged, it's like, WTF, like, should I just stop. And oftentimes, we're just also busy. We all have, you know, 10 to 100 emails a day. We might really like it, but we never actually say we really like it. And I've noticed that theater in the last three years, especially on LinkedIn. A lot of people want to connect with us because they want to sell us some program or some guarantee or whatever. And you know, I just don't accept those anymore. But I also invite you and others to connect with me, because I think we have similar interests, similar dreams. Well, I guess my commitment in this moment is from now on, when somebody accepts or invites, I'm simply I will respond to them saying, thank you, here's something about you that I really appreciate. Wouldn't that be a nice switch? Wouldn't that be a rewarding way to start the next evolution to state, you know, with that? I'm going to remember that savage guy, he actually practices what he preaches.

**Peter Margaritis**

Brilliant, David. That's brilliant. We all get on a click. Okay, we're done. Versus... I'm bad at this. Say, Yeah, I'll accept. But what I need to do is go to their profile. Look at it. See if we know somebody who's to same, Both of our network, find something go, David, I see that you're an expert on collaboration. Collaboration is one of my key things. Looking forward to connecting and collaborating on maybe some future stuff, something along those lines?

**David Savage**

Yeah. Yeah. So, we're failures together, Peter. We don't do that enough. And, and, you know, early days, it's important to know, okay, I want to have 10,000 connections on LinkedIn. Well, so what? Now, what if I had four that were really powerful, and we could do magic together?

**Peter Margaritis**

Absolutely. And you're right, you said the F-word, failure. And you know, something. If we take the word fail, and create an acronym for it, it's called the first attempt at learning. I think we all, we all want to be



perfect, but we can't because we're human. We do fail. It's just and this one, I'm trying to work with my soon to be 22 year old son. It's okay to fail. It's okay to fail. Just don't continue to fail doing the exact same thing over and over again. But he's younger, he did it to tell him out of fail. He was asking, trying to ask girls out. He was failing. Well go find someone to ask. And then he asked this one girl, she said yes. And then he thought he had game. I said, No, you don't, don't. You don't have game. You just gotta keep working at it. And allow yourself to fail. Learn from it. Because that's the only way we get better.

**David Savage**

Yeah. Yeah, I'm, I'm remembering my early days as a boy and thinking, yeah, I didn't want to get on the ice and show people that I had no idea how to skate. Well, unless I did those 100 times, I would never have any idea how to skate.

**Peter Margaritis**

Right.

**David Savage**

Another actually, if I might, one of my favorite books in the last year and a half is Adam Grant's, Think Again.

**Peter Margaritis**

Yes.

**David Savage**

You've probably read that, Peter.

**Peter Margaritis**

I have. I have read that. Yes, I have. Yes.

**David Savage**

One. If I might just like to read a quote. "It takes humility to reconsider our past commitments. Doubt to question our future decisions. Curiosity to reimagine our future plans. What we discover along the way can free us from the shackles of our familiar surroundings and our former selves. Or there's freedom."

**Peter Margaritis**

Yes. I just, I'm just there. What, do you remember what chapter in the book it is? Because I have the book. I want to go find that and reread that over and over again.

**David Savage**

I've got the book in front of me, but I will probably, I will probably send you the chapter. But for your listeners, your viewers. But it is brilliant. Just to realize that the barrier to communication is, in fact, me thinking I know it all, because then I don't really need to learn anything from Peter. And the second thing is to say, Well, why am I trapped in my beliefs, whether it's religious, business, political? What if I actually had a wholesome learning conversation with you on things that we really disagree on. So,

number one, you show me the respect by listening to me. And number two, I learned something that I probably didn't know before. You know, those collaborative learning conversations are critical. So, I know we have a very short period of time, but I think curiosity is one of the greatest strengths of a leader. I've been speaking for a couple of years now and hope to publish a book called Nobody Gets To Be Right. You know, what if we came from that perspective of curiosity, and realizing my beliefs, my perspectives, the story that I tell myself about who I am 10,000 times a day is incomplete, and you can help me round it out.

**Peter Margaritis**

In his book, is he's a gentleman that went to, was at white supremacist or whatever it was trying to get a better understanding. I, I have to go, I have to go back and reread the book, because there was something about, you know, that curiosity about the other person and trying to get them the time to drop the biases, and the fear and everything and just having that conversation.

**David Savage**

Yeah, I'm not remembering that part of it, Think Again. One of the earliest stories is where he, he talks about the global debate challenge by two world class debaters who are also very young. And both of them go head-to-head. And I think there's something like 70% of the people that were going to vote for debater A, ended up changing their minds and voted for debater B. And there were two key things around that. Is debater B actually only had two key points. They didn't overload with, here's 100 reasons why I'm right. Here's just two things about why, Peter, is the greatest podcaster in the world. The other thing is the debater B asked questions. Debater A only made proclamations. And after Adam Grant tells you that story about B winning the debate, then he tells you that he was actually a computer that had gigabytes of wisdom and knowledge on this subject, but just could not win over people with data data, data, data. It was the curiosity and the humaneness and the simplicity of Debater B.

**Peter Margaritis**

That hit on a lot of, on a lot of areas of the world that I live in with accounting and finance folks who just love to give data data, data, data.

**David Savage**

Yeah.

**Peter Margaritis**

And I, and I just did a session for a client over the last week came upon an exercise similar to that. And so, we only had five minutes or 10 minutes. Why didn't you just ask what's going on? What's keeping you up at night? And let them give you the roadmap to explore versus we trying to supply that roadmap, only to realize maybe it's out of gas or does it I can't get there from here. I love that I love the curiosity aspect. So, when this book will come out?

**David Savage**

Well, I'm working, I'm working on actually three books right now. Before I answer that question, Peter, I just wanted to say, here's another tool and technique for your listeners, your and your viewers is ask the 10 people most important to your organization to give you one word that represents what you do.

And then ask, you know, go to 10 future clients, or customers or suppliers and ask them, tell me one word about what my company is. And that will surprise you. So, this is linking back to the business with purpose, you know, that I stand, because I create shared value. You benefit, we all learn together, etc. And it's a surprising and very simple technique that in 10, very brief, telephone conversation Zooms or coffees you can, you can really assess how effective your brand is. My three books, Nobody Gets To Be Right. And all these I'm planning to release in 2023, Nobody Gets To Be Right. It's about curiosity as a leadership skill. And how I've gained and my shareholders have gained from curiosity as opposed to fighting that I'm right, because too often I'm not. The other one is creating that Historical fiction based on my father's experience in World War II, blowing up bridges behind the Nazis as a Canadian engineer. And that in telling those stories to my family, and my kids and my grandkids, Remembrance Day has become way more meaningful to them when they get into the experience what it must have been for my father, at 23 years old, leading 75 men behind enemy lines in France. The one that I'm probably most excited about is a book that I'm writing with my 12-year-old granddaughter, and 14-year-old grandson, my, it's a young adult fiction. And it is a fictional book about one of our favorite places to me in British Columbia. And it could be a horror story, but it turns into a story about oneness, about environmental protection, and about letting go of our assumptions of what the world really is, and just open into what is actually here now. And by writing this book with my two grandchildren, and of course, my five grandchildren are the lead characters, I'm hoping to build the awareness that they can be whatever they want to be. It's not about me, writing more books. It's about them realizing, hey, in these platforms that we have today, they can have our shared book in a teenager's hand in Afghanistan. May not ever make money on it, but they exercise their power and grow their sense of possibilities. Those are the three books, Peter.

**Peter Margaritis**

David, I will get you back out of this podcast again. This has been eye opening, exhilarating, and just enjoyed the conversation immensely. I can't thank you enough for taking time out of your schedule to do this. I will have you back on the podcast, especially as you get closer to those newer books for next year. And want to really kind of talk to you about and I'm looking forward to hearing more about those three books.

**David Savage**

So, thank you for reaching out, Peter, and I really appreciate the way you lead.

**Peter Margaritis**

I appreciate it. Thank you very much. I want to thank David for his thoughts and stories around the power of collaboration. It was a fascinating conversation that we had. And remember, collaboration is powerful. Also 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 are rewarded by the safety they obtain. Be yes person. Thank you for listening.