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THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES

EPISODE FIFTY-FIVE
EXPERIENCE DESIGN
AT THE PACE OF CHANGE

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GUESTS: BRADEN KELLEY,
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Shawn: Welcome to the fifth season of *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast, where bold leaders combine with big ideas to make life better for all of us. I'm your host, Shawn Nason, CEO and founder of MOFI. In these episodes, we'll be exploring the power, influence, and importance of Experience Ecosystems™. To do that, we're bringing together the most unique and influential experience experts in the world for honest conversations about not being okay with the status quo, leading with heart, and getting real about heartsets and mindsets. In case you're wondering, an Experience Ecosystem is the web of people, touchpoints, and interactions that combine to create all of the positive and negative experiences we have in the world. When an organization wants to improve customer experience, they're wasting their time if they're not willing to engage and humanize their entire Experience Ecosystem. It's time to blow up some silos and ignite an experience revolution by putting people first.

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Shawn: On this episode, we are diving into the disruption caused when innovation gets accelerated. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for speeding up lots of different innovations throughout lots of different industries, including industries who weren't prepared for something new. How are business leaders using experience design to keep up with the pace of change? To start the conversation, we have Braden Kelly. Braden is the customer experience and innovation solution director at HCL Technologies. He's a longtime leader of innovation and transformation projects, author, and speaker. Welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles*, Braden.

Braden: Glad to be here, Shawn.

Shawn: Well, Braden, we've known each other a few years and lots has happened over those years in the innovation experience space. So I am really excited to jump in and get your leadership on this episode. You've seen the experience design industry manage lots of changes in your career. And in a recent article on riding the data wave to digital disruption, you wrote that, "Today's digital reality requires all companies to think like a technology company, or go out of business." That's a pretty bold statement there, Braden. Why is it a kiss of death if companies are not thinking like a technology company?

Braden: Well, I think it's because of that experience component that you mentioned, Shawn, and it's the fact that in our digital world and our digital economy, the digital component of the business has become so important to the experience that if you don't have the digital part of your experience, well-formed and well-executed, then

you really put yourself at risk. And because it's easier than ever to start a business and scale it than it has been in the past, it's really easy for a digital native to come in and eat your lunch more so than before. And so you have to constantly be rethinking your business and leveraging the tools that are available and minding the experience.

Shawn: Totally agree. Braden, we talk about at MOFI, this Experience Ecosystem where the digital experience is a part of that ecosystem. And industry research shows that the average lifespan of a company has dropped from 61 years to 18. An executive site promoting continuous innovation as a challenge. Is this actually a good thing that we see companies dropping off a lot sooner than before?

Braden: Well, it's a good thing and a bad thing. And it's definitely a bad thing that executives see continuous innovation or being able to continuously innovate as a challenge because then that means that they haven't architected the organization or their current architecture and their current capabilities don't support that. And so I think that it's incredibly important that organizations take innovation as a core component of their organization and don't think of it as a project. Too often we see innovation as a project. And that gets you to the end of that project, and maybe you launch something really cool. But, unless you want to only live for 18 years, instead of 61 years, then obviously, you're compromising your future.

So I think that the key is for organizations to look at their infrastructure for innovation and make sure that they're putting the right capabilities in place, the right elements of flexibility and agility but at the same time, recognizing which parts of the organization need to have some elements of fixedness so that they can go fast. You know, if you make everything too flexible, then you don't go anywhere. But if you make everything too fixed, then you also don't go anywhere. So to achieve true agility, it requires a balance between flexibility and fixedness.

Shawn: Let's jump into that, Braden, because we're really interested about this ecosystem concept and you actually just wrote an article and have a graphic around organizations of the future. And in that, you depict as a kind of distributed modular ecosystem. How close are we to this structure becoming the norm and how does it help companies manage that rapid change that you're just sitting here talking about?

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Braden: Well, I don't think that we're too close yet, Shawn, on that stuff, unfortunately.

Shawn: Neither do I so.

Braden: But it's not surprising because it's a really hard concept and a really hard construct for companies to make the walls of their organization more permeable and to make the boundaries of job descriptions and the talent that they have more permeable as well. Because the reality is that people hire to a job description, but you don't hire a job description, you hire a person, and that person has talents, skills, and abilities, and interests and passions. And sure, there may be a huge intersection between that and the job description, but if you only focus on that, you're missing out on a huge opportunity.

So there's a few organizations doing some interesting things around this idea. Cisco has this idea of the internal internship, where they pretty much throw up a project that a department needs help with, and then the human resources component or the organization supports somebody, say, in finance working on a project for marketing. And that finance person might have incredible marketing skills that they just haven't had a chance to use because they've just always gotten hired for finance jobs, or that may be where their passion lies, or that may be where they're doing all their individual learning. And so I think too often we hire people because of what they've done before, not at what they're best at.

And organizations that truly want to be innovative need to have ways of having the slack time necessary to allow people to work on other things, to have the flexibility in them to allow for redeployment of human resources to new capabilities that the organization needs to build. And I just don't think we're there yet. And a lot of that is that we tend to do things the way we've always done them or the way we're rewarded. And so doing new things in new ways is not necessarily always rewarded.

Shawn: And you know Braden, again, we talk about this Experience Ecosystem is the web of people, touchpoints, and experiences that are combine to define your experience promise. And so we really believe at MOFI that if you focus on the overall web of experiences, and the ecosystem of experiences, this is exactly what you're talking about.

Braden: Yeah, definitely.

Shawn: Let's talk about some business and the heart of business. As we said, lots of people have inventive ideas, but making them real, you have to be able to be bold and take risks about that. So in your first book, *Stoking Your Innovative Bonfire*, you cover a great concept called Infinite Innovation. Most companies are not set up for that type of innovation and fail to grasp that inventors have great ideas, but innovators change the

world. I feel like most companies have those tools to go big with innovation. But how do we help them find the courage to act on it?

Braden: Well, I think it comes down to how you define innovation. And I've always defined it as innovation transforms the useful seeds of invention into widely adopted solutions valued above every existing alternative. And there's a couple of key things that highlight some of the areas where we run into trouble with innovation. And number one is that tension between invention and innovation and that was in the quote of mine that you read earlier is highlighting that distinction. You know, invention and creativity are very closely linked. They're both also very closely linked to value creation. But to create innovation, it has to displace something. It has to be so valuable that people are willing to abandon the previous solution, even if it was the do-nothing solution.

And that's not easy. And that takes time. And I think oftentimes people underestimate how long innovation takes. I mean, if you look at the VCR, if you look at the MP3 player, and you look at a lot of technologies, we're talking 20 to 30 years from first invention to wide adoption. If you look at Gorilla Glass that a lot of people have on their smartphones these days, that was invented 50 years before it achieved wide-scale adoption on smartphones and other technology devices.

And so sometimes, organizations underestimate how long it takes to innovate. If you look at history, you really start to understand how innovation happens, and why it's important to invest in putting the infrastructure in place to make it continuous, to make it move beyond a project basis. And that's where the Infinite Innovation infrastructure comes in. And it pretty much gives you a blueprint or a recipe for moving from a project mindset to a continuous innovation approach within your organization and lays out the components of the infrastructure that need to be in place.

And then on the risk question, that is a very, very big question. It's one that a lot of people are doing very interesting work on. It's lot about creating psychological safety and understanding that it's not...that failure isn't always a bad thing and understanding the difference between failure and mistakes, and which one you want to control for and which one you want to allow.

And we kind of also get stuck on this idea in thinking of ourselves as forward-thinking organizations like, "Oh, we're going to focus on failing fast. We're going to be people that fail fast." But it's not really about failing fast, it's about learning fast. And you can learn from success just as much as you learn from failure, but only if you're looking for it, and only if you have a way of identifying the learning.

And so the key thing that organizations have to do is to make sure that they have the conditions in place to empower innovation to occur. So, there's definitely a lot for organizations to unpack into and invest in if they want to make innovation repeatable and possible.

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Shawn: Yeah, it just can't be a checkbox anymore. And I think we went through a time and a period within organizations and corporations said, "Oh, we do innovation. it's part of our core values. You know, we hire a chief innovation officer," but they really haven't changed their system and becomes a systemic problem within an organization if you don't change the system.

Braden: Right. Right. You have to change the system. If you're going into new areas, if innovation leads you into new areas, you have to invest in new capabilities. I mean, when Apple decided to go into the music player business, they weren't making consumer electronics. They weren't in the music industry. They had to go build these capabilities, to hire people they didn't have in their organization to make that ecosystem possible.

Shawn: Yeah, let's talk a little bit about change. And the reality of it is because of the pandemic, right, as we're coming on the outside of that change is not going to slow down at all. So how can a focus on experience design help companies be less rigid and more fluid while moving into this new norm and this new future?

Braden: Well, I think that a focus on experience design will allow organizations to think bigger, to take more of a systems approach than a point-solution approach to things. And if you look at experience design, people are familiar with product design, service design has been an increasingly popular topic, process design has been around forever. Systems design is sort of bringing things together. Then we have customer experience and user experience, and more people are talking about employee experience.

These are all important topics, but they're usually thought of by themselves. And if you're really trying to design the experience, you have to think of all of these things working together. And innovation is also a systemic ecosystem type area. And when I talk about innovation, I talk about it all being about value. And I break down three key areas that drive value that people need to think about. And that's value creation, value access, and value translation. And usually, most people when they're talking about innovation, they think all about value creation. But if you don't translate the value for people effectively, then your invention will never become an innovation. If you don't

build the right experience and ecosystem around your core idea, then you also won't help people access that value, and your invention will never become innovation.

Shawn: Wow, that's awesome. Well, Braden, thank you so much for all these nuggets that you've dropped on the listeners today. You know, we've come to this part that we do with every one of our guests within the podcast, and we call them The Combustion Questions. So there are some randomly selected questions that I don't even know until I start to ask them to you because they're given to me. So, Braden, are you ready for your Combustion Questions?

Braden: As ready as I'll ever be.

Shawn: All right, combustion question number one is outside of your professional work. What topic could you spend hours talking about?

Braden: Probably basketball. I just love basketball because it's a team sport and it requires seeing into the future a little bit to be successful in the role that I play, which is typically point guard. And you have to be able to see all the moving pieces, so probably basketball.

Shawn: I love it. I'm a huge college basketball fan, Braden. So we can talk about that forever. All right, combustion question number two. Fruits or vegetables?

Braden: Definitely fruits.

Shawn: Why?

Braden: Well, I love mangoes. I love passionfruit. I love a lot of the tropical fruits, guava and others. So I'll definitely say fruits although carrots make a wonderful addition to smoothie. It's nice.

Shawn: Awesome. Well again, Braden, thanks so much. It's been a pleasure and I hope you can join us again on *The Combustion Chronicles*.

Braden: Thanks, Shawn.

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Shawn: Let's shift now to focus on how experience professionals in healthcare are adjusting in the accelerated world of innovation. To cover this topic, we are so excited to have Diane Stover-Hopkins. Diane is the founder and CEO of ExPeers, an in-demand consultant, speaker, and writer, and she has extensive experience blending marketing

and experience strategies primarily in the healthcare industry. Welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles*, Diane.

Diane: Hey, Shawn. Thanks for having me.

Shawn: You know, Diane, you have seen a lot of changes happen in healthcare. And, you are one of the first chief experience officers in the U.S. healthcare industry, and maybe actually, the first, if I remember right. But you started in marketing. So how do you see healthcare differently since pivoting from marketing to experience and this Experience Ecosystem space?

Diane: Well, I see it as a very natural progression back in the early 2000s, late 1999 area, was when one of the times our industry, the healthcare industry was under attack from many different areas. And we weren't going to cut budgets our way out of these problems. And that's when a focus on innovation came seeping into the organization I was at in Indiana with our CEO. And as I explored innovation and explored what other companies not in healthcare did with innovation and we did over 80 InnoVisits to companies like Whirlpool, and Harley-Davidson, and Procter & Gamble, and DuPont. We realized that when you're in a service company like healthcare is, that you're not making widgets that you innovate, you have to innovate from being a service to an experience.

So, when we looked at our marketing, we saw all this energy, and effort, and money we were spending positioning our brand, making promises to the community and to doctors and patients. And, Tom Peters has a model called, the Future Shape of the Winner model, which says certain things have to be in alignment for you to be a long-term winner. And, when we studied that, we realized that one factor called, brand, how you represent yourself to the world, what you promise your customers, that goes through your staff, your employees, to the experience that is ultimately delivered. And so, that's where I saw the connection with marketing and experience design. And that, if you're going to spend $2 million on a campaign for your new bariatric surgery program to attract people from five states. And, you promise less pain, less blood, less time in the hospital. And then, you go through the people that had to deliver that, the surgeons, the frontline staff, whomever, and they're not getting less bleeding and less time in the hospital, let's save the $2 million till the experience is what we say it is. And so, that became a way to have the experience be what the patients deserve, and the brand and market communications have to be authentic with what we deliver.

Shawn: So, Diane, I love this, and recently, a former guest of ours here on the podcast, Blake Morgan, she posted something around, "What if 5% of experiences would

change in the healthcare system? How different would healthcare be?" And I actually wrote back and commented on it on her LinkedIn. I said, "Blake, what if just one percent of healthcare would change, how different would the experience be?" Right? And you've seen that a ton, Diane. And you say, "It's not good enough to have leadership create an experience initiative," which, by the way, I give a huge "amen" to. It has to become instinct for everyone in the organization. Why is that, and how do you make it happen?

Diane: Well, you know, in healthcare and in any industry, but healthcare is probably more important because life and death is part of every day. You have 10,000 people in a health system. You cannot possibly prepare 10,000 people for everything that's going to come their way, with a family or a patient, every day, every week, every month. You know, you can't anticipate what they're all going to be. And let me tell you, some of the stories, you wouldn't believe. And so, since you can't prepare them for everything that may come their way, we want to develop an instinct, so that whatever comes their way, they know what to shoot for, and how high to shoot for. And they've got permission, the culture gives them permission to shoot high, to deal with whatever may come their way. There's a few things in healthcare we do to do that. One, you have to have a commitment to co-creation. The frontline people see what we don't see in the boardroom. They know what we don't know in the boardroom. And they're part of our team, yet very inconsistently do we leverage their knowledge and insights. And I'm talking about the valet parker, the nurse at the bedside, the homecare delivery people. These people are at the front with our customers, seeing real life, seeing where we do well, where our procedures get in the way, and we typically don't do a great job leveraging that. So, co-creation is the way to leverage that.

Now, co-creation, I've heard many health systems tell me, "Oh, we do co-creation. We do SurveyMonkey and such surveys, once a month with the staff and the ER, and, you know." Okay, I guess, it's better than nothing, but co-creation is bringing people together from different positions, you know, doctors with cleaning people, and the mix of everybody in between, and having them share their perspectives of what's going on in, you know, the company, in the world of servicing our customers, and learning from one another, and feeling comfortable with one another. And it's important to make sure that it's also fun and engaging.

So that's the first part of it. The second part of that long answer to your question is that the instinct needs to be to get a workforce of more innovative problem solvers. When I ask a room full of healthcare professionals, "What percentage of their day is problem-solving? Ninety-percent, 95%, 98%." And then I say, "What exposure have you ever had to becoming a better, stronger, problem-solver? A more innovative problem-

solver?" Nobody yet in seven years has raised their hand. And so, here we have people dealing with all kinds of crazy problems, customer problems, who are doing them either through their gut or through whatever the rule may be, and they don't understand they have so much more to bring to the table. So, I do focus a lot on refining the innovative problem-solving instinct, the understanding that every person can influence the experience. And, by the way, not only does all of that benefit the patient and the family, but the employees become...feel more important, they feel that they're heard, and they feel respected, which is an engagement benefit.

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Shawn: I love it, Diane. And, I love all the things that you can measure out of just those two things around building instinct that you gave us. Speaking of your book, *Unleashing the Chief Moment Officers: Reliably Giving the Gift of Exceptional Experiences*. Can you tell our listeners and our audience a little bit about the book, and why you even wrote it?

Diane: Well, as I was on that early journey, I was very, very blessed, you know, back in the beginning of before...you know, back when I started working on innovation in healthcare and patient experience, the definition of innovation in healthcare was technology assessment. If you went to any of the big health systems and they said, "We have an innovation division," it was about what technology might we buy. And that was it. We were looking at it as a culture. How do we activate 6,000 people to be more innovative? I was very blessed to study with Pine and Gilmore, and Tom Peters, and IDEO, and Doblin at the time, and learn from other industries on those inno-visits. And, I started to see that co-creation was the key, and co-creation done well, and respectfully, and with energy and fun was the key. And then, I was asked to speak around the country at all these different healthcare meetings all over the place. And as I would do those speeches, and I would talk to other health systems, I saw very quickly that they were not engaging their frontline staff, except for maybe once in a while a little survey here and there. And so, as I realized that people weren't getting the idea that, imagine, if 10,000 people in your organization saw themselves as a chief moment officer. And if they did... Because a lot of times I'd meet with frontline staff and they'd say, "You know, I'm not in charge of anything, I just do what I'm told." So disengaged, so unimportant, is the attitude. It made me always think that they were like Eeyore walking around.

And so, once I realized that this was not being accepted, it was not well understood, that's why I wrote the book. And then, as I got deeper into that topic with healthcare,

especially, I thought, "My goodness, the power of having 10,000 chief moment officers well prepared."

Shawn: Again, great stuff, and I love the concept of chief moment officers, Diane. In staying with that, because to me, chief moment officers is really about the heart. I'm always looking for the ways to put heart into business. And you teach a concept of, Extreme Listening, that looks at listening through the Japanese character which includes five parts: ears to hear, mind to think, eyes to see, undivided attention to focus, and heart to feel. And I love the inclusion of heart, obviously, giving empathy a place in this. Why is this approach to listening so important to you, especially in business? And, coming out of this pandemic, I think this is a really amazing concept.

Diane: First of all, Extreme Listening in our industry, in the healthcare industry, is what we owe the patients. These are life and death situations, many times, and if they're not, they could be. So, when you've got so much at stake, listening with your ears, and listening with one ear while you're working on your cell phone with the other hand, you know, is not what the person that may have cancer deserves. So at the bottom line here, this is the right thing to do. So that's the first thing.

Second thing, from a practical standpoint, if we listen with our eyes, and with our hearts, and our full minds connected, and our undivided attention, we get the chance of seeing the full picture. There's many reasons why patients don't tell us everything we need to know when they're in the hospital And so, by watching, and listening, and connecting the dots, and especially now, you know, the healthcare frontline nurses, techs, especially doctors, you know, they are so distracted now, there are so many distractions in our industry that we can't take lightly, and they absolutely contribute to errors. And so, fully present undivided attention has to be the core of an exceptional experience expectation, because of all the, you know, technology, and the pandemic, and, you know, there's just so many distractions.

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Shawn: Oh, Diane, I love that everything you do comes from your heart and leads with empathy. And I thank you so much, again, Diane, and what a pleasure it is to have you in this segment talking what's happening in the healthcare space and the acceleration in the Experience Ecosystem. But it has come to that time, Diane, where we do this thing called, The Combustion Questions. And, it is two fun questions that we're going to ask you, and just ask you to answer them from your heart, which I know you will do, and what comes to the top of your head. So, Diane, are you ready for your Combustion Questions?

Diane: Hit me.

Shawn: All right. Diane, combustion question number one, what's your favorite type of pie?

Diane: First one that comes to mind, which is probably not the typical answer is pizza pie. That is my favorite pie. But if I had to do a traditional pie, it'd be plain, old, wonderful apple.

Shawn: Well, you know, Diane, I am recording this particular segment sitting in Chicago, and I'm going to go enjoy some pie this evening. I actually like what you said. Pizza pie, especially. Now, pizza pie, is it New York style, or Chicago style, Diane, that you prefer?

Diane: Well, actually, I'm from Philly, so it'd be Philly style.

Shawn: Ah, Philly style. All right.

Diane: Which is more of a thin, not really crispy thin, but more thin, not deep-dish.

Shawn: Ah, right. Awesome. Well, combustion question number two, Diane. Would you rather be completely invisible for one day, or be able to fly for one day?

Diane: I think I'd rather fly for one day, myself. So I can go a bunch of places that would take me too long, otherwise, to get to.

Shawn: I think I would like to fly too as well. Well, again, Diane, thank you so much for being on this. And, let everyone know how they can find you and reach out to you.

Diane: The company that...my consultancy is ExPeers, E-X-P-E-E-R-S. And, you can learn more about me and it at expeers.net.

Shawn: Well, Diane, thank you so much, and we really look forward to looking at your upcoming work and what you're doing.

Diane: Great.

[00:28:11]

Shawn: To wrap up this episode, we have an expert in the future of education. Our final guest is Michael Horn. Michael is a senior strategist at Guild Education. He speaks and writes about the future of education and works with a portfolio of education organizations to create a world in which all individuals can build their passion and fulfill their potential. He's written multiple books, sits on a few boards, and is the co-founder

and a distinguished fellow of the Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruption Innovation. Welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles*, Michael.

Michael: It's good to be here. Thanks for having me.

Shawn: Yeah, you know, you co-host a podcast called *Class Disrupted*, that you actually started, last year in 2020. When the curtain was pulled back on education in America, as schooling went virtual and parents said, "Wait, what is this?" Can you tell us about the podcast? And what have you learned in unpacking issues in education on the show?

Michael: Yeah, absolutely. You framed it well. The pandemic started, I think educators were willing to question first principles and ways that they haven't always been perhaps. And parents certainly were because there was a whole bunch of questions, so everything from childcare, to social support for my child, to, you know, are they healthy mentally right now, to, "Oh, my goodness, I'm watching what's going on, and there are a number of problems with what I'm seeing." And, so, we really wanted to take what was happening, not just immediately during the pandemic, but over the last year, and sort of pull it apart and say, "Hey, these are actually endemic of deeper problems with the education system that we could solve." Right? There's actually solutions, and there are schools out there that are doing a much better job. And I'll say, for me personally, it's been a cool journey because I've learned a number of things. Everything from, I used to assume, "Hey, you know, internet keeps getting cheaper year over year. Devices keep getting cheaper, disruption keeps making that a more affordable market."

But, I've come to the conclusion actually, we need to invest now. Every student needs access to high-speed internet and an internet-connected device at home because that's the world in which we're living. And if you don't have that today, you're sort of excluded. There are a few other things, but I'll just name one other, which is project-based learning, where, you know, you're doing authentic projects in the real world, in schools. I've always been intrigued, but also simultaneously a skeptic because I've seen so many projects gone bad in schools. But I would say, I really learned a lot in the episode around that, you know, good project-based learning, students are getting robust feedback throughout the entire process, and it concludes with a performance at the end.

Shawn: Yeah. I remember my project-based class, Humanities with Mrs. Tanner. And, I remember more from that class, my senior year, and other people's projects than I do about anything else. And, you know, Michael, when you and I first met, I was the chief

innovation officer for a higher education institute. And I said then, and I still firmly believe that, that the educational system, the way that it's set up today, not just K–12, but higher ed is the next bubble that is going to burst. And I think 2020 started to expose that. Do you agree? Do you still see that this industry is on this teetering point, that if something doesn't change, it's almost going to self-implode?

Michael: Certainly, that's the case for higher ed. Like, I think my mentor, Clay Christensen was famous for saying that 50% of all institutions will fail over the next couple, you know, decade, or whatever. I think the course that we're on, the price of these institutions, the cost structures, they keep getting more and more expensive. They're not connected to real-world outcomes. People are questioning the ROI. I have friends who do not follow what I do that will constantly say to me, "I don't know that college is worth it." Like, really that price tag, even with a scholarship, even with the debt you might get, or the degree, or whatever else. Like, they're asking fundamental questions. And, so, I do believe that for many institutions, if they don't fundamentally revisit their model, they're going to go off the cliff, and I think it's 25%, at least, maybe over the next couple decades. But, it's a lot of institutions that are going to merge, they're going to close, the financial model will implode, to your point. And it's just unsustainable. And in K-12, I think it's a little trickier. But, I do think the pandemic fundamentally pulled the Band-Aid off. And, a lot of people all of a sudden said, "Hey, wait a minute, like, I want school to provide childcare for my family." And that's still important, but who the heck wants childcare, only from 8:00 to 3:00, five days a week, and not at all for summers? Like, that's not actually a very good design. And, so, I think you're going to see a lot of entrepreneurial energy go into educators creating novel options. And yes, it's free, but they might just say, it's not worth it, even if it's free and walk into new options and new configurations, because they know that they can now. And I think it will be a significant minority that makes that move over the next year.

Shawn: So, if that's the case, and we're going to redesign education, how can we do it in an inclusive way that collaborates with people who are often left out of this conversation, then?

Michael: Yeah, look. The biggest revelation I think I've had is this concept of moving from a zero-sum system to a positive-sum one. And, what I mean by that is, in today's education system, for every child that wins, almost by definition, there's another child on the divide that loses, right? You know, we grade on a curve. We compare people to other people when we grade projects as opposed to an objective standard of mastery, where we want everyone to successfully master core concepts as they're doing their learning. And the job of the teacher, the job of the system, isn't to judge people, or sort people, or label people, but it's instead to support everyone to getting to mastery.

And then, seen in that system, all of a sudden, it's a positive-sum, right? The families for whom school sort of works today. And I say sort of works, because I actually don't think it really works for anyone regardless of where you are, but for those who sort of works, right? You're from a well-off family, you're able to navigate it, etc. At least in moving to a positive-sum game, they're not giving up something. And I think that's important, because a lot of reforms get stopped because those with much to lose stop it in their tracks.

And then the second piece of it is exactly what you said, like, we have to build with communities. We can't do to communities. And that means involving parents and students in the design process from the get-go and building something that works for their lives and that helps them succeed.

And then the last piece, I would say is, don't assume it's going to be a one-size-fits-all solution. Like, you might need schools within schools that operate very differently or schools that have very different philosophical choices, right, that support individuals and families that have different needs. Because we all do. And we should acknowledge that and embrace it and not segregate based on race or based on income, but instead based on what is this child need so that they can make progress in their lives.

[00:35:34]

Shawn: I love it. So, let's jump a little bit to higher education, and in organizations that you're actually connected with, you know, Multi-City College. It's a virtual university model called the Minerva Project. And can you tell us more about this organization and how it may signal to the future of higher education, as we've been talking about?

Michael: Yeah. So Minerva is one of the boards that I serve on. It's really the first new liberal arts institution of the last 100 years in the United States that serves incredibly talented students from around the world, regardless of means, who are able to attend. And so essentially, how it works is that students co-live together in a variety of cities throughout their four years. So, they might start in San Francisco, then Korea, Argentina, etc., and go around the world. But they're learning online throughout it. And the online environment is not like video lectures or something like that. It is the most active learning seminar. Like, it beats the pants off any college seminar anyone's had at any college period. It's incredibly engaging and active. It's a little exhausting to be totally honest. But, it's a really cool learning experience. And then, you come out of this online environment, you're with your peers, and you're doing projects. You're embracing the community. You're starting businesses in the community. You're solving problems in the community and really immersing yourself in a variety of different

communities around the world that creates this really cool global cohort in effect from all over the world. And I think it's like... I'm going to mess up the numbers, but it's like, over 75% of the students are not from the United States. So this is a very different kind of institution, that as you said, it merges the best of online with place-based. It merges the best of a cohort with a really exciting learning experience that creates unbelievable insights and gains. And by the way, it's focused on building creativity, communication, critical thinking, because it's super precise about what the skills and all of those disciplines are. And then you practice it in domain after domain after domain. Because, yeah, it's true that like thinking critically and, you know, computer programming looks very different from another field. But it's also true that the basic discipline is the same. And so as you jump into a new field and you're learning about it, you're learning the knowledge, you have a method that actually transfers that you can embrace and use to allow you to solve really important problems and create really cool things that make progress in the world.

Shawn: I want to throw a question out to you about really around heart. Where do you see the biggest needs in terms of humanizing the world of education? Rather it be K–12 or higher ed.

Michael: Yeah, such a good question. And, I think that's actually one of the things that the pandemic has shown us, right? That education is fundamentally a very social, emotional experience. I actually think almost every classroom in America right now, in K-12 and higher ed has a significant opportunity to remodel itself to make the relationship piece between the teacher and the students and the students and the students, right? We move away from that zero-sum game, all of a sudden, students can support each other and have fun with each other. And there are certain schools that do that, like Montessori environments, I think do this really well already. But, I think there's an opportunity to reposition the majority of classroom environments across the world to put the relationships at the center and then leverage the technology for the knowledge and the skill-building and things of that nature. But, it's really all in a pursuit of freeing up time to make those human connections deeper, more meaningful, and more enduring.

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Shawn: I remember how much time we used to have to have those social interactions, and they just don't have them anymore. And it's sad to me what's happening. So, I love that. And Michael, we could go on and on. And we will have you back on again to talk more about blowing up education a little bit. But, we've come to that point in this segment that we do our Combustion Questions. These are two fun questions that

we're going to give you. I've not seen them. You've not heard them. But, we just want your open response and honest response to them. So, are you ready for your Combustion Questions?

Michael: Let's do it.

Shawn: Awesome. So combustion question number one, Michael, if you were a Transformer, what vehicle would you turn into?

Michael: Oh, boy, you know, I have always wanted to fly. And so, it would be something that would allow me to do that. I confess when I say that and I'm blanking on the one of the Decepticons that came about in the second version of Transformers, so I wouldn't want to be evil, but I would love to be able to fly. So, some sort of F-16 or something like that, I think would be awesome.

Shawn: I love it. Awesome. So combustion question number two. What do you think about waterfalls?

Michael: Waterfalls are awesome. They're beautiful. They're enticing. It's funny, we're planning a trip to Hawaii, which we were supposed to go to two years ago when the pandemic all hit. So, we're going to make it up and get there. We were talking about going near Hilo on the Big Island. And there are such amazing waterfalls if you just pull off the road at random junctures in Hawaii, in the tropical forest areas. And you get some rainbows occasionally through them too, which, you know, who can hate rainbows?

Shawn: Well, I hope you get to experience it. So again, Michael what a pleasure to have you on *The Combustion Chronicles* with us. Thank you so much.

Michael: Hey, thanks so much.

Shawn: Thank you so much for listening to this episode of *The Combustion Chronicles*. Let's keep the conversation going by connecting on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

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