



Honest Conversations about Youth Development and Education

On Please Speak Freely, Eric Gurna, Executive Director of Development Without Limits interviews leaders in the fields of youth development and education to shed light on key issues and explore different perspectives. The idea is to get past the platitudes and institutional positions, and have honest, nuanced conversations about things that really matter to young people and communities. Examples of current and future Please Speak Freely guests are Alexis Menten of [Asia Society](#), [Earl Phalen](#) of [Reach Out and Read](#) (and Founder of [Summer Advantage](#) and [BELL](#)), [Dr. Pedro Noguera](#) of [New York University](#), [Karen Pittman](#) of the [Forum for Youth Investment](#) and [Carla Sanger](#) of [LA's BEST](#).

Episode #12: Brad Lupien, March 15, 2011

[The original podcast with Brad Lupien can be found here](#)

Eric: Hi, I'm Eric Gurna of Development Without Limits and this is Please Speak Freely, the podcast where we have honest conversations about youth development and education.

So I'm here with Brad Lupien, who is co-founder and co-president of Champions. Um, the full name is Champions Afterschool Adventure - what is it?

Brad: Champions Adventure Afterschool and Sports Programs, it's a bit of a mouthful. It's been shortened by our students down to Champions.

Eric: Champions, right. I think it's been shortened by most people down to Champions.

Brad: Absolutely.

Eric: So, ah, Brad co-founded and is co-president with Gary Lipsky, of Champions. We're here in beautiful San Diego, we're sitting on the balcony of my hotel room overlooking a bay with sailboats and a old steamwheel ship and it's just gorgeous here. Um we both, we both happen to be here at the Up Your Game Step Up High School Conference Amp Up Middle School Conference. Which is happening all week, they went from sort of the high school conference called Step Up to the middle school conference at the end of the week called Amp Up. We both happen to be in town and I've been wanting to talk to Brad on Please Speak Freely so I'm glad to have the opportunity to do it. So thanks for talking to me.

Brad: Yeah, thanks for having me. I'm excited.

Eric: Your programs focus not entirely on high school and middle school but mostly, is that right?

Brad: Predominantly. We have a handful of programs across southern California, twenty-one of our programs are specific comprehensive high school afterschool programs.

Eric: And that was how I got to know you, you did a presentation with Sam Piha a couple years ago at - I think it was a National Afterschool Association Conference, and it was on high school programs. And you know, I think back to that conversation, and you and I have got to know each other a little bit and work together a little bit since then, but I remember very distinctly in your presentation that what really jumped out at me is that it seemed like you all had figured out how to do what a lot of other people had been talking about, and that is to make young people actual leaders in the program. To not just do youth leadership training and to not just create certain projects or, you know, activities where young people can be leaders, but they're leaders throughout the program including designing the program and sort of running the program with you. Is that right?

Brad: It is right. I mean, I guess just spinning on that and riffing on that for a little bit, it's embarrassing to say but now I'm happy to make it public - I didn't - I heard this term youth development and I feel like I've been in the field since I was in undergraduate programs up in Vermont. And I heard youth development and I was like, mm, okay. And I feel like we're still in this stage where people talk about youth development and everybody likes to throw in the term.

Eric: Yeah.

Brad: But seeing it in actual practice is - I haven't seen it a lot in actual practice now that I've actually learned the formal definitions of what it is.

Eric: Mmhm. So what do you mean. like, the formal definition of what it is, or like, what is it in practice for you?

Brad: I come from - this is a little bit of the back-story here, but I think it begins to define it for me - I come from a family of teachers, and my dad was a PE and health teacher at a middle school in Whitman, Massachusetts for thirty-seven years before retiring a couple years back. And he taught me what youth development was through his work well before I started Champions and well before I started hearing the term. And it was the idea, for me, I see youth development as being the idea when we are taking young people and we're giving them some concrete life lessons and then we're asking them questions about how they interpret that information and then we're weaving in other programming and other opportunities for them based on their responses to those questions. Asking a group of kids, "Hey, what do you want to do in your afterschool

program?", that's not youth engagement, that's not youth development for me. I think presenting ideas, challenging them, asking questions and then helping guide them on a path that relates to what they, how they respond to that question, is youth development. And that's really what we've tried to do with our programs. And I, it's not Champions, I think there's lots of programs out there doing it but those are the programs that I think are most desirable and they're the programs I want to try to be like.

Eric: It's interesting, 'cause it's come up in a couple of these conversations, that it seems to me that the process you just described, it's, there's a set of values that it's based on and the values are different than the values that a different process would be based on. So what I mean by that is like, it seems to me that when you talk about not just asking a group of young people or like, making a suggestion box so they can suggest activities or something, but actually engaging with them in a critical conversation that takes place over time and that grows and develops and then the program that you create together, it really it gives weight to not just to the suggestions that they have but the interests that they have, regardless of whether they're interests that you started out with or not. So there's, it's like there's a level of dignity and respect that you're approaching the young people in your program with that I think is lacking when we approach young people like we know where we need them to need to get and we're just gonna ask them, you know, for some guidance about how they might best like to get there.

Brad: Right.

Eric: You understand what I'm saying?

Brad: I do. Interestingly, when Champions first started back in two-thousand-and-one, we called ourselves coaches. And I think a lot of people do that now. Because I come from a sports background I learned a lot of the life lessons that I hold near and dear to me, I learned a lot of my values on a soccer field or on the basketball court. So we always, we built Champions as being a sports-based youth development, youth-based organization. Now I've shifted that, and my team gets frustrated because I always change things up. I'm like, "Ah, I think we were doing it wrong for eight years, let's start using a different term." Now I actually refer to the older youth site coordinators and assistant coordinators and stuff, I'd say, "'Listen, you're a guidance counselor, you're a social worker in the school. " Our young people don't, in the big urban settings in particular, they don't get enough opportunities in my opinion to have somebody just sit and actively listen to what they have to say, to check in with them on the relationship between home and school, on the relationship between school and what they wanna do in the future. So I say to my staff now, "Listen, you're a guidance counselor." Unfortunately I think there's a confidence issue with young educators, myself, I mean with lots of educators or I guess regardless of age, but inexperienced - I'll use the word experienced - inexperienced educators lack the confidence to be able to sit there and really listen. They wanna try and educate, they wanna try and teach - "Let me give you -let me pour out information for you to soak in." I think the really high quality educators are the ones that are able to sit there and say, "Let me hear everything you have to tell me about what you wanna

be/do/think and then I'll interject advice/suggestions/ideas/things that you might wanna further explore, as you talk to me."

Eric: It's interesting, it reminds me - um, Alfie Kohn talks about, we should say less and ask more, you know. And it's a nice rule of thumb to think of in your mind as you're in that situation when you don't know what to do, when you don't know how to respond. It's like, oh if just, if I have an inclination to say more, but if I say less and ask more maybe that will get me somewhere different. I never thought about it as a confidence thing, that it takes a lot of confidence to just listen in that way, and I'm wondering - I mean for me, the way I heard what you just said is, that the confidence that you need is that when you do speak it's gonna have to be something that's somewhat spontaneous and responsive to what the young person is bringing up, rather than something that you prepped in advance. Is that sort of the confidence that you're talking about, that there's the unknown? It's like you're gonna have to respond to something and it's totally unknown. You can prep your sort of your capacities and skills but you can't prep your script.

Brad: Yeah, I, yes, I mean I think that that's what social workers do, I think that that's what therapists do. You have some questions that you wanna ask and you have some leading questions that maybe are rote and you use with everybody, but then from there, there can be no scripts in educating young people. It has to be, start the conversation and then really listen to what they say, and the response to their questions should be - that should define the path you're gonna take with their education. In particular in the afterschool field. I mean it wasn't, when I was in the classroom it wasn't the same because of standards. In many ways I had to say, "Okay, you guys wanna talk about Mayans right now, but were supposed to be talking about the Inca empire." So you know, maybe a bad example, but you get the idea.

Eric: Yeah, yeah. And I think that's why a lot of us end up in afterschool and other sorts of alternative situations rather than the classroom. But I think some people would start to get uncomfortable with how you're talking about it and referring to them as social workers and guidance counselors and even therapists, like you said. Because those are, especially social work and therapists, those are highly, at this stage they're highly credentialed positions. There's a lot of regulations, you know, you're a clinical social worker, you have, you know, this license and you have this training and, you know, some people are critical of putting young, you know, often inexperienced educators in college, straight out of college, whatever - into situations where they're not necessarily formally trained to be a social worker or therapist and they're being asked to play a similar role.

Brad: I would - I agree with you. The three critical training pieces and professional development pieces for these less experienced educators without the credentials and without the, you know, graduate level education in therapy or in clinical psychology or whatever it might be is, one, let's teach our educators how to actively listen. Two, let's teach them what strengths perspective thinking is and really embrace strengths perspective and active listening. And then most importantly train them when to bow out of the conversation. I mean I don't want my inexperienced staff to start asking questions and when the young person says, "I'm contemplating suicide," to keep going in that conversation. So we really spend a lot of time training on alright, go as far as you can go

in that conversation, but you need to also have the confidence and be realistic enough to know when you say to a young person, "I thank you so much for sharing that with me. I wanna help you, I'll always be here for you. I think that there are some amazing things we can do together, but I really want you to talk to somebody else, and I'm gonna tell somebody about what you just said." Or, "I want you to know that I want more help for you, so I want you to reach out to somebody else. I'm not comfortable going any further with this conversation, I think its something that we should bring in somebody else. "

Eric: Yeah, so they're playing the role of like, connector and sort of like playing a support role for that young person and helping them to connect to the resources that they need.

Brad: Absolutely. I mean, listen, look at - in our existing large urban high schools, what's the caseload for a school social worker or a school guidance counselor? Hundreds, if not more than hundreds. I don't think that that's the way it was intended when we put school social workers in place. So in many ways I think the afterschool staff can function as support staff to the existing school social workers, the LSWs.

Eric: A colleague of mine, Rebecca Fabiano, she talks about this notion she has of, every young person should have, I think she calls it their team. I gotta ask her, she has a catch word for it. But the idea is like, celebrities have stylist, and they have a lawyer and they have a this and they have a that. They have a whole crew of people that are there to support their success, and that young people need a crew of people to support their success. And that everybody can't play, you know, every role. You don't want your stylist drawing up legal documents or your lawyer doing your hair, but that they can play a key role and they can connect you to other resources.

Brad: Absolutely. So I'm not suggesting that the Individualized Education Plan, the IEP plan for special education students is as efficient as it could be. I was a, you know, I taught in a special education school in Boston for young people with behavioral and emotional disabilities. Kids that were trying to basically to move from lock-up situations back into the public schools. But I started thinking, like, well why doesn't every young person have an IEP meeting at least a couple times a year, where were bring together all the different people in this person's life either with the - we should have the young person at the table but saying hey, here's your football coach, here's your art teacher, here's, you know, somebody from - mom or dad or aunt or uncle or legal guardian from home here's - if you're having a hard time, here's your social worker. Let's sit down together and create an end plan for you. What percent, I don't know what percent, I'm not a statistician, but what percent of students right now get IEP's written for them? Well, wouldn't it be amazing, and I know I'm idealistic here, but what if we had Individualized Education Plans for every young person? And I think the openness right now and the lack of definition for what older youth afterschool programming is allows us to do that. I mean we sit down with a team of people, we coach the young person, we're like, "Hey, you should get involved in this, oh you've got an interest in art , do you know that this exists, let me connect you, let's bring that person in to the table to talk to you."

Eric: I think the trouble is that when you formalize it and you turn it into a bureaucratic process with forms, that it almost becomes something completely different than it started out as. So the IEP is something that just has to get done for the kid as opposed to a human kind of experience that you're talking about where it's not just people, it's not the social worker, the this, the that, who are sitting down - it's individuals who know that young person, who that young person has a connection to and trusts. That's a really different experience.

Brad: I'm not sure how to explain this, but I get scared of stopping- when we stop working toward the ideal because it seems impossible. So everybody says, the immediate response when I say every young person should have an Individualized Education Plan and we should have three, four meetings if not more, plus sub-meetings, everyone says, "Well, that's impossible." But - why? We won't get there and I understand that but why not try to move towards that as opposed to saying, "That's impossible and let's stop." I get frustrated with that in a lot of areas, but I get frustrated when we say, "Let's stop working towards the ideal, let's stop working towards the utopia 'cause it's too hard." Okay, so let's be realistic. We're not gonna meet it, but heck if we can do that for half a dozen students in a school that would be amazing as a start.

Eric: Also, I mean, I don't even think it's necessary to say we're not gonna meet it,. Like, I mean, there's been all kinds of huge changes in the world and some of them have happened really fast. I mean, if you look at, you know, your experience living right now compared to what it would've been twenty years ago - if we were the same age we are now twenty years ago - we have completely different resources at our fingertips, literally. So I don't know that it's - I wouldn't even, I don't even think you have to apologize by saying, "I know we're not gonna meet it." I think it's worth saying that every young person is entitled to this, you know. And I think we live in a culture right now where saying - entitlement has become like a dirty word. You know, because Republicans talk about entitlements as, you know, handouts and all that stuff, as though it's not right to say someone's entitled to something. I think humans are - should be entitled to certain things.

Brad: Absolutely. It's interesting actually that you bring that up, and it's a little bit of a transition here but something that I've been thinking about a lot lately is, in terms of this relationship to what the existing rules are and the speed at which society is changing.

Eric: Yeah.

Brad: We keep running into that. And I think we're able to innovate in an afterschool setting in some really cool ways, but we often run into, "Oh, social media, you can't use social media because risk management is never gonna let that happen," or "How do we ensure the safety -" and those are important questions to engage with, but we keep running into- or I keep running into, and I think a lot of us are running into, that is, well - "We can't do that in schools because there's rules against that." I think the starting point is to ask the question "Why? Explain to me that rule." We've got a changing world. Our young people see the world and experience the world in very different ways today in

2011 than they did even five years ago, definitely ten, twenty years ago. But throwing up our hands and saying "There's a rule, the bureaucracy has told us we can't do that so therefore let's not explore it any further," is foolish. We have to explore it further and it starts with asking questions. "Why? Tell me why you're saying no to that, I wanna understand what the rule is." And I'll see if I can find a way to work within the theory of the rule and still get it done for our young people.

Eric: That's funny, 'cause I was sitting for breakfast earlier with one of your colleagues, Angelo, and I said, "I'm gonna be interviewing Brad later for my podcast. What should I, you know, what should I talk to him about? What sort of, what lights him up?" You know, I wanted to get Angelo's perspective. And he said well, anything about the status quo and just like, the idea that we should be doing something just because it's the way that it's done. You know is something that -

Brad: Drives me nuts.

Eric: Drives you nuts. And that is a good transition because I think that your organization is somewhat unique in just the structure of it, how it start- maybe not how it started but the structure of it, how it exists in relation to this nonprofit organization that you founded, so I hope you don't mind talking about this.

Brad: Not at all.

Eric: Champions is a private corporation, or a -

Brad: It's an S-corp. It's a for-profit S-corp.

Eric: Right. I like to say Development Without Limits it's - it's not against profit.

Brad: I like, I'm a big fan of the new movement, not so new but past few years of B-corporations, for-benefit corporations.

Eric: Right, not just for profit.

Brad: It's not just for profit, it's a tax status.

Eric: Right. But also not just for profit, we're for a lot of other things. The problem is that the tax status of 'for profit', it makes it sound like all you're for is profit. And to me the big distinction is between publicly held organizations and privately held ones, 'cause publicly held organizations, when you work there your sort of duty is to make money for the stockholders. If you're the owner or co -owner of a company you can decide what your job is and what you value, how much you value profit, how much you value something else.

So Champions is a private company that provides after school programs in public schools and public charter schools as well. Right?

Brad: Yes.

Eric: And so mostly it's public moneys being utilized through grant programs in the state of California, twenty-first century money, that sort of thing, right?

Brad: The predominant business model is that we're a subcontractor for a school district that gets federal money.

Eric: Right. Which is the same model that many nonprofit organizations are. They're subcontractors for the school districts, so in that way it's no different. But you also formed a nonprofit organization that sort of works in concert.

Brad: Yes.

Eric: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Brad: Yeah. Core Educational Services is a 501(c)3 here in Southern California and the primary role is to bridge the gap between the private sector and the public sector. So we use Core to bring additional funding into afterschool programs. And I'm very specific in saying into afterschool programs, not Champions afterschool programs, because, yes, Core raises money and brings in additional resources for schools where Champions is an afterschool provider, but that's only a portion of where the funding and resources go. We bring in foundation dollars and private sector dollars and implement programs where Champions has no presence.

Eric: Okay, and why did you decide to form a nonprofit? Champions is doing very well, you seem to have your hands full with that work .

Brad: Um, one, because - there's a couple answers to that - one answer is because of the requirements within the grants and the contracts of getting a match and we found it, I mean very realistically we found it pretty challenging with people's existing understanding of what a private versus a public organization corporation does, in walking up to, you know, another private entity, a grocery store, and saying "Hey, would you make a donation to Champions?", and they're like, "Yeah, fantastic, do I get my 501(c)3 tax letter ?" Well no, so that was part of the reason. I also believe in- I've referred to in the past and I'm not sure what people think about this and frankly I guess I don't care any more - I believe in the Robin Hood method. I believe in - it makes me a screaming liberal, I guess - but I believe in this Robin Hood method. I believe that Champions can go into some of our more elite schools where the income, the household income for the families is really high, and we can charge a premium for a fee-based afterschool program and the quote unquote profit from that program gets funneled into a school that is in a socioeconomically lower threshold and is only maybe getting the federal dollars, which I just don't think is enough. I don't want to misquote here, but it believe it was the Mott Foundation who put that report out a while, a couple years back, on what it cost to run a high-quality older youth program and I believe the number was up in the thirties, the high twenties and thirties. And the state of California, we get about ten dollars per student per

day to run the program. And I said, "How do we cover the gap?" Well, I use Core to try and cover the gap.

Eric: Right. Which is no different really from what other nonprofit organizations do, you just have two entities to do it.

Brad: Right, our business model is the same as a 501(c)3. At the end of the year the money that comes in is going back out the programming. You know, that's -

Eric: Well, right, except for the money that goes to pay people. I mean programming-

Brad: Which is the same as any corporation.

Eric: The cost of programming is primarily paying people to run the programs.

Brad: Absolutely.

Eric: As the owner, owners of the company as opposed to just being the executive director who works for the company, you're getting paid, Gary's getting paid, but so do executive directors of nonprofit organizations.

Brad: We're W-2-ed employees of our corporation.

Eric: Right, so what you're saying though is - part of this might not even end up on the podcast because now I'm getting into the weed, but I'm curious for myself - you're employees of the corporation, but there's also a profit. At the end of the day there's also a profit.

Brad: We strive for that, but no. In ten years we've never posted a profit. We've reinvested the money into personnel or other resources to further develop the organization. That's not to say that we're not aiming for that, I mean, I think we are. But I would challenge any executive director of a 501(c)3 that at the end of the year doesn't say, "Yeah, were trying to raise more money."

Eric: Sure.

Brad: "We're trying to grow."

Eric: Sure, I mean, most want to have a cash reserve if they can.

Brad: Absolutely.

Eric: That's really interesting. That's not - that's based on a set of values. You could cut corners, do less and make more money.

Brad: Yes.

Eric: In the structure - with a private company, that can be the motivation - is that if you do it cheaper you keep what's left. As opposed to if you're an employee getting a flat salary, doing it cheaper doesn't increase your salary.

Brad: It's not - this is not just words. It's a concept, a theory of value, a moral of the organization. The bottom line for me is and will always be young people. And regardless of an organization's tax status, I don't think everybody, and I would question even the majority of people have that as their true bottom line.

Eric: So what do you think is the true bottom line of -

Brad: I'm a board member for a number of different nonprofits. As a board member the number one thing that I'm asked to do is fundraise. I'm asked to bring in money. The dollar's the bottom line.

Eric: But the money ostensibly is for the programs and services that that nonprofit provides, right?

Brad: Yes.

Eric: So what I'm asking you is, for those leaders of organizations where you don't believe that young people really are the bottom line, what is the bottom line that they're working on? What is the set of values they're basing their work on?

Brad: I think for many it's expansion, growth, power.

Eric: So, sort of like building an empire.

Brad: Building an empire. It scares the heck out of me.

Eric: Why?

Brad: Because I think that our country is based on not having monopolies and not having - and I think competition is really good in a capitalist society. I think that if we want the best product for young people we need to compete. And I think if, regardless of one's tax status, or private versus public corporations status, if their goal is to control everything then we eliminate competition.

Eric: You and I - you referred earlier to - when we were talking before we started recording, to a session that you and I co-facilitated, co-designed and co-facilitated at a conference a couple years ago about how to take business practices and apply them to afterschool. And you know, that's sort of similar to what you're talking about right now. But I also, you know, my thinking on some of that has I think changed since we did that. Because while I think there are certainly things that we can learn from business practices

I also think there can be a danger in approaching everything as a competitive situation or everything as a business. You know?

Brad: We started this conversation about - in talking about how the most important thing we can do for young people is ask questions and then listen to them. And I think that's the same thing here. No one's saying that it's a black and white situation, it's a one or the other situation. But I think we have become scared in the education non-profit world of looking at the business model and saying "There's some amazing things we can learn." And that's what excited me about that conference and that presentation we did in the past is, let's look at the positive things we can learn and let's engage with that model to say "What do we wanna pull out and what do we wanna stay the heck away from?" But listening to that model, understanding it, engaging with it is important, that's education. And we need to do that as opposed to just throwing up our hands and saying we're not gonna look at it.

Eric: So what are some of the ideas you think that can be especially helpful from looking outside the afterschool sort of nonprofit government public education construct?

Brad: I think that there's a lot that can be learned in the education field about how marketing firms and advertising works. I think we have to advertise, we have to change perceptions of schools because we need to be advertisers and marketers. We have to shift young people's perceptions of what school is. Instead of being that thing that they dread going to, if we shift school to become the center of the community, the place where you hang out, play sports, be with friends, that hosts celebrations for you - I think that that type of marketing and advertising is really valuable. I think that there are some concrete concepts there like loss leaders that we've talked about in the past where you know, at the beginning of programming you have to put some things out there that are gonna cost you a fortune. And I don't want the budget people, the CFOs, to say "Ah, that's too expensive." Say, "Let's look at return on investment." If we have to drop a boatload of money in the first couple weeks to get young people excited about what school is gonna be like that year, good, spend the money. You'll get it back tenfold with the number of times that young person comes to a program or how they perceive school as a whole.

Eric: It's funny because I just interviewed Michael Edwards who wrote a book called *Small Change: Why Business Won't Save the World*. And the book is essentially a criticism of the philanthro-capitalism sort of model, like the Gates Foundation, who else, the Broad Foundation, others who look at investing in certain social policy, public policy that they've deemed important, putting their money into organizations who are going to tackle those problems the way that they've suggested that they tackle them, allocating money towards companies who are going to take a businesslike approach and looking at return on investment and all of that. And I think the way you described it, it just makes sense. In another context it can mean that the hardest problems get ignored because the easier problems are gonna be the ones where you can show success. So we keep going after the easy ones and we ignore the harder problems. And the harder problems are often more expensive to fix, more expensive to even begin to address. And so I think that my thinking on it may have - I'm still a little muddled with it, but my thinking on it has

become more critical of both sides, that what you're - agreeing with you that for people who are just totally in the bubble of school and non-profit who won't look at the business world, that that's like, holding us back. But it's also wrong-headed to think that we should take a totally business-like approach to the business of working with people, to the business of social programs and education.

Brad: Yeah. It's not - I like to play in the gray area. It makes me nervous even to be - this conversation here that people are listening to, for them think oh, Champions and Brad are looking at it from a business model. I mean, I am a social worker and a teacher, that's what my education was and that's what I continue to be. But I think that there is a gray area between those two and I want to play and live in the gray area between the business world and the education world. I think that there's a really rich and valuable middle that we need to explore. And you know, I think one of the things that I - I want to continue to have people ask me the hard questions and I want to continue to ask other people the hard questions. I wanna wrestle with the challenging ed. reform ideas. And in some ways the big money from the charities, from the foundations out there, pushes us to do that. I don't, we don't always get a grant - we don't often get the grant, but the process of writing fifteen pages about how I want to think about technology in the classroom pushes me to be better even if I don't become a grant recipient. And I'm sure we've turned in a lot of things that are way off mark, but they end up being - you know, my ten-page rant gets turned in as a grant application. I'm sure it gets laughed off the table, but it helped us become a better organization.

Eric: That's interesting, so it's like proposal writing as a means of, sort of, your idea development more than just as a means of getting money.

Brad: It makes my team not focus on daily operations when I say, "Okay, we're gonna be going after x number of dollars, let's get the team together in my office." And we're gonna throw up the whiteboards and we're gonna start thinking and really engaging and start talking about how we wanna go after this money. For that day, for that week, for that month, whatever it takes. That's time that I'm not just thinking about daily operations and it's too easy in our field to get sucked into day-to-day operations and what we have to do about getting kids signed into the program, feeding them a snack and getting them to do their homework. And we don't take enough time to push and challenge.

Eric: That's really interesting to me 'cause I've just recently been involved with several different proposal development processes where we're a subcontractor or a partner on someone else's proposal, and I've been noticing that different organizations take different approaches to that. And to me, it's - I'm sure there's more than two, but the two approaches that have become apparent to me are the organizations who look to, look at the request for proposals or whatever it is and try to almost approach it like it's a take-home homework assignment, like a take-home quiz. Like, "I'm gonna write this to answer these questions as well as I can and to write what's gonna score the best." You know, the proposal that will score the best. And others approach it like, "Here's an opportunity, what's gonna be our concept? What's gonna be our idea that we can fit into this opportunity?" And like you said, throwing up the white boards and having those kinds of

brainstorming and really looking at it like concept identity. And figuring out what that is and there's an exchange of ideas in that process and it can be a little messy and but -

Brad: Messy is good.

Eric: Messy is good when it comes to thinking. And I've been very frustrated with the other approach and, you know, it might just be my short-term limited experience with it, it also seems to be the approach that doesn't work as well. Because you know, it just so happens that these few instances that I'm referring to, they didn't get, you know, they didn't get the funding. And the ones we've got that have been the most significant have been ones where we've had a significant role in sort of thinking it through and sort of feeling our way through the process and it's grown our ideas, as you said, sort of putting that proposal together. So it's just interesting to think about, and it applies directly to my own recent experience. And I just, you know, I wonder if there's some way - I don't know what I wonder. It's just, it's really frustrating to work with people who just look at it like, you know, all you gotta do is fill in the bubbles.

Brad: There's so many overused expressions that actually are so meaningful if you stop and really think about it and work within the - one of them for me is being outside the box. This is what you're talking about, like, even if we don't - if the money's inside the box and we're all trying to get there, you don't have to be inside the box to get the money, I don't think. I think you can work way outside of it and - yeah. Well, I appreciate that you're doing these types of things, because I think a lot of us out there are really trying to wrestle and think about the hard questions and have the hard conversations and the good conversations that push us forward and those conversations that are outside the box and they happen too infrequently. And everybody's scared of saying something that's gonna annoy everybody or be confrontational, but I want people to challenge me and have those harder conversations.

Eric: And so how do we do that, how do we change the field? I mean you and I are about the same age, I guess we found out the other day I'm a few years older than you. But so you know, we're sort at this point where we're at a lot of conferences and we're, you know, out there in the field and part of the reason for doing Please Speak Freely and for doing other things that we've been doing, debates and things like that, is I realized that I was complaining about something and I was part of the problem. So I'm complaining about how boring the conferences are but I'm a presenter at all these conferences. So I'm, you know, complicit in the boredom, the boringness of them, so I need to do my part. So how, what can we do to change the field? 'Cause I totally agree with you - to change the field so that it's not just the same conversations being had over and over again, and the same sort of institutional statements, you know, about whatever is the current topic. Right now it's extended learning time, or however you want to say it - expanded learning time, extended day, more time. All the sudden this is the thing everyone is talking about, and there's like, certain party lines on it and it's assumed that we all agree, and there's not so much of a really critical conversation where we say "Well, wait a minute, let's, like, look at different perspectives here." So you know, I go to conferences, I go to things like that, and it seems like it's almost a publicity platform for a particular policy, set of policies,

rather than an opportunity for, you know, different people in a field to be able to, you know, I call it geeking out. You know, to be able to, like, talk about all the intricacies and disagree about - we can agree about, sure, everyone has good intentions for young people. I'm gonna take that as a given, if you're in this field you have good intentions for young people. But that doesn't mean that I'm gonna, that I think you're valuing the right things in your work or in the direction that the policy and the funding is going. I don't. But I don't find a lot of - you know, I had to create this podcast because I needed a way in which to have these conversations more publicly, because I don't feel like I have one. Well, what do we - what's our part?

Brad: I think the question in there, or the piece of the question in there that resonated for me is how to change it. And I- bear with me on a little aside here. My wife and I spend a lot of time sitting down over a glass of wine and talking about everything from politics to religion to the future of the world to education to technology and we'll - I love those conversations. It's one of my favorite things in the world, is sitting, having those discussions. And then when friends come over we would have that as well. And I started saying well, we had this idea, we said - what if we just assigned one person to tell us all about what they're passionate about for, like, forty minutes and then after that everybody can kind of ask questions and that would frame the conversation instead the party breaking, you know, the social gathering breaking up into six different conversations about, "Hey, how the Red Sox playing? Hey, you know, how's work these days?" So this kind of information salon that they used to have back in the, you know, back in the day in the early nineteen hundreds, let's start, let's implement salons. I think we need to do that with the conferences as well, like why not at an education conference have the CEO of a, or a franchise owner of Dunkin' Donuts or McDonalds come out and talk to us about what they do? And people would say, "Well, how the heck is that relevant at all?" But I got a funny feeling that a lot of people sitting there in the audience might start thinking about, "Oh man, how's that relate to my classroom? How's that relate to my club? That would be cool!" Or let's bring out academics, you know, the academic conferences they read papers. Our conferences people get up and talk and run with a Powerpoint. Wonderful, I think they're both great, but what if the afterschool conferences and these get-togethers we have, like, here in San Diego, what if we had some professors come out and talk about what's happening at, you know, the university level, in the engineering department or in the law schools. I just think it might challenge us to think differently about the questions.

Eric: Yeah, hm. Well, we'll get to work on that.

Brad: Yeah, again, one of those, like, "Huh, yeah, sounds great Brad, but that ain't gonna happen."

Eric: Well, I don't know, I, you know, it's - that's kind of what I'm saying though, that it's not "That ain't gonna happen." It's, "Are you gonna make that happen?" or, "Am I gonna make that happen?" It's that, for me, part of doing this podcast and part of, I mean, everything we do at Development Without Limits is- maybe not everything, some things are just - we have contracts and so we do the work - but a lot of things we do are things

that we just decided to take on and now we gotta figure out a way to make it happen in the world. Like, it's not enough to sit around talking about the concept of it, we gotta operationalize it. We gotta actually make it happen in the world. But the thing is, things like that - you could make that happen. Like, you know, Champions could throw that conference. You know, you could actually just host, like, do it yourself, you know? And that's what, kind of what I'm saying is that I think that those of us who, in the field, regardless of age and all that but those of in the field who are frustrated with the somewhat one-dimensional nature of a lot of the professional learning experiences that we're having need to make some things happen ourselves. You know, I just was at the Bridge Conference a couple weeks ago where you met Zach Wilson who...

Brad: Yes.

Eric: ...who runs the Bridge Conference. And you know, it's a standard two-day conference, but within that format, there - I think that they were able to do some innovative things, really bring some things to life. And as I talked about with Zach on the podcast that we did live from the Bridge Conference, to do it in a way where people feel that they're being treated in a humane way. That they're being respected, that they're having a pleasant experience, and above all it's modeling the kinds of experiences that we wanna be creating for young people. You know, so I guess I wanna say, I think you're already doing a lot of that in your program. From what I've learned and know about your programs, that you're already sort of walking that talk and I'm just glad to know that you're already, you're always a few steps down the road. Like, "It's not good enough, it's not good enough. We've gotta get closer to what we mean, we've gotta get closer to this ideal that we have in our minds and our hearts," you know.

Brad: I think these, what they say about entrepreneurs in particularly, in particular entrepreneurs in the technology field, that's - if you haven't failed twenty times, twenty-five times with your new idea, with your new concept, you're not really going the right direction. It wasn't like these people who come up with this brilliant concept, it's the first thing they ever thought about doing. You've gotta try lots and lots of different things and think about lots of crazy ideas and most of them will be, you have to be comfortable that most of them will fail. But if one of them is a great idea and it sticks, you're successful.

Eric: Yeah, yeah. And maybe it changes the world.

Brad: Maybe.

Eric: Well, you know, it's funny, 'cause I think I prepared less for this conversation than I have for any of the other ones that I've had. And I think the reason for that was that I knew that once you and I sat down that conversation was gonna take on a life of its own anyway. And when I look back at my notes now I covered everything in my notes. I think we've done a pretty good job here, do you think we did it?

Brad: Yeah, I think it's fantastic. I love the conversations and the idea of the - I wanna hear other people's conversations. I wanna hear more people and what's happening in these types of discussions, because it pushes it forward. I think we did it.

Eric: I think we did it. Thanks, thanks a lot for doing this.

Brad: Yeah, thanks a lot for having me.

Eric: Alright. Okay, but you know, just when you thought it was over, it's not over. We weren't done, we didn't do it. 'Cause as Brad and I are sitting here, sort of talking about the conversation we just had, we realized that there's an important announcement that Brad has and that by the time this podcast goes up online that announcement will already be public. So we thought we'd use this as an opportunity to make that announcement even more public. So Brad, do you wanna talk about the name?

Brad: Yeah, Champions has always kinda been one of those, when people say, "What is your business model?" we say, "Say yes and then figure out how to do it. Figure out a creative way how to do it." So in some ways we didn't write down a huge business plan and didn't go through all of the legal things we probably should have back in two-thousand-and-one. So because of that the name 'Champions Adventure Afterschool and Sports Programs' has been, we've been told by another corporation that had that name in the vaults for a while, that they're now making it public. I'll just say it - it was coincidental, maybe, that that happened right after there was some words about a national best practices resource book coming out and then all of a sudden the name Champions was no longer ours. So we will be launching a new name. It is Arc, and the Arc Experience, and then we will have a supplemental program where students in all of our older youth afterschool clubs will have an opportunity to have an online presence that is related to the clubs that they're involved with that will be called MyArc.

Eric: Wow.

Brad: So our new name is Arc, A - R - C. It is not an acronym for anything, but it could be.

Eric: Alright.

Brad: I like to think that young people will interpret that as they see fit. It's about academics, it's about recreation, it's about community, it's about creativity, it's about college. It's about all these things that are A, R and C words, but it is not an acronym.

Eric: That's cool.

Brad: The Arc symbol is essentially a C, seventy-five percent of a circle. And I'm tired of hearing about an achievement gap, I think we need to close the opportunity gap and Arc's job is to close the gap in opportunities that we offer our young people. Arc, it will be - a young person will go through their Arc Experience, and they will have their Arc or MyArc, MyArc will be the online supplement to all the clubs that we do.

Eric: Great. And you know, we'll post a link to Champions on the website, so it will now be a link to Arc.

Brad: Every kid is still a champion by all means, but you know, it's how the game goes.

Eric: Great, well, I'm glad we have a chance to let Please Speak Freely listeners know about this and it's definitely a unique way of naming it. It's like, sort of an acronym, sort of not an acronym, which is pretty cool.

Brad: I hope it makes people think.

Eric: Yeah, great. Alright, so now I think we really did it.

Brad: Alright, we did it. Thank you.

Eric: Thank you.