MANAGING YOUR PRACTICE: A DIMENSIONAL PODCAST SERIES

The Five-Step Framework for Growing Your Business Through Deliberate Practice

Catherine Williams: Hi everyone, and thank you for joining us today. You know, with spring, for many of you that are parents, this introduces a lot of spring sports, and my niece just started playing softball. Why is that important? Well, it reminded me of when I started playing softball. She's nine years old. I was just a little bit older than that.

And I remember thinking "I got this," because I could bat both left-handed and right-handed. So as long as I showed up on the plate and kept the pitchers guessing, kept the coaches entertained, if you will, I didn't really have to worry about the skills involved in playing good softball. Little did I know that really incredible deliberate practice, which is something we're going to talk about today, was key to ultimately developing my skills as a softball player.

I could not simply rely on the fact that because I could switch hit, if you will, that I was I was good to go. And a lot of that also included learning at a very young age to take feedback from someone other than my parents, maybe even other than my teachers, other than my siblings. Because, you know, your siblings are very good about giving feedback.

And so I was reminded of all of that the other day as I was talking with my niece, super excited about playing softball. And as we think about our time today and the topic and the areas we're going to talk about, you know, that was a lesson for me at a very young age that to get really good at something, you couldn't just casually pay attention to it.

You really needed to work at it. And I think everyone listening today can probably identify an area or an experience in their life where that very much showed up to be the truth. And so with that, it is absolutely my pleasure to introduce Craig Wortmann, who is joining us today. And we're going to talk about not just practice, but deliberate practice and the science of it. The muscle that you can build by pursuing diligently this area of practice, professionally, certainly personally as well, too. We may even talk a little bit about that, but it shows up in all areas of your life. And for those of you who may not know, Craig, he is the CEO of Sales Engine, which is a 30-year-old organization that has long been delivering tools, consulting, resources to help organizations think about growth and how to drive sales.

And then as well, he is the clinical professor of innovation and entrepreneurship. I love that title, Craig. That's really awesome. At the Kellogg Sales Institute which is part of Northwestern University. Craig, it's great to have you with us today.

Craig Wortmann: Catherine it is great to be with you. And I love, love, love the set up here with softball and your niece. We are going to talk about that absolutely, positively.

Catherine Williams: When I thought about our discussion today and of course, you know, very much Dimensional, we love to start with the data and thinking about the science behind everything we do. And one of the aspects that and also, you know, came to mind thinking about the advisors we work with, what we learn from particularly top performing firms. This is a muscle, however awkwardly, that they do in fact build over time.

This idea of getting very purposeful around practicing what it is that you're trying to achieve, soliciting really good feedback. So, you know, when I when we're asked frequently how do top performing firms grow? How do they develop their people? How do they enhance their client experience? This is an area that we are frequently talking about. And I know that you have done a ton of research on this.

There's a science behind it. There's a methodology behind it. I'm looking forward to talking about it today.

Craig Wortmann: I am as well. I can hardly wait to dig in. Let's jump in.

Catherine Williams: All right. Well, let's start with the why. Why is deliberate practice so important?

Craig Wortmann: The best way into this, Catherine, into this conversation is with a little thought experiment, and you and I can do it together and we can sort of recruit our audience to do it with us. So my question to you and to everyone is just answer this in your in your mind. It's a strange question. Have you ever had a bad taxi ride?

Have you ever had a bad taxi ride in New York or London or Chicago? Or Singapore or wherever? The answer is, of course you have. The next question gets even more weird, which is how is that possible? This person is a professional driver. Oftentimes taxicabs, Uber drivers, Lyft drivers drive eight, nine, 10, 11 hours a day, maybe five or six days a week.

These are professional drivers. So the question is, how is it that you can have a bad taxi ride? These are professional drivers. Well, we know the answer why. And what it turns out is we as drivers, myself included, by the way, and I'm not a professional driver, I'm just a driver. We engage in something called repetitive practice. Now, stop and think about that for a second and juxtapose that against a professional driver.

Craig Wortmann: My favorite professional driver is Danica Patrick, an Indy Car racer. And she's, you know, amazingly famous and an unbelievable driver. This is a woman who is driving a car 206 miles an hour in traffic where the traffic is about four inches away from her wheel. So this is an incredibly skilled, which is a word you used to describe you and your niece and softball, incredibly skilled, knowledgeable and disciplined person.

So now, if you and I, as just regular old drivers or taxi-cab drivers are engaging in repetitive practice, what makes Danica Patrick, Danica Patrick? Well, it's deliberate practice. And there is this enormous gap between what we do, which we refer to as automaticity or automatic experience. We just get in the car, and we are almost literally unconscious of what we're doing.

We just we have forgotten all the things we've learned. It's just a habit. And we just drive and we signal and we turn and we do this stuff or we just we're thinking about work the whole time or thinking about something else. Whereas when Danica Patrick gets in a race car, she is practicing deliberate practice. And you asked about the science.

So what we know from the science is that there are five things that have to be true to build a system of deliberate practice around yourself such that you behave more like an elite athlete, elite chess master, elite musician, elite Dimensional person, whatever it might be, versus engaging in repetitive practice where you're not getting feedback. So the person who deserves the most credit, in my judgment, for this is a guy who sadly passed away a couple of years ago named K. Anders Ericsson.

Craig Wortmann: He studied and you know, his research continues. His body of research continues. They study the science of deliberate practice or what's often referred to as the science of expertise. How do we

develop expertise? And what they've discovered and where the research has really settled, and I'm just fascinated by, are these five things that have to be true. So I'm dying to talk to you about these, but let me pause there. Does that make sense so far?

Catherine Williams: It does. And I think the example of how, you know, essentially how we show up as drivers in day to day and even some of the things that we don't think about, versus what Danica has to do to, you know, to deliver is an incredible analogy. It's so true. And that is the difference that is exactly what we're going to talk about today.

And the idea ultimately, I hope with our listeners today is that you're going to come away with more than a few ideas and how we don't want you driving like Danica Patrick on an on the everyday streets. But you can probably at least feel like you're operating like Danica on that. So makes absolute sense. And I do want to delve into that science and what is the difference? What sets deliberate practice apart from the other ways that we might think about practicing to do something well?

Craig Wortmann: Well, we will do that now. You know what's interesting and it's what's fun about the sort of analog of driving is, of course, we're not talking about driving. We're talking about work. We're talking about our, as you said, our professional and our personal lives. How do we move through our days and how do we think about our own performance and how do we strive in certain areas of our lives to be 10 times better than we are right now?

And lest you and your audience think that's hyperbole, we have this notion at the business school at Kellogg, where I teach and have taught for years, we have this difference between an opinion and a point of view. An opinion is anything we want it to be. We all have opinions and you know, some you agree with, some we disagree with, but a point of view as an elevated standard, a point of view has evidence.

We can, you and I, and everyone listening can literally be 10 times better than we are right now at anything. Parenting, chess, music, selling, leading, anything. And what's so fascinating about the science is if we implement what we in learning as learning professionals tend to call a scaffolding, we implement a scaffolding of these five things around ourselves. We can begin. We can get on and stay on a journey to get 10 times better.

So let's look at each one of these and we'll I'll go through quickly, Catherine, and then I'll stop and then we can unpack whichever ones you want to. We can quickly unpack them all. Yep. Starts with number one. We must have, and this one sounds super simple and it's incredibly, weirdly hard to do.

We have to have a specific goal, we have to have measures by which we can measure our progress towards that goal, and we need a plan to make progress. That's the one that people usually and I do this, you know, I do workshops on this two or three times a week, literally. And that's the one where they go, “yeah, yeah Craig, I got, I got that, I got that.” And the research would show we don't have that. We do not have that. So a specific goal.

The next one is a willingness to get out of your comfort zone. The next one is really interesting. And Anders Ericsson and others research has really revealed this over the last 20 years. We have to have a drive to try differently, not just harder. So, you know, when our wonderful parents told us growing up, you know, just try harder. When your softball coach, Catherine, told you “Catherine don't worry about that strikeout. Just try harder.” You know what? That's fine advice. But it turns out it's not the best advice you can get.

The answer is try differently and that goes with the fourth thing that has to be true. So that's number three. The fourth thing to ask be true is we must have coaches and the coaches must have a mental representation

of what great looks like. And we can unpack that further to the extent that we want to. And then finally, as you mentioned at the outset of this podcast, we need continuous feedback.

Craig Wortmann: So you can sort of see these as pieces of a puzzle that all have to be true. So, you know, the question is, OK, Craig, you know, the fifth piece of the scaffolding is we have to get feedback, from whom? Well, that's the fourth piece of the puzzle. You've got to have coaches. So this is, you know, this science of expertise is really powerful. And on some levels, you know, we kind of we can fall into what psychologists call default behaviors. Where we say, you know, we're nodding. We say, you know, I say, Catherine, yeah, I got it, you know, get out of my comfort zone. Yeah, I got it. It's actually trickier than it looks. And that's where it's really fun. You know, I talk to the world's brightest business students about it.

The world's most amazing corporations like Dimensional about it every single week. And we get to really dig into what actually do these things mean and how do we do it.

Catherine Williams: Well, so let's unpack a few of these, because I think I know personally, professionally, the awareness of many of these doesn't always kick in right away. And yet I would offer you've got to have all five in place. One is not mutually exclusive from the other but you mentioned number one being the hardest, you know, setting those specific goals, determining how you're going to measure your progress and then making a plan around that. So there's quite a bit there, to be honest. Right, depending on the goal, depending on what you want to achieve. But what is it that in that number one that does typically trip folks up around that particular step?

Craig Wortmann: Well, it's a great question, Catherine. I'll answer with a quick story. And this happened actually last week. And so I was overseas last week with a sales team and really interesting. And we had the very senior people in the room. And we got to this point in the discussion and I said, let's all just take two minutes and think about a goal that you have set for yourself over the next quarter, so the next three months.

And so we just silent for a couple of minutes and we had just been talking about what I like to refer to as running high impact meetings and the surprising science of meetings and how poorly meetings are run and how some very simple but powerful skills and disciplines can create incredibly impactful meetings. And so we had just been talking about that. So we stopped the 2 minutes. And this woman in the group raised her hand, said, Craig, can I talk about my goal? And I said, yes, what's your goal? And she said, my goal for the next three months is to design, based on our last conversation, to design my meetings such that I run the best meeting of anyone's week.

So my clients are having, you know, 25, 30, 35 meetings a week. I want them to look back on Friday night and I want them to say, my meeting is the best meeting of the week. It's the one that stands above. And I said, that is a great goal. And so I said, may I ask you some questions about that?

And so now you remember, Catherine, we're in number one: a specific goal, measures, and a plan. And I said, all this is, and this is again drawn straight from the science of deliberate practice, is just helping her or you helping me get concrete about the goal. So here's what this series of questions that, we actually have a tool that we've created called the Goal Coach.

The Goal Coach. What I said to her first is I said, this is a great you know, what a great goal. And this is achievable over the next three months. How will you know if you're going to be successful? So that's the first question. How will you know? And we settled on asking clients for feedback in intervals over the next three months to say, you know, how are you feeling about the meetings?

Have we improved? Do they stand differently? Do they stand apart from your other meetings, et cetera, et cetera. So I asked her a bunch of questions about how will you know if you're successful? And then I said, great, OK, we've got some actionable steps here to take. And I said, speaking of actual steps, what are the two or three things that you have to do during the next couple of days to start this process?

And she said, well, I'm going to start my meetings crisply with the purpose benefit check. I'm going to end with a summary. I'm going to start ending a few minutes early because we know from research that that is a huge discipline of running meetings. And she listed off some disciplines. And I said, great, these are great actions that you're going to take.

Craig Wortmann: We then said, OK, if you're going to do those two things and this is how we know we're going to be successful, we already know the time frame which is going to be you're going to achieve, you know, start to achieve results in three months. You're going to see some results in three months. Now, let me ask you a different question.

How much of a stretch is this for you? And there was a long pause, which there always is, and she's like, well, what do you mean? And I said, her name is Ann, and I said, Ann how far out of your comfort zone are you? Are you like, hey, this is going to be simple I can knock this out?

Or are you panicked? Are you like, oh, my God, this is a huge stretch? And she said, you know, somewhere in the middle, which is a good gauge on this being a realistic goal. OK, now let me stop the story here and tell you a different story, OK? And we'll come back to this. What I have just done essentially with this amazing, powerful woman is SMART goals.

The story is, in 1981, a guy named George Durand and his co-authors authored an article that went viral about smart goals. And to this day it is known worldwide as sort of the goal setting process. Right? Specific, measurable, let's see, attainable, realistic, time-bound, SMART. It's a really simple acronym that's very powerful. Guess what? The story gets more interesting.

It turns out that much of the research on deliberate practice has happened since 1981 and we now know from the science of expertise, smart is not enough. So now back to my story with Ann, I continued I said great. So what tools do you need to get this done? And she said Craig what do you mean by tools?

And I said, well why don't we poll the company, we got a bunch of powerful people in the room right now for the best agenda. Let's find the best agenda. Let's find the best checklist for preparation. Let's find time on your calendar. A calendar is a tool. Let's block time on your calendar to get absolutely, powerfully prepared for these meetings.

Let's block time on your calendar for follow up. Let's block some time on your calendar for coaching and her eyes were so big because she was like, wow, there's a lot of things I have to do. And I said, you do, you do. Next question. Ann, what support do you need in the form of coaches? Who's going to coach you?

And she literally was looking, pointing to people in the room and saying, this person over here, he runs the best meetings I've ever seen. I said, great, sir, you are now her coach. And I said, if we had more time, I would go deep into this and I would say, how much time do you need from him? Where is that going to get calendared, et cetera, et cetera.

So now we've identified two or three coaches around you. I have my one last question for you. You just told me that all of that stuff put together, all those actions are going to take you about three and a half to four

hours a week. That's great. What are you going to stop doing? Because we all have the same 168 hours in the week and you don't get 172 next week, you get 168.

Craig Wortmann: And Catherine, I'm telling you, doing this two or three times a week with very, very senior people all over the world, that's the one that stumps them. And guess what the research shows? This is why most people, even very smart, sophisticated high performers in companies fail to reach their goals because they don't get concrete. And so now I've changed the acronym.

It's now SMARTS…S M A R T T S S, and the last T S S is tools, support, and stop. That's specificity. That's concreteness. Now, she knows exactly what to do to cause her to deliver the best meeting of anybody's week. So that's the first one.

Catherine Williams: What I find really interesting about that, and particularly the example with Ann, to your point, even if you put pen to paper and you have great clarity on what it is that you're looking to achieve, allocating the time quite honestly, probably underestimating the time that you need to apply to it is absolutely I think where a lot of organizations fall down.

I was just doing a strategic planning session last night actually with an advisory firm it was last night because I'm on the East Coast and this firm's in California. They have great brains, great resources, great people, great systems, great technology. The lack of a strategic plan is just putting time in on it, you know, and this idea that, as I often say, you can't do it at 3:00 on a Friday afternoon either.

So I think that that makes sense. So applying the time around that for sure. So you mentioned in that story as well too, that needing to try things differently or try to do things differently, not just harder. Hopefully I didn’t butcher that too much. And I'd love for you to talk a little bit more about that because I think as well we look around for the playbook, right?

We look around for the road map, we look around for the thing that will certainly just help us shortcut maybe even a little bit. And then we get going and it's maybe really not a lot different than what we have been doing previously.

Craig Wortmann: Yeah, for me, this part of the research really gets fascinating because, you know, we've all heard this phrase for a million years, you know, don't work harder, work smarter. OK, well, what does that mean? It's just like the same thing is, you know, oh, Catherine just set a specific goal. You know, set a goal, and it's like, oh, OK.

So the interesting part of the research, what Anders Ericsson did, he was he was for a time, his lab, I believe, was at the University of Wisconsin in the United States. And he did a very clever, he and his research partners did a very clever thing. They brought a second-year university cross-country runner named Steve Faloon into their lab.

So this young man is you know, he's a Division One runner. So he's a very accomplished runner. By the time you get to a Division One program, you know, you're 19-20 years old. You've been running hard at it for, you know, seven miles a day for many, many years. And so this young man was chosen because he was very gritty. He was very disciplined.

They also chose him, and this is key to the story. They chose him because he had an average IQ. And they sat Steve Faloon down on the first day and they said, Steve, we're going to we're going to conduct an experiment on raw memory. We're going to give you random numbers one per second, and we're going to give them to you in groups. And you have to repeat those numbers to us in perfect order three times in a

row, and then we'll give you another digit. So, for instance, Steve, today we're going to start with seven numbers, you know, two, three, six, you know, up to seven. And then you repeat those back to me, to us, and you have to repeat them three times in a row perfectly. And then we'll go to eight and then we'll go to nine. And you can stay Steve, in the experiment as long or short as you want, you can drop out whenever you want. We're just testing your raw memory. So the story just gets super interesting because over a couple of weeks, Steve Faloon got to the point where he could reliably repeat three times in a row with perfect accuracy, about 21 numbers in a row.

It's a lot of numbers. And then he got stuck and he hit a ceiling for a couple of months. He got very frustrated because he just could not get 22, 23. He just couldn't. He could do it once or twice. He couldn't do it three times and it just couldn't do it so he was topped out.

His raw memory, short-term memory was topped out. And then he realized something. He realized he was a cross-country runner and that one of the memory structures available to a sophomore cross-country runner is race times. And he started putting them in triplets. So he would hear, and I'm making this up, but he would hear two, three, six, and he would say, oh, that's a good split for whatever race.

And that's a memory structure. So he would remember it. And he went to 44 numbers. And by the time he was done with the experiment in about 12 months or 13 months, he could remember 81 random numbers three times in a row. Think about that. 81 numbers. Now, here's the interesting part. What Anders Ericsson discovered in this research is that when he would hit the ceiling at 21, trying harder made no difference.

You can't tell your brain, your raw memory, just work harder. You have to try differently. So he figured out triplets and then when he got to 40 something he figured out quads. He would remember four numbers in a row and then group them. And that was trying differently. And what they did cleverly in the research is they brought in another sophomore cross-country runner named Dario. Dario, by the end of the experiment, he went faster than Steve Faloon and he can remember 101 numbers. And the interesting thing that Dario had that Steve Faloon did not have was a coach. And the coach, his name was Steve Faloon. When Dario got stuck, Steve said, Dario, you're a runner. Just put them in triplets. And he went, oh, and he progressed.

So your coach can help you try differently.

Catherine Williams: Yeah.

Craig Wortmann: So it's just fascinating stuff.

Catherine Williams: I love that. And, you know, we often, particularly with young and upcoming professionals even, you know, certainly here within Dimensional, but as well with the clients we work with, you'll find that coach, find that mentor, look for someone who has excellence in some of these areas and you know, and really engage with them. A good coach will help you think differently about what you're doing.

So that that absolutely makes a lot of sense and can be incredibly powerful and quite honestly, it's probably likely someone, maybe you have to look a little bit, maybe you have to really dig, but likely it's someone within your current ecosystem even.

Craig Wortmann: We always say, Catherine, I always say to people, I said this overseas last week, we acquire coaches, we acquire coaches. They're actually all around us. Again, like any of these five pieces of scaffolding we're talking about, they seem obvious on their surface. Many people assume that they have one coach in their life and that's their manager.

Right? That's ridiculous. So yesterday I did an entrepreneurship bootcamp at the business school with a couple of colleagues and one of my fellow professors who's a quite famous person, he and I walked out of the room and we gave each other feedback, because in that moment he's not just my, in the moment of the bootcamp, he's my co-professor.

We're co-facilitating a huge bootcamp on entrepreneurship, but after it ends and we walk out to a private space in our office, he's now my coach and I'm his. And so we gave each other feedback. So he goes from my fellow faculty member to my coach, and me for him. Once you start to think about that way, you realize that you've got coaches all around you.

Now what you need is a mechanism, a methodology by which they can give you them, give you feedback, and you can give them feedback if you're coaching someone else. And so, you know, if you think again about an elite athlete, she or he, they are surrounded by coaches. They have strength coaches, they have strategy coaches, they have nutritionists, they have stretching coaches, they have mindset coaches, they have brand coaches. They're surrounded by coaches.

Catherine Williams: Well, that's the perfect segue way to unpacking number five. And, you know, in the interest of full disclosure, I absolutely want to say that I think in so many ways, this particular structure feedback that we're going to talk about is, there's lots of different ways, but this particular way of giving what I think is great feedback is one that we have been deploying here at Dimensional.

And it's really had, I think, a very powerful impact. And we'll talk a little bit more about why. And I think it'll be obvious to our audience as we talk to this structure, like why is this so powerful? But in the spirit of that, let's talk about it. Let's talk about the framework of what we call two-by-two feedback.

I think that's where we ultimately want to go. But, you know, this idea of getting continuous feedback in concise, regular, rapid fashion, following a concrete structure each time. I mean, this is it's, you know, sit up everyone if you're only casually listening, chewing your sandwich or half listening to what's going on in the background. Listen to this part because this is I think this is a game changer for so many individuals and certainly so many organizations.

So with that, now that I've set that all up, set up expectations, you can tell I'm super excited about it. But, you know, when you live it and breathe it and use it, right? Like that's what it's all about. So this idea of continuous feedback and the framework that you've developed around this, let's share that.

Craig Wortmann: Well, thank you for those kind words. That's super great. And it's been so much fun to work with Dimensional on this. So, you know, we keep talking using this metaphor of a scaffolding. The thing that holds all that up is the ability to give feedback. So you got to have coaches, you got to have a goal, you got to try differently. You got to get out of your comfort zone. Now, how do you structure a conversation where you can get performance feedback? And again, it's very helpful to keep an elite performer in your mind's eye, a musician, a chess master, an athlete, whatever that person is, and the best of the best, think about what their day looks like.

And now I'm going to juxtapose where most corporations in the world actually settle on this. And by the way, I've been part of I'm an entrepreneur now, but I've been part of large corporations like IBM and others, wonderful companies for years and years and loved every, you know, loved almost every minute of it. However, where most corporations have settled on this is the annual performance review.

And if you think about that for a second, it's ludicrous, right? The annual performance review is actually an annual compensation review. It's not about performance. It's about you know, it's overall performance,

aggregate performance, but it's really a compensation review. And that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. But how do I know I'm performing right now? How do I know I'm performing in this podcast well or poorly?

How do I know if I'm performing at work on a day to day? How do I know how I did in the bootcamp yesterday that I taught at Kellogg? And so the thing you mentioned is one of, if not the most, it's one of the most powerful leadership and performance tools I know. We call it, as you said, Catherine, the two-by-two feedback framework.

And it works like this. Let's just say for fun that you and I get done with this podcast and you say, OK, Craig, thanks for doing that. Let's do feedback. And here's exactly what you do next. And here's the two by two. You say, Craig, what's one thing you think you did well just now in the podcast? And I say, whatever, you know, I had fun.

You know, whatever I say. And you say, great, here's one thing I think you did well and you give me a piece of "did well," thereby building my confidence. Then you say, as my coach remember, you're my coach. You say, Craig, great. What's one thing you would do differently? If we rewound the tape, we do this all over again right now, which we're not going to do, but what would you do differently?

And I say what I think about it and I say what I say. You and I might talk about it a little bit, and then you say, great, Craig, here's one thing I would like you to do differently next time. And I say, thank you, Catherine, or we talk about it a little bit and that's it. It is no more mysterious than that.

It is a secret hiding in plain sight. So if you think about these as columns, you go, Craig, what's one thing you did well? Here's one thing I think you did well, that's left-hand column, that builds my confidence. The right-hand column. Craig, what's one thing you'd do differently? Here's one thing I would suggest you do differently, that builds my competence.

So it's confidence and competence. And it is the most powerful one-two punch I know. And Catherine, I can tell you this with a straight face because I am the luckiest guy in the world. I am surrounded by coaches. This happens to me probably five to seven times a week. I get feedback. And when I get it, it does not mean I always agree with it.

Sometimes it's super awkward because it makes me defensive or it makes me feel bad. Well, guess what? Welcome to the business world. I'm here to perform. And so. And what if all the way back to the beginning, if I'm that average driver and I never get feedback on my driving, I will never improve. In fact, the news gets even worse, Catherine.

I can look you in the eye and say I am a worse driver today, and I think I'm a pretty decent driver. I don't get in accidents, knock on wood, I don't get tickets. I'm a decent driver, but I'm actually a worse driver today than I was when I was 21 or 25 years old. Why? Because I've stopped paying attention.

And the question for us is again, this is not about driving. It's about our performance as parents, as professionals, like are we paying attention? Are we saying this thing, running meetings, doing podcasts, teaching bootcamps, I'm going to be 10 times better than I am right now? I'm going to get on this journey. So that's what the feedback mechanism does.

Catherine Williams: So I want to take you back to the early days. I know this is years ago relative to this framework and those first few times that you gave feedback within the two-by-two framework, and you

talked a little bit about this week receiving some of that feedback and absolutely kind of, you know, how we feel. Do we agree, disagree, that sort of thing.

But the giving of the feedback, I think is as well. Right? A really, well, it's critical to this framework and it's a really important muscle for people to build, particularly when they're giving that feedback to maybe their boss, right? You know, that's usually, and I'll share one of my early stories with the two-by-two feedback and giving that to someone I consider my boss.

But think back to those early days. How did that feel? Where was it successful? Where did you stumble? What did you have to really figure out in order to effectively give feedback within that framework?

Craig Wortmann: Yeah, it's a great question. And I'm going to be very blunt about this. The first few batches of pancakes are it's just awkward. It's awkward, and I won't paint it any other color. I mean, you are you know, if I'm coaching you there is a point where I say, Catherine, here's what I would suggest you do differently. And it might hurt a little bit.

You know, it might hurt a little bit. And sometimes it does and what I realized is if you repeat feedback over, meaning not repeat the words, but repeat the process of giving feedback, it's magical because it only takes three, four, maybe five times for you to realize I've got your back. I've got your back. I'm not criticizing you.

I'm helping you become a better performer. It would literally be like an elite athlete. Your coach going, Oh, Catherine, great, great day, great, great job, great job today. That's it. That would never happen. Right? They review game film for a reason. And so it's that version. But again, when you start this, I'm going to jump to your question on giving senior people, your boss feedback, too, because that's a specialized version. Makes it even more awkward.

What I think your move is there is if you're starting this process of using the two-by-two feedback framework and you would very much like to coach your boss. What I think the best move is, is to begin that process, let's say, Catherine, you're my boss and I'm going to present this and I'm going to say, here's what I would do first. It'd be sort of a one, two or three thing process. So the first step of the process is I would say, Catherine, I came across this really interesting feedback process and I want to sketch it out for you and just sketch on a whiteboard. I'll take four seconds to sketch it on a whiteboard, teach your boss this framework and then say, Catherine, I'm trying to get better at what I'm doing, you know, for you, for me and for us.

Would you use this feedback framework on me? You know, a couple of times a week when you see me perform or not, you know, perform well or poorly and see if you can recruit your boss into being the giver of the feedback. That's step two. So teach, step one, recruit, step two. And then at some point and again, I can't possibly know, but it might be a week. It might be a month, it might be a year. Say, Catherine, you know that feedback process we've been using? Can I use that on you? Is that OK? Right? And if it's you know, some bosses that will happen in an hour because some bosses will see it and go, hey, I'd like I'd like you to give me feedback. And then you're on your way. Some are more recalcitrant.

Catherine Williams: I'm wondering what your perspective is on the kind of the “did well” side, which, as you said, is all about building confidence or as “do differently” is the competence piece. And absolutely it can be challenging to think about those “do differentlys” for sure. And communicating them, picking the right words. You know, I, I sometimes say to my young associates, sometimes you just have to start with, this may come across a little awkward, you know like just own it, like just put it out there like, oh, you know, I've never had anyone balk at that.

But on the “did well,” this idea of you know, of course you cannot just say you were great, you're great, you're fantastic. Right? Like that is not helpful feedback. And so I sometimes find that that's actually even myself a harder thing to do to really come up with something super tangible on the “did well” not just because they did everything well, but because I think we take a shortcut on that at times.

I don't know if you've observed that or not. I'd be interested in your thoughts around that.

Craig Wortmann: Well, you're right on target. We often get lazy and I believe that's the word. It's, you know, another a better word for lazy is undisciplined. We just don't have discipline in the moment. I say, Catherine, great job. That is empty sugar. There's you know, you feel good for two seconds and you kind of go OK, what does that mean?

Now, this is why this scaffolding of deliberate practice we're talking about is so critical. And remember, the fourth piece is a mental representation of what great looks like. What that actually means is, when I watch Catherine do something, run a meeting, give a speech, run a podcast, lead her people, whatever it is.

What I am observing is I'm watching for the particular skills and disciplines that Catherine is applying in that moment, the choices she's making, the way she's behaving, and I'm looking for specific things. Now, the best way to move beyond, hey, Catherine, great job, is what we call a feedback alliance. So now you've got the two-by-two feedback framework.

But guess what? Before you walked on stage and gave that speech, you and I had a different conversation as coach and coachee, right? Coach and athlete. You pulled me into a room and said, hey, hey, coach. Hey, Craig, I'm going to give this speech. What I would love to have you do is provide me feedback on how I engage the entire room with eye contact, body positioning, how I walk in and out of the crowd and just draw people in, because we know that is a bucket of skills and disciplines of great presenters, great speakers, right?

And we both know that's one of the many, many mental representations of what a great speech looks like. But now guess what you've done? You've given me a great gift because now when you're done with the speech, we go back in that room. I can say Catherine and my “did wells” and “might do differently” are focused on that.

So now I'm actually coaching you using the feedback model on a mental representation of what great looks like based on what you've asked me. So it becomes very specific and concrete.

Catherine Williams: I think that's fantastic. It, it not only sets expectations, right? Sets, sets it up that you're going to have this, this conversation afterwards. Which is another reason why ending your meetings five minutes early allows time for that.

Craig Wortmann: Yes, exactly.

Catherine Williams: But it gives a focus. It gives a purpose. Because especially for something that might be big and wily, like a big giant client meeting or a big corporate meeting or even for that matter, or a big project of some kind. So I love that. I think that gives a lot of great focus to the conversation.

Really, really great advice there. So I want to circle back in just our remaining moments here to the why in your experience, your work with businesses around the world, when organizations start focusing on the act of deliberate practice, these five areas and then as we've been talking about here most recently, specifically this feedback loop, really, really building that muscle.

What have you seen is the impact on the businesses that that you've worked with that have really fully employed and embraced this construct?

Craig Wortmann: Yeah, I'll give you an anecdote that we got a great gift just recently from a founder entrepreneur here in Chicago who founded a company not all that long ago and now has 800 employees. So this company is just exploding and it's just super fun. Yeah, it's a rocket ship and it's just we got a chance to do this, work with them and build a system of deliberate practice.

And he gave us a great gift because he called and he, he said, you know, and I won't use the exact word that he used, but he said, Craig, when we first met and you told us that we could be 10 times better than we are right now, I thought you were full of it. He used a different word.

And he said, now that we've been through this and we've built this scaffolding, not only do I view that it's possible but I view that it's probable. And so, Catherine, I think my answer would be, you know, we have seen individuals, teams and even organizations transform themselves. And it is just so fun because the research is right there.

It's just right in plain sight. It is not rocket science, even though it is the science of deliberate practice, it's not rocket science. I mean, these five things are right in front of us, but it is really getting on that journey. And that starts with a decision. The decision as each of us as individuals saying to each other and saying to our coaches and saying to our families, you know, I am going to pick this thing, you know, public speaking, handling objections, prospecting new leads, telling stories.

I'm going to do this thing and I'm going to get 10 times better and you're going to see the result, you're going to start to see the results within a couple of months. And here's how I'm going to do it. It's just a decision.

Catherine Williams: It is a decision. And I think it's a cultural one. It's a business decision for sure. Organizations are thinking very carefully about how do they want to operate and the impact it can have on their clients. Even, you know, talk about getting feedback, getting feedback from your clients, right? We could spend a whole other hour talking about that, right?

Craig Wortmann: We could indeed.

Catherine Williams: And we absolutely have several situations here where members of our team, as I was sitting out with a client and saying, you know, we're going to go through this meeting today. We're going to talk about this stuff at the very end, I would love to get a little bit of feedback from you, right? Does that make you proud?

Craig Wortmann: So proud. So proud.

Catherine Williams: But, you know, I certainly remember early on in this process, one of the first people that asked me to give two-by-two feedback was Bryce Skaff. And I think Skaff and scaffolding, there's a little bit of irony there. He's our co-global head of the client group, and it was intimidating. I'm not going to lie, like it really, you know and I'm someone whether if your management or middle child of two therapists. I don't know. You know getting feedback is not necessarily a challenge. But in this construct it really does make you think carefully, purposely and concisely about what it is that you're doing. And so, yeah, whether you're giving that to a boss, a colleague, a peer or someone that you have an input on how they develop as a professional. So really powerful opportunities.

Craig Wortmann: Oh, I love it. Yeah.

Catherine Williams: And, you know, I'm still here. So clearly the feedback was…so, but with that, I have so appreciated our conversation. There's so much in the way of the tools and resources, the way that you engage with professionals and business owners around the world. So I really want to encourage our audience to, to find you on Instagram and LinkedIn to check out the Sales Engine tools that are available.

Some of what we talked about today is available right on your website. You make it very clean and available and transparent for advisors and, for the advisors we work with, but clients in general. But I'd love to end, if you don't mind, I think, you know, when I do look at the work, you're CEO of a large organization, you're deeply engaged in the research and consulting, the science of everything that we've talked about here today.

So I want to ask you a question I've asked my last few podcast guests, and it's based on a quote from James Mattis, who is a Marine Corps General and Former Secretary of Defense. And he talks about solitude and how it allows you to reflect while others are reacting. He says we need solitude to refocus on perspective, decision making rather than just reacting to the problems as they arise, which we can all relate to that I think. So I would love to ask you, as a leader, as a growing, evolving business, how do you recharge? What do you do to perhaps seek solitude so that you can show up as not only the best consultant and coach, but also business leader in your life?

Craig Wortmann: Well, thanks for asking. It's a great question and it's a neat quote as I reflect on that question. My answer is with routines. So I have a lot of routines in my day, and it's not overly robotic or scripted, but there are some non-negotiables. I'm what's called a lark, so I get up really early in the morning and very, very early.

And so I start my day in solitude because nobody else is around. And so I often will come to one of my offices. I'll be at the business school or I'll be at my office up in Wisconsin, and I will have literally three to four hours in the morning. That is work time, but it's also reflection time. So that's one way I do it.

And another routine that uses my calendar as what we in learning call a "doing device" is I also do build in blocks of time between meetings. So we never schedule me back to back to back to back because there's just you know, it's not necessarily solitude is not really the word. It's just reflection time and prep time.

But I find it but that's often done by myself and I find that that has been a real life changer for me. It took me a long time to learn that. Just that simple thing, but now that I have, it's been a real game changer.

Catherine Williams: I love that it's carving off that time, even right as you talked about earlier, make being purposeful about that, which, you know, time is precious, and we don't have a lot of it. But boy, I love that. That's fantastic. Craig, thank you for joining us. It's always great to talk with you.

Craig Wortmann: So great to be with you. Thanks for having me. This was really fun. I hope it was helpful for your audience.

Catherine Williams: I think it was. I think it is, you know, helping our advisors think about the clients we get to work with. Think about what, you know, how do they just get to that next, that elite level that they're looking for in whatever manner that means. Right? Whatever that looks like for their businesses. I think it's really powerful. Again, Craig, thank you for joining us.

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