

Nick Colangelo: The Window Podcast is a service of the Belin-Blank Centre for Gifted Education and Talent Development in the University of Iowa College of Education. The Belin-Blank Centre offers comprehensive programming for students with talent in academic areas: visual arts, writing, inventiveness, and leadership. The Centre serves teachers of gifted and talented students through professional development available both online and on-site. Go to the belinkblank.org for a complete listing of resource. The Belin-Blank Centre is part of the University of Iowa College of Education, leaders, scholars, and innovators since 1847. Learn more about the top-ranked College of Education in the State of Iowa at education.uiowa.edu.

Speaker 2: Welcome to The Window.

Nick Colangelo: Adam Grant is a professor at The Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania. He has been Wharton's top-rated professor for six consecutive years, he has been recognised as one of the world's 25 most influential management thinkers. Adam is authored three highly-acclaimed books: Give and Take, Originals, and his most recent book title, Option B, coauthored with Sheryl Sandberg. Option B was the number one New York Times bestseller.

Adam, I welcome you to The Window and it's a pleasure to have you here.

Adam Grant: Well, thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Nick Colangelo: Great, you became a professor because you wanted to make a difference in the lives of students. The ratings by your students about your teaching are tremendously high, so, obviously, you are succeeding. Can you share a story about an impact that you've had on a student and how that's made you feel?

Adam Grant: Oh, that's very kind. I actually try to focus more on, I guess, the ways that I benefited from the amazing experiences that I had a student in the classroom and then, pay those forward.

Nick Colangelo: Sure.

Adam Grant: If I had to identify a student that I've had an impact on, I guess, one of the ones that stands out to me is Justin Berg.

Justin was an undergrad at Michigan. I was in grad school at the time actually and I posted a research assistant position and was planning to take either three or four people and ended up interviewing about 50.

I came home after interviewing Justin and I said to my wife, "I can't hire this student because he's too similar to me. He plays ultimate Frisbee, he's been a magician, and he also grew up in the Midwest and I know we all have this bias toward hiring people who remind us of ourselves. I don't wanna be one of those people." She did an independent assessment of his application, she said, "He

looks really amazing. You can't discriminate against him because he happens to have some hobbies in common with you, you have to give him a chance."

So, I brought him into the team and it turned out that he had always wanted to be a teacher, but was afraid that it wouldn't be the kind of job that would enable him to pursue all of his passions. So, he ended up doing his undergraduate thesis on how people cope with having an unanswered calling. Then, after that, realised that he loved research so much that instead of being a teacher, he wanted to be a professor. So, a couple years later, Justin came to the doctoral programme at Wharton and he's now a superstar young professor at Stanford who does some of my favourite research on creativity.

It's so interesting to look back and wonder what might have happened to his career had we not connected up. I know he'd be doing great things, I'm not sure if it would be in academia and it's always fun when the occasional student continues the legacy and carries the torch.

Nick Colangelo: One of the great things that I've found about education is that you never know which decision that you make that will have a tremendous impact. The fact that you gave him an opportunity, look where it's gone. As you say, you keep playing it forward. In your background, Adam, you've been a Junior Olympics springboard diver and you're a professional musician. These are not the typical resume builders for a faculty position, so how do these two aspects of your life, do you think, improve or help you become a more effective teacher?

Adam Grant: I wouldn't assume that they have. So, if I had to say, I would guess that, in diving, actually, I probably learned ... I think I learned more actually from coaching than I did from diving. One of the things that I had to do, as I transitioned from diver to coach, was I had to motivate people to do things that they were completely terrified by. So, we'd have an 11-year-old standing up on a 10-meter platform and they have to leap 32 feet, 9 inches. Do some somersaults, try to land straight knowing that they're gonna hit the water at more than 30 miles an hour, and that experience of trying to motivate people in those situations, one of the things it taught me is that people are rarely at their best when they're just competing for themselves or when they're just working for themselves.

Oftentimes, that leap came from wanting to make a coach proud or a parent proud or not wanting to let down a team. I think that either that's been something that I've tried to build into the classroom as much as possible as well as the core topic in my research. I've studied what motivates people. In the classroom, I try to create an environment where students feel like their learning is not just gonna benefit them, but it's also gonna help their peers. It's gonna put them in a position to help the organisations they're part of be more effective. I guess, on the magic side, what's fun about that is the years I spent as a magician probably affected me in two ways. One is that they helped me overcome my fear of public speaking by getting me out on a stage and that was a huge step. I'm not sure I would've become a professor without that

experience and then, the other thing is magic is always about the element of surprise.

The same trick is much more powerful if it takes an unexpected turn and I found the same to be true in social science, that you can tell people about a study or a piece of evidence. They'll be like, "Yeah, that makes sense." But, if you can set it up, so that they actually might expect the opposite to be true, it's much more interesting, then, to try to understand it and make sense of it. So, I try to build the element of surprise into my classroom quite a bit, whether it's a case that goes in a direction that nobody anticipated or a study whose results upend conventional wisdom. I think that's a huge part of the learning process is leaving people constantly surprised.

Nick Colangelo:

Alright, I agree with that. You also happen to mention the worry about failure at something, whether it's talking about diving or something else. In your book, *The Originals*, one of the things you talk about is, in innovation, you have to generate a lot of ideas. Obviously, chasing some of these fresh ideas, some things aren't gonna work out. Let's call them failures. My own observation is that, in our educational system, we have very little room for rewarding failures. If you agree with that, what do you think we can do to redesign our education system, so that it's a lot more encouraging of taking chances on something fresh and new?

Adam Grant:

Well, I think that's actually a key distinction. I don't think we should be rewarding failure, I have yet to meet a student who says, "Yeah, you know what? I'm really hoping to fail today. This is gonna be awesome." What we should be doing, though, is making it safe to fail and helping students realise that it's not the end of their careers, or even their educations if they make a mistake, or if they take a risk and it doesn't work out. I'll tell you, one of the things that I became aware of, while I was writing *Originals*, is I felt like a bit of a hypocrite because I was talking about the importance of people challenging the status quo. Here I was teaching a whole class that's about psychology applied to work where I'm asking students to internalise the evidence that's already out there and never question it and that's not an environment in which they necessarily feel that they can take risks because if they ask me a question, I will immediately rattle back, "Well, the best randomised controlled trial ... ", or, "The meta-analysis on that ... ", "Here's what it says ... " It can shut down discussion, and debate, and new lines of inquiry, so I decided that I was gonna have to do something about this.

I didn't wanna do it at the beginning of the semester because I did want students to actually learn material before they started questioning it. So, what I ended up doing was I assigned them in ... it was the Fall Semester, in November, to a new exercise I've never done before. I made it one of the course assignments in the class, which is, they had paired up and they had to film a mini TED Talk, five minutes or less, on any idea-related organisational behaviour. The twist was, though, that it had to be a talk that was counterintuitive in some way or that directly complicated or challenged

something they'd learned in class. I was just blown away by how many interesting ideas came out, but, also, the format innovations that we saw. I think that, after that, I saw a lot more students being willing to go out on a limb, try out ideas they weren't willing to consider before.

I think that every class ought to involve at least a little bit of attention to, "What if this isn't true?", or, "When might this idea actually be wrong or backfire?" As you get students to take those kinds of risks, as they sort out their own beliefs and understandings of a topic, I think it's a chance to model, as a faculty member, the very openness that you want them to have.

Nick Colangelo: I'm gonna keep that in mind because I like what you say about the fact that, as a faculty member, you have to model risk-taking. I think that's probably not something that everybody does or everybody even thinks about, so that's a ... it's really a good point that you've made.

Adam Grant: Well, I don't know if I would go that far, but I do think, from a role-modeling standpoint, one of the things that we could probably all do more of is opening up about our own failures. I've heard students say over and over again that they have a hard time identifying with their professors because it seems like they've always succeeded in everything they've ever done. They had to get perfect grades and then, they had to do excellent work in order to get hired. My response to that has been to talk about my own failures a little bit more, so I'll talk about falling short of my goals for my diving career, but, then, also, the jobs that I didn't get and the journal article rejections that I faced. I've gone so far as to start to walk them through my failure resume as opposed to just the success resume. Even then, what they often say is, "Yes, it's easy for you to talk about this stuff now because you've overcome those obstacles."

So, what I've started trying to do a little bit more of is actually share ongoing challenges, right? Mistakes that I made last week that I haven't figured out how to solve, professional failures that I encountered last month, which I haven't necessarily been able to overcome yet. I feel like that may be something that helps with creating psychological safety in the classroom.

Nick Colangelo: Is there one that you're willing to share and what you see as a current ongoing failure that you would like to do to resolve for yourself?

Adam Grant: Absolutely not. Next question? Yeah, no. Yeah. I think, I would say, I have a whole list of them, depending on whether we're talking about research, or teaching, or consulting, or speaking, or advising. I feel like one of my ongoing failures is when I stand up in front of the audience, of any audience, whether it's a class of students or a group of executives at a keynote speech, the emotions that I tend to go for are surprise and entertainment.

We talked about surprise earlier and I think that ... yeah, entertainment is big for me because, one, I enjoy being entertained.

I love to attend a talk that's fun or funny, but, also, because it's the only feedback that you really get from a live audience. You can hear when people are laughing and you can see it, but when somebody is inspired or moved, there's not that same visible reaction. I think because of that I've come to rely on humour as a crutch and I'm not spoken as passionately or as forcefully about some of the core things that I believe in because I'm almost afraid of going to that level of depth and not knowing if the audience is with me or not.

I missed a lot of opportunities, in the past few months, on a lot of stages, I think, to connect with people and maybe affect them in a different way than I had before. To be perfectly candid, I have not figured out how to overcome that yet. I think about it when I'm offstage and then, I get back up there and I go back to the comfort zone.

Nick Colangelo:

Yeah. Adam, in your work, you also talk about leadership styles, ways to influence others, and you talk about them as the main styles of being takers, givers, and matchers. Can you just briefly define each one and your insight about how each one of these three ways works?

Adam Grant:

Yeah, so these are three different styles of interaction that we're all familiar with. When you're in a giving mindset, you're asking, "What can I do for you?" A taking mindset is the opposite, "What can you do for me?" A matching mindset is basically, "I'll do something for you if you do something for me." The evidence is pretty strong that we all have moments of giving, taking, and matching, but we all also have a style, which is how we treat most of the people most of the time.

Yeah, you can find some people ... we all know some people who are just consistently generous. We think of them as givers and then, probably some people who are a little more selfish in their typical interactions. I think of those people are takers. Most of us, by default, operate as matchers saying, "I don't wanna be too generous or too selfish, so I'm gonna play it safe."

Quid pro quo. It's fair." When I studied these styles, I was interested in how they affected success and so, I studied salespeople, engineers, medical students and gathered data of my own, as well as looking at a lot of evidence from other social scientists. The basic finding was that the givers were consistently the worst performers. They were the least productive, they were so busy doing other people's work that they ran out of time and energy to finish their own.

If you think about this in school, right? They were the ones who were helping their friends study instead of filling the gaps in their own knowledge, which meant they were just teaching the stuff that they already knew, and that was bad for them. So, then, people wonder, "If givers are the worst performers, who are the best?" I was pleasantly surprised to discover that it was not the takers. It is not the matchers either, it's the givers again. Yeah, the givers were overrepresented on both extremes of success. What tended to happen was, in the short-run, there was a trade off between doing what was best for their own

accomplishments and what served other people's interest, but, in the long-run, their reputations, the relationships that they built led to a lot of trust, which is great in an interdependent world where we have to collaborate, and work with, and rely on others constantly.

But, it was also a real learning edge and this was something I had not anticipated at all, that the time you spend helping other people solve their problems actually makes you a better problem-solver, often gives you knowledge that you can take back to solve your own problems. Yeah. I think, to take us back to the classroom, this is huge, that when we subject students to forced grading curves where they're basically pitted against their peers, it's a huge disincentive not to study together, not to share knowledge, and that's sad because we've known for decades that teaching other people is one of the best ways to learn. I think that, as we think about creating classroom structures where students can think about themselves as givers who share knowledge freely as opposed to takers who have to outperform their rival classmates, there's actually a learning advantage in that for all of us.

Nick Colangelo: I would think that one of the issues that people might have about being a giver, especially on a long-term basis, is that it could be a burnout situation where you're putting yourself forth so often. If this is so, how could someone take care of themselves, so that they don't give up on this idea of giving?

Adam Grant: Well, I think the mistake that a lot of people make is they feel like, "Look. If I wanna be generous, if I wanna be a giver, then I have to help all the people all the time with all their requests." The evidence is pretty clear that successful givers are thoughtful about the decisions they make around helping. So, they say, "Look, I'm gonna be more generous with fellow givers and matchers than I will be with takers. I'm going to make sure that I had blocked out time to make progress on my own work and my own goals in addition to trying to help other people with theirs. I'm gonna focus on giving in the places where I can have a unique impact and where I actually enjoy what I'm offering, so that giving is energising and efficient as opposed to distracting and exhausting." I think just being a little bit more thoughtful about when do you say yes. You realise that you don't have to say "no" to everyone and every "no" frees you up to say yes when it matters most.

Nick Colangelo: Did you know that high-ability students can go from high school to a major research university after only two years of high school? Our programme is the only early entrance programme at a public research intensive institution, accepting students from across the country and around the globe. Learn more about the Bucksbaum Early Entrance Academy at the Belin-Blank Centre at the University of Iowa College of Education by visiting belinblank.org/academy.

Right now, out in the bestseller and New York Times bestseller list is a book that you've coauthored with your friend and colleague, Sheryl Sandberg. It's called *Option B: Facing Diversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy* and it's a really inspiring and powerful book about Sheryl's view and with the unexpected death

of her husband. One of the things that Sheryl brings up is building resiliency in her children, so that they can face the situation, maybe just prepare for other situations that come their way. Can you share some of your insights and research about how do we build resiliency in children to face some of life's challenges?

Adam Grant:

I think, for me, the most powerful insight that came out of the work that Sheryl and I did was just crystallising how important the feeling of mattering is for kids. So, mattering is the belief that other people notice you, care about you, and rely on you and it's basically the answer to the question, "Do I have significance in the world?" We know, as parents, we know, as teachers, that it's important for kids to feel that they matter. We try to make sure that they know that by giving them undivided attention, offering them unconditional love, showing them how much we care about them. What we forget, though, is that mattering, especially, as kids move into adolescence, is also a feeling that other people depend on you, that they rely on you. I think one of the things that parents can do is they can actually help kids build their own strength and recognise that they can solve their own problems by asking them for advice.

This is something my wife and I have started doing with our kids from time to time is we'll talk about a dilemma that we're facing and say, "What do you think we should do in this situation?", or, "How would you recommend confronting this conflict?" When we do that, we're trying to show our kids that we trust them to come up with good solutions and that also they have the strength to, say, handle the same kinds of challenges that we might face. I think that's something that I would love to do more of and that I've seen a lot of parents benefit from.

Nick Colangelo:

Again, in the book, what I got is that there are certain things the individual could do to build resiliency. Then, you also talked about what others could do. So often, family and friends, at a time of difficulty, you feel like, "I wish I could do more, I'm not sure what to do." Do you have any words in terms of others around a person who is undergoing a difficult situation?

Adam Grant:

The mistake that most of us make, which is one that I've made over and over again throughout my life, is we don't know what to say or we don't wanna say the wrong things. So, we often say nothing at all and that means, as Sheryl experienced and observed, that, along with whatever pain the person is experiencing, there's also, then, a sense of isolation. Then, "Nobody's there for me, no one's there with me." I think the best thing that we can do is we actually try to acknowledge the pain and say, "Hey, I'm aware that this happened. I wanted to check in and see how you're doing." Then, after that, I was always the person who might check in once and then, let it go because you don't wanna remind somebody of the horrible experience they're going through, whether it's a loss, or an illness, or any other kind of adversity. What Sheryl taught me is you can't remind someone that they're going through something difficult.

They know that. So, by not bringing it up, by not checking in and following up, you end up really pushing them away as opposed to bringing them closer. So, the other mistake that I think is really common is I have said over and over again, "Please, let me know if there's anything I can do", because I don't know what the person necessarily needs or wants. I wanna make clear that I'm willing to help in whatever way I can and only recently did I learn that that actually shifts the burden to the person who's suffering, to not only know what they need, which they may not, but, also, to feel comfortable asking for it. Bruce Feiler wrote a wonderful article on this. He said, "Look. Instead of offering anything, just do something." It's amazing how much these small gestures can really matter, it might be as simple as bringing a home-cooked dinner over to somebody who's in a difficult situation, reaching out and letting them know that you're available if they wanna get together and suggesting a few specific times or to go to a movie, right?

Something concrete that you could actually do where they can say "yes" or "no, thanks" is way more powerful than just saying, "Let me know if there's something I can do."

Nick Colangelo:

That was one of the things that really impressed me in my readings is do something concrete, no matter how small and trust that. I'm sure that in writing this book with Sheryl it also became a personal journey for you. What did you learn about yourself in the course of this project?

Adam Grant:

Oh, I think one of the things that I learned is when somebody that I care about is in a tough position, I've overlooked ways that I could be helpful. We just talked about some, but one of the others is I learned from Sheryl that when you go through difficulty in your personal life, often, that has a spillover effect on your professional life.

So, for Sheryl, her confidence was shattered. She felt like she couldn't focus in a meeting after she lost her husband, Dave, and she couldn't do her job anymore along with all the pain at home and having to parent two grieving children.

Psychologists actually call this primary and secondary loss. You face an initial setback. Then, with that, comes a cascade of other challenges and confidence is very commonly one of those secondary losses. So, I guess, I had a chance to apply what I learned some months ago when I had a colleague, who works in another organisation in another state, but is in my field, she lost her husband.

I was thinking about reaching out, I didn't know her that well, but I'd written a recommendation letter for her a couple years earlier. You know with a recommendation letter, you almost never share it with the person you're writing about. I thought, "Well, maybe ... it never would've occurred to me before to do it, but, now, maybe if she's looking for meaning or purpose, if she's struggling with confidence, maybe this is something that can help on the margin." So, I just sent her a quick email and said, "Hey, I was thinking of you. I wanted to see how you're doing and I wrote this letter for you, I'm not even

sure if you ever knew that I wrote it, but I just wanted to let you know how highly I think of your work and hope it's something you plan to continue."

I got the nicest note back and she said that her husband had been a huge admirer of her work and her biggest cheerleader. She was now rededicating herself to it in order to make him proud and that was a big lesson for me.

Nick Colangelo:

I really appreciate you sharing that, I'm going to, the last question, go back to something that I started with, which was about you being a faculty member. You are the youngest person, tenured professor, at University of Pennsylvania Wharton School of Business. You've obviously been on what people might call a fast track and so forth. What's something that you really believed in when you started as a faculty member, as a teacher, that you no longer believe in the same way?

Adam Grant:

Oh, oh, that's interesting. What was I most wrong about? Well, I guess, one thing I'll say is I used to believe that every professor had a responsibility to do research, that if you were gonna stand up in front of a group of students and try to enrich their understanding of a topic, you should be so curious about that topic that you couldn't help but explore it in your own work. I've come to believe that that is a terrible, terrible idea and, at least the way research I universities are structured, that we make a colossal mistake by forcing great teachers to do research and great researchers to teach. If you look at the data, skill at research and teaching are uncorrelated. So, if you draw that two-by-two, yes, there are some people who excel at both, but it's just as common and maybe even more common for people to be great at one and not so effective at the other.

I think it's really unfortunate for students, but, also, for the world that you have some researchers who would love to do that full-time. But, they have to stand in front of a classroom of students who are not engaged and not learning as much as they could be. Meanwhile, you have some excellent teachers who can't keep jobs in universities because they don't produce enough research. I think there should be multiple tracks to tenure in universities that there should be a track where you only do research, teach classes. You're evaluated on a different standard than people who do both and there should be also be a way to have a long-term relationship with the university that is based solely or primarily on teaching. Then, people wonder, "Well, how do we know if teachers are any good?" Well, number one, we can build partnerships between the researchers and teachers and make sure that the knowledge being transmitted has been vetted by experts in the field, but, two, we know that you can evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher, in part, based on how well students master the material that they're supposed to be teaching.

There's a great study in Northwestern a few years ago, which, actually, indexed how good a teacher of an introductory class was by how well his students performed in the next level class in that subject.

We can get better at these kinds of measures. They'll never be perfect, but I think we have a real responsibility, as educators, to allow people to focus on the skills that they excel at and realise there's no reason to design a job and force it to be designed around two completely separate skills, so that's been a surprise for me in the evolution of my own beliefs.

Nick Colangelo: Yeah. One of the things that, just in listening to you, Adam, and reading some of your works is that even though you've had a number of successes and they've come quickly, it seems that you always have a balance of reflecting on your own life and on yourself personally and professionally. I think that that's just a tremendous gift that you carry with you, the ability to reflect no matter how outwardly successful you are. I wanna thank you for sharing your thinking.

Adam Grant: That's very generous of you, Nick, but, I have to say, what kind of psychologist would I be if I didn't, right?

Nick Colangelo: But, you have it. You have it, so I wanna thank you for sharing your insights on The Window and I wish you continued success in what you do professionally and in your life.

Adam Grant: Thank you. Right back at you and thank you for having me and asking such thoughtful questions.

Nick Colangelo: The Window is presented by the Connie Belin and Jacqueline N. Blank International Centre for Gifted Education and Talent Development, part of the College of Education at the University of Iowa. The Belin-Blank Centre is directed by Doctor Susan Assouline, The Window is produced by David Glove and Joshua Jacobs. Music for The Window was composed and performed by Daniel Gaglione and John Rapson. Opinions expressed by guests on The Window are their own and not necessarily those of the Belin-Blank Centre, the College of Education, or the University of Iowa.