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James Robert Lay:

Greetings and hello. I am James Robert Lay, and welcome to the 69th episode of the Banking on Digital growth podcast. Today's episode is part of the Exponential Insight series, and I'm excited to welcome Dan Sullivan to the show. Dan Sullivan is the co-founder and president of Strategic Coach. He is a visionary innovator and gifted conceptual thinker with over 40 years experience as a highly regarded speaker consultant, strategic planner and coach to entrepreneurial individuals and groups. Dan is the author of over 30 publications and books, including his most recent one, Who Not How, which I'm decided excited to discuss with Dan today. Welcome to the show, Dan.

Dan Sullivan:

James, first of all, it's a real treat to be with you, and I appreciate you introducing me to your audience.

James Robert Lay:

Well, I'm excited because I've learned a tremendous amount from you over the past four years being in Strategic Coach, and really excited to transfer some of the knowledge and thinking. I think probably one of the most helpful concepts that you've recently written in this book, Who Not How. But before we get there, I just want to hear from you. As we look ahead to the future, what are you most energized and excited about right now, whether that be personally or professionally?

Dan Sullivan:

Well, I think what got me into coaching in 1974 was my growing awareness that the microchip was equal to the printing press as a historical shift. I read a lot of articles that said if you're a really smart entrepreneur, the capabilities that you're going to get technologically, they're going to be really exponential for you. And I've always been a good coach, James. I mean, when I look at different things I did in my life, they tended, regardless of what the activity was, that I would become a good guide to other people.

Dan Sullivan:

I have a tremendous passion for kind of finding out what someone's unique at, and then kind of getting them to simplify their life so they just focus on, one, where they're really great. And secondly, where their greatest enjoyment comes from. So that's my background and I've been at it, it's going on 50 years and in a few years I'll be 50 years into it.

Dan Sullivan:

But one of the things I noticed along the line, I got very interested in technology. I have a lot of clients who are involved in advanced technology in different sectors. In your sector of the banking industry, I mean, FinTech is just amazing, some of the cross border, around the world type capabilities that are being developed.

Dan Sullivan:

What's always lagged is the human teamwork around exponential technology. And I said, "You know what I'd like to do. I'd like to create a exponential teamwork concept." Okay? And this was just something that played in the back of my mind for a couple of decades. And then it was actually Dean Jackson, who's wonderful, marvelous-

James Robert Lay:

Yes he is.

Dan Sullivan:

... internet marketing guru. We have a podcast together. And I had introduced to him a notion that procrastination, which is seen as a very bad thing, it's a source of guilt for a lot of people. It's a shameful secret to procrastinate. I had come to an understanding in myself that it was actually wisdom on my part that makes me procrastinate. And that is, I'm a big goal setter. I see things in the future and I set goals. But I noticed that when I set the goal, when it came time to take action, I wouldn't take the action.

Dan Sullivan:

And a lot of people consider this a failing, a fault, something to be guilty with. And I said, "What if it's wisdom?" What if the procrastination is telling me that it's a great goal, but I'm not the one to do it, and that instead of asking myself, "How am I going to get there?", I should ask, "Who's going to help me get there?", or "Who's actually going to achieve it for me?"

Dan Sullivan:

And it was like a lightning strike. First of all, all the work I'd done in Strategic Coach, going back to the 1970s, all of a sudden, it just sifted into place. Everything you're doing is to get entrepreneurs to be the visionary, to lay out the future for other people, and then put together teams of people who are who's, and they have much better skills than the entrepreneur to achieve it.

Dan Sullivan:

And Peter Diamandis, who is an advanced scout in almost every area of technology on the planet, we have a podcast series called Exponential Wisdom. And I just dropped this idea in the next podcast. And he said, "Oh my God. Who Not How. That's amazing." Well, they're Dean Jackson's words, and I said to Dean, "It's just which of us can get to the intellectual property lawyer first here." And Dean was great with it. I mean, it wasn't something that he was going to do anything with. And he said, " Well, run with it." You know?

Dan Sullivan:

So, it immediately went into the Strategic Coach program. I immediately created a small book just for Coach clients. And then I met Ben Hardy and Tucker Max. And I said, "I think this is a major market book, but I'm not a person who can write and package and market a major market book." And Ben and Tucker said, "Well, we'll do that for you." And they found Hay House, the publisher, and negotiated the contracts. And because of our fast start with this one, we now have a 10-year, 10-book contract, and I'm not going to do any of the writing. Ben's going to do it all.

Dan Sullivan:

And so something I'd dreamed about, I'd have major market books, but I was just... I mean, James, you know there's things you can dream all you want, but you're never going to be the person that does it.

James Robert Lay:

When I hear you unpack all of that wisdom and insight. You mentioned FinTech. And when I think about the banking space, historically up to this point it's been built around the physical world of brick and mortar sells, and then also from traditional broadcast marketing. And COVID has been a forcing function to move us into this digital space in financial services. But a lot of financial brand leaders, whether it's so the leadership team, the marketing team, the sales team, they're asking the question, "How are we going to do this?" And when you think about like asking how, why is that a limiting question that could lead to some very dangerous places?

Dan Sullivan:

Well, I think it's basically because your thinking doesn't go any further than your previous experience, James. You know, you've done this, you've done this. But the reason why you're stopped from achieving the higher goal is that you've created a higher need for capability than your experience has. You don't have them around you. They're not your experiences. And a lot of people give up on goals simply because they get that procrastination feeling. And I said, "Pay attention to your procrastination. It's your wisdom saying, it's a great goal. But now start spreading out and creating networks [inaudible 00:08:52]."

Dan Sullivan:

So the way that I see this moving forward as a vision of the future is that you have this chicken and egg kind of relationship between exponential technology. I mean, Zoom is a full dose over the last 10 months of what exponential technology can do. But then you have to have exponential teamwork. You can't have people doing the how's they're no good at if you're interacting with exponential technology. Every person has to be in their unique ability.

Dan Sullivan:

That's one of a fundamental concept in Strategic Coach. I just want a network where everybody's just doing the thing that they're great at, they're confident at, and their unique ability interacts with other people. So you have networks of people who basically take advantage of what's essentially network technology.

James Robert Lay:

It's interesting. You mentioned this idea of unique ability and focusing on the few things that you're the best at. Because when I think about what banks are doing with digital, they're adding more things to the pot, more checklists, more to-do items. But that's adding more complexity. So can you unpack this idea of unique ability and unique ability teamwork? Because I think what it boils down to is getting really clear about a few things, right?

Dan Sullivan:

Yeah. And it's historical. The problem that we're experiencing today is something that was historically very valuable. So I was born in 1944 two weeks before the Normandy invasion, and everybody was trained to be a great how in those days. The economy was a factory economy. It

was either blue collar factory, or it was white collar, had offices that were very, very large. All the institutions of society tended to be pyramidal. I remember, I grew up in Northern Ohio, which was big auto country. It was the big three. And then you had the big steel factories. It was really very, very industrialized.

Dan Sullivan:

And I remember once just reading that from the CEO level of General Motors to the factory floor was 18 management levels. Okay? And a little later when I became a coach, I said, "You know, these big pyramids, these big corporate, bureaucratic pyramids, they're just really crummy microchips." Those are really bad microchips because the CEO tries to send a message down. The messages are always going down and they get distorted through each level of management. So usually by the time they get down 10 levels, they mean just the opposite of what was intended. I said, "The reason why we created microchips is to get rid of these really crappy pyramidal-"

James Robert Lay:

But that was personified in the movie Ford Versus Ferrari.

Dan Sullivan:

Oh yeah. Remember he was sitting in the office and it took five people to deliver the letter to-

James Robert Lay:

Pass it around.

Dan Sullivan:

Yeah.

James Robert Lay:

And Carroll Shelby sitting there and he's watching. He's like, "I've seen this letter touch five hands." Let's talk about all of the inefficiencies there. So when we think about this idea of inefficiency, you mentioned FinTech before and traditionally speaking in the banking space, particularly from the lens of incumbents, those that have built their world in the physical, I think we've looked at FinTech incorrectly as a competitor. And when you think about the concept of Who Not How, you can't look at things from a competitor. You have to start looking at things from a collaborative lens. Can you expand on that thought?

Dan Sullivan:

Yeah. Well, I'll give you an example. So one of the chapters in Who Not How is on a 20-year coach client named Paul Heiss. Paul is a manufacturer out of Milwaukee who about 15 years ago started up factories near Shanghai. He had three factories, and what he does, he does component parts for really, really big product manufacturers like Caterpillar Peterbilt, global manufacturers.

Dan Sullivan:

And things were going along. He did really well. He said, actually, if you're an American and in China, the Chinese trust you more than they do other Chinese. So he did a great deal of business and he had good labor force. But then the tariff wars has started about two years ago,

and it took all his profits away. You know what I mean? It was 25% tariff and your profits are gone.

Dan Sullivan:

So he said, "I really have to shift quickly." And he said, "I got to get to India because they have a lower cost labor force, and it's an English-speaking business culture." You know, he couldn't be choosy, but that was what. And he said, "But I don't know how to do it." So we have, as you know, one of the go-to thinking tools in Strategic coach is the impact filter. And that's how to lay out a project so that the person that you're telling just totally gets why you want it, why it's so important, the fact that you're totally sold on it. And it gives you the measurements that this is what the project looks like when it's finished.

Dan Sullivan:

He sent one to the high trade commissioner from India in Shanghai, and he said, "I want to build a factory in China." He sent it, he didn't even talk to him in person. He just send it to him by fax, or sent it as a PDF. And the high commissioner says, "I know exactly who you need to talk to." He put through a phone call to that person, and that first interchange between Paul Heiss and the trade commissioner was duplicated six times in about a two week period.

Dan Sullivan:

Three months later, he had his factory, and in the first six months, he was profitable with a brand new factory. And he's 60 years old, he's in the area of about 60 years old. And he said, "I just made myself 20 again." He said, "For the rest of my life, I'd never do another how."

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. I want to come back to that point because you mentioned you're born in 1944, but then you also mentioned something here that I thought was fascinating. You talked about the tool, the impact filter. And really when we think about Who Not How and collaboration, for example, it might be with a competitor because-

Dan Sullivan:

We actually put this in the book. People can actually see the impact filter and what it looks like in the book.

James Robert Lay:

Because collaboration really yields to a world of abundance, and there's enough to go around for everyone. But it comes down to this idea of the impact filter, getting real clear, gaining clarity, but then also communicating clarity. That requires us to do something. It requires us to stop, to pause, to think, and escape the doing that so many of us are addicted to because, I look at the world, I call these the four digital growth operating environments. You can be learning, you can be thinking, you can be doing, or you can be reviewing. But you can only be in one place at one time. How can we escape? How can we create that space in time to stop doing, and really, to use your words, to create space and time to think about your thinking?

Dan Sullivan:

Yeah, well I think, first of all, I have a very narrow focus and that is that the only people who are in Strategic Coach, in the program are successful, talented, ambitious entrepreneurs. We have

very, very high income requirements, personal income requirements, before someone can come in. And so I'm just dealing with one kind of human being and that's been true for, well, the program's been 31 years. And before that I did 15 years of one-on-one coaching.

Dan Sullivan:

But all the time, I'm just looking at this one type of human being, and I think there's a lesson in that. And that is, don't try to be everything to everybody. Just pick your type of person that you're going to be a hero to. So my goal for the entrepreneurs that I coach personally, and then we have 16 other coaches, I said, "We want to be heroes to these people. As a result of coach, we want them to bring in their complexity their complexities and leave with simplicity." Okay. We want them to be proud of what they accomplished during the last 90 days, so that their confidence from the last 90 days gives them a greater sense of commitment and courage for the next 90 days. And just repeat that.

Dan Sullivan:

So, James, during 2021, I have 32 entrepreneurs who are back for their 30th year. I've seen them every quarter for 120 quarters, and every quarter they take a job. It's like going through the locks of the canal. Every quarter, the water raises up and they go into the next lock. And I would say with the vast majority of these individuals, if they hadn't been in Coach, they'd be retired.

James Robert Lay:

I'm glad you brought that up because this was the point that I had wanted to come back to. You mentioned being born in 1944. And if there's one thing that I've learned from you, it's always make your future bigger than your past. And when I think about the leadership in the banking world right now, they're letting opportunity pass them by because they look at, "Oh, I only have three more years" or, "Oh, I only have five more years." But that's deadly. How can you apply that thinking to make your future always bigger than your past?

Dan Sullivan:

Well, it's easier if you're an entrepreneur, because you're the person who does the hiring and firing. So just don't fire yourself. You know? And people, it's really weird entrepreneurs separate themselves from the normal way of making a living early in their career, but when it gets close to what they think should be the end of their career, they start joining golf clubs with people who worked in corporations all their life. And I happen to feel that retirement is a deadly thought, that the moment you started thinking about retiring, your body takes notice, and it starts sending the parts back to the factory. You know what I mean? Anyone who's ever been in my workshop, you bring up the R word and it'll be the last. You'll be so embarrassed in the next five minutes, you'll never mention that again,

James Robert Lay:

Death is the exit then.

Dan Sullivan:

You're giving death assistance. Don't give death assistance, you know?

James Robert Lay:

But I think you're onto something with this. Particularly as we're moving into a whole new world of opportunity, we're going to be living longer. We're going to be working longer, and that creates opportunities in the banking space too, because people are going to be banking longer. And we're going to have to transform the way we think about money. So I know you mentioned Peter Diamandis earlier. Great book out by him, *The Future Is Faster Than You Think*. What are some of those things that we should just be thinking about that are going to be changing at the macro level, that as leaders we just need to be aware of?

Dan Sullivan:

Well, interestingly enough, I'm a political junkie. So my mom got me hooked on politics in 1952 for Eisenhower. Eisenhower was my first president, and I've followed every election in the States. And I'm American. I live in Canada, but I'm red, white, and blue. I'm an American. And so a big era of history, the second half of the 20th century began with the end of the Second World War, and it really, really ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The US was kind of the guarantor of a lot of things in military security. But the biggest thing was they kept open all the trade routes with the US. The US Navy is the greatest military force in the history of the world. I mean, still is. I mean, one carrier group that the Americans have, a super carrier with maybe 10 other boats, is equal to most people's military.

Dan Sullivan:

But the only reason why the US was financing the rest of the world, the only reason why they were protecting the rest of the world, was because the Soviets were promoting a different system. So what the US did is they created a wealth curtain around the Soviet Union. The Soviets created an iron curtain, but the US created a wealth curtain. And then in '91, the Soviet Union without anybody's permission, quit. But everybody else who had been receiving the benefit of American support assistance, they were kind of like the adult supervisor for the world, they said, "Don't tell the Americans that it's over."

Dan Sullivan:

So here we are, 1991, we're 19 years down the road. And it's not just one president, but I think starting with Clinton and then going to Bush and then Obama and Trump, and now thing, they can't pay the costs for this anymore. Americans won't put up. We've neglected a lot of the infrastructure of America, and I think what's going to happen is there's a huge pullback and America is going to be a place where everybody wants their money.

Dan Sullivan:

This is what I'm seeing. Talented people in the world want their children to grow up in America. I think every year they do a worldwide poll. They say, "If you could live someplace else, where would it be?" They survey about 200, 300 million people, and 200 million of them if they had a chance, they'd moved to the US with all the negativity that's in mainstream media, nothing like a green card. I'll tell you nothing like an American green card.

Dan Sullivan:

And so, on the one hand, borders are going up. Okay. So COVID is a good example. I'm an American citizen. I live in Toronto. If I go across the border into the United States and I come back, I individually quarantine for 14 days. That's a border. That's a border. And you're going to see border. All the European Union countries, there's going to be borders.

Dan Sullivan:

So physical borders are going back up, but FinTech jumps over the borders. So what you have is a bordering of the entire physical world. But in the digital world, you can cross over those barriers. The only question is, do you have the mindset? Do you have the goals? Do you have the vision? Do you have the willingness to be great at teamwork with other people who may live time zones away? And you're communicating with them every day, James, the way the two of us are communicating.

Dan Sullivan:

So that's what I see. The whole notion of globalization, it will only happen in the digital world. It will not happen in the physical world.

James Robert Lay:

And that right there I see in the banking space is really the most transformative, and the biggest opportunity to stop looking at FinTech as the competition. Because FinTech has its own challenges in regards to gaining eyeballs. They need eyeballs. Traditional incumbent banks have the eyeballs, but they lack the capability. So that's a capability upgrade in and of itself to work with the FinTech, and everyone wins.

James Robert Lay:

But it all comes down to really getting real clear of what value we're looking to create. To use your words, who do we want to be a hero to, besides getting the book, and this has been such a great conversation today, getting a book on Amazon. What is one recommendation that you could recommend to bankers going forward to apply the thinking of Who Not How?

Dan Sullivan:

Yeah, I mean, there's a very simple exercise, James, we do. YOU have a sheet of paper. It has a little circle in the middle and an outer circle. Okay? And in the little circle, take a metric that's really important to you. Revenues, EBITDA, whatever your metric is, and put it in the center and put your present highest score for that. You know, historically you're at the score. And then the outer circle represents 10 times that, okay? And if you're a banker say, "Okay, we're going to go 10 times."

Dan Sullivan:


And then between the two circles are five boxes. But you can't do the how's. You have to get five who's who help you go 10 times. Okay? So if you're a mainland banker and you're a bricks and mortar bank, or even though you're doing a lot of digital work, you're still geographically located, probably two or three of those who's are going to be FinTech collaborators.

James Robert Lay:

That's exactly right. Dan, this has been such an amazing conversation. If anyone wants to follow up, just to say, hello, connect with you, what's the best way for them to do that in this borderless digital world that we're all living in?

Dan Sullivan:

Yeah. Well, strategiccoach.com. We're just passionate about that part of the global future to which entrepreneurs are going to be the creators and the collaborators. I've been at it for 47



years, and I just put together my game plan for 2044, when I'm a hundred years old. Our network of collaborating entrepreneurs in Strategic Coach, our impact that year, our economic impact that year, is going to be \$15 trillion.

James Robert Lay:

It's amazing. It's amazing. Absolutely.

Dan Sullivan:

A lot of them are going to be FinTech entrepreneurs. A lot of my entrepreneurs are going to be FinTech entrepreneurs.

James Robert Lay:

Definitely. Definitely. Dan, thanks so much for joining me on another episode of Banking on Digital Growth. This has been wonderful.

Dan Sullivan:

Yeah. This is a real gift. Thank you, James.

James Robert Lay:

As always, and until next time, be well, do good and wash your hands.