

## Transcript - Richard Savage - Should we be trying to have more conflict at work?

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# Transcript

Ross D 00:07

Hello! You're listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast, developed to help you build your leadership and management skills. I'm Ross Dickey.

Nathalie 00:14

And I'm Nathalie Nahai.

Ross D 00:15

This week we're asking, should we be trying to have more conflict at work? What is conflict? Should we really be trying to avoid it, or can it be helpful? To answer these questions, we're speaking to conflict coach Richard Savage.

Ross D 00:25

Richard is an entrepreneur with a 15 year career in advertising. He now works as managing director of Savage McBeth. He trains people to manage conflict at work. He's also a self-trained butcher and pilot.

Ross D 00:36

Hello Richard, how's it going?

Richard 00:38

It's fine, thank you very much. It sounds quite bizarre, that introduction, doesn't it?

Ross D 00:45

Well, you have a you have quite an interesting CV, which possibly we'll get into later. But to get us started, can we define our terms? So what do we mean by conflict and how is that different to negotiation?

Richard 00:59

Okay. Well, people, I think, associate conflict with bad things, negative relationships, confrontation. And in my experience, and what we're trying to help people do is to see conflict as an opportunity, really.

Richard 01:14

If you imagine you walk into a supermarket, deciding what you're going to have for Sunday lunch, and you're staring at a, I don't know, big pile of premium-priced vegetables, and, you know, you are necessarily in conflict because you're deciding, will they satisfy my needs?

Richard 01:30

Am I prepared to pay the price that I'm being offered them at? Is there enough there to cater for my needs? So I've got all these variables at play, but I would see that as a conflict. And with any conflict in that sort of situation, we see opportunity because, armed with the right skills, you can navigate through conflict and often get more value out of whatever exchange that might be than what you might have perhaps gone in to get.

Ross D 01:58

Yeah, I think it is often framed as something that's negative, something to be avoided or managed in some way. I think that there is a, obviously in an organisational context, you wouldn't want people just going around fighting all the time, but it's also not something perhaps that you'd want to completely suppress and get rid of.

Ross D 02:18

So what are some sort of examples of more productive conflict? Often sort of referred to as that you think of like creative abrasion if they bring these two forces together, which might be in opposition, but ultimately yield something that is more positive.

Richard 02:33

I mean, in a very simple and usually commercial context, I would suggest that conflict is simply an imbalance between one or two or more parties' preferred outcome, something, this is what I want to get, and someone else says, well, this is what I want to get.

Richard 02:54

It's just a question of whether or not you can trade or persuade each other that you can come to some sort. They're not normally abrasive using your word. The difference, that imbalance, it doesn't have to be abrasive.

Nathalie 03:10

Do you think, because I'm thinking here also in broader terms, in terms of our readiness to defend a position and to lock horns with other people in the way in which on public social channels that seems to be the preferred route, the sense of I'm going to dig my heels in throughout an opinion and sod the rest of you, I'm wondering, do you think that we've gotten worse at constructive conflict?

Nathalie 03:32

Do you think that our ideas around conflict are much more, well much less, reconciliatory than perhaps it used to be?

Richard 03:40

Is that a word, Reconciliatory? It is now. Fantastic. I love it. Yes, I think it is. Um, I think that we see, um, I'm just going to ask that again. I'm sorry. I'm so excited about the word that.

Nathalie 03:55

I'm going to have to go check that afterwards and say, actually, did I make that up? Yeah, so just the idea that now we think of conflict as digging our heels in, defending our position at all costs, and of course that there is that sense of defence within the idea of conflict, but I think previously, before social media, we might have been more open to the idea that conflict could be constructive, and it's not just about locking horns and defending one's own position, it's also about figuring out stuff, coming to a different conclusion, perhaps thinking about a more generative outcome.

Nathalie 04:27

So has our idea of conflict changed or we've got now a very diminished idea of what it can yield?

Richard 04:33

Well, if I can answer that question slightly tangentially, because what we're wading into here is emotional intelligence and the lack of it, quite frankly, because we are naturally quite poor, but oddly enough, it's a skill that we can learn.

Richard 04:49

And I think people's emotions tend to kind of wed them to their position and that they see any flexibility in that position as a weakness. And therefore, they protect it. And sometimes they protect perhaps a strategy to achieve something like their life depended on it and utterly destroyed the relationship that they're in when simply they might have gone, do you know what, maybe there's another way I could tackle this.

Richard 05:21

Maybe there's a way that we can both kind of achieve what we want to get. And you can look at it very simply in the context of, I don't know, friends deciding where they're going to go out for dinner.

Richard 05:31

The objective for some of those friends might be to refuel, just to get some food on board, because it happens to be in the evening, but for someone else, they want to go and have a mad night out. And for somebody else, they might want to catch up and discuss, I don't know, a problem or a challenge that they've got with their friends.

Richard 05:49

But they're all trying to kind of agree around an overall objective of meeting somewhere for a meal at a particular time. But even the time gets into, you know, if it suits somebody to meet at seven o'clock, but someone else has got a work commitment or a challenge or something, they can't get there till eight.

Richard 06:06

The whole thing can turn out into a really tense exchange between friends where, and I, you know, I listen to my own grown up children sort of go, oh, such and such is such a tosser. You know, they won't come to where, you know, they won't come

to, I don't know, Soho to meet me for a drink but I'm not going to finish until 6.30.

Richard 06:25

And often, you know, you just need to, or if I could have cold water over these things and just go, everybody take a step back, let's just have a think about what's going on here. Do you really care?

Richard 06:36

Can't you go three stops on the tube and meet them near their work? Can't you rearrange the time to, you know, and it's just about this sort of, I suppose, calm, it's what we call professional ambivalence, which is a kind of technical term for kind of not giving a shit.

Richard 06:55

But I've never come up with a fancier word for using that.

Ross D 06:59

So to dig into the more politically correct, but professional ambivalence, what does that look like? Because you can't be completely ambivalent, or I guess you can be, but I don't think a lot of people would want to be ambivalent about the work that they do, and often do care deeply about these kinds of situations that lead us into conflict in the workplace.

Ross D 07:23

So it'd be great if you could expand a bit more on what professional ambivalence looks like.

Richard 07:30

Sure. We say to people in negotiations that it is a very, and people are very reluctant to do this, but we say that it's a very powerful thing to do to tell people what you want. And whilst that might seem like the most blindingly obvious thing to do, people are very reluctant to tell people what they want.

Richard 07:50

They're very reluctant to be specific about what they want because they feel like it's a weakness to declare their intent. But the reality of not telling people what you want is that they don't have a Scooby-Doo what you want, so they have to guess.

Richard 08:06

You don't get it. Well, you don't. And this happens in real life, grown up commercial situations, as well as more domestic, lower key sort of things. So what I would be saying to people is, tell people what you want, but don't tell them how badly you want it.

Nathalie 08:31

Okay.

Richard 08:31

Right? Because if you tell them how badly you want it, you're transferring the power in their favour. They can then use that insight to create leverage. Because if you want something really bad, you're going to pay more to get what you want.

Richard 08:46

Right? But if I just know what you want, then that's useful. And if I was in a commercial situation coming back to the professional ambivalence point, you'd say, look, I really hope we can do a deal here.

Richard 08:59

I've got this new product. I'd love for you to be trialing it. I'd love to get distribution through all of your store estate that you might want to sort of trial it first. But I have no flexibility on this price, or I don't know, this timing for the deal.

Richard 09:16

And then you don't say anything, and you wait, and you let them process that information. And they can then decide. You see, if you've planned well for your exchange, and we'll come on to finally negotiation, I guess, soon, but you go in to do that.

Richard 09:35

If you've done good planning, if you understand where your pitch point is, i.e. where you can credibly pitch the different things that you want to achieve from the deal, and more importantly, you've worked out where your walkaway points are,

you're in a much stronger position, because the reality is a deal can only be done between your walkaway point and their walkaway point.

Richard 10:00

Do you see what I mean? Because as long as you're confident of the point below which you won't go, that might be a price, that might be a volume thing, that might be a resource issue, then it's very easy to say, oh no, I couldn't agree to that, because that's below my minimum.

Richard 10:20

And that ambivalence, that sort of, well, you know, I don't mind, I really want to do a deal with you. But if we can't do a deal at that, then we can't do a deal, never mind. Move on.

Ross D 10:31

So that's kind of what conflict looks like in terms of negotiation. You mentioned defining negotiation. So could you offer a definition of negotiation separately?

Richard 10:42

Yeah, sure. I mean, I just think it's worth kind of pointing out that negotiation is a trading process, right? So you have to exchange value. And what we think at Savage Macbeth, which is really important, is that you don't have to necessarily start trading value to get what you want in a deal.

Richard 11:02

It might be that you can persuade the other side, or it might be that you can influence them. And you can use techniques like scarcity or authority or social proof to influence the other side in favor of your product or your service or whatever you're trying to do.

Richard 11:21

So just recognise that negotiation, whilst can add value to a relationship and create value in a deal, necessarily means you have to give something up in order to get what you want.

Nathalie 11:36

So there also has to be a willingness going in then to think, okay, we're going to, we're going to have a reciprocal exchange. So I think often it's kind of the winner takes all mentality, this sort of individualistic sense of I've got to dominate this negotiation.

Nathalie 11:49

I want to come out on top the winner. Um, and clearly if you're going in with that mentality, it's quite different in terms of clarity, you'll talk about, about the walkaway points. I think there's, there's also that question of how do you reeducate people to realise that negotiation can sometimes include compromise and that that's not a weakness.

Nathalie 12:09

It's not a thing to shy away from as long as you're meeting your minimum criteria that you set, set up in advance. How do we reeducate people to think about negotiation as a more reciprocal process?

Richard 12:21

Well, we, I mean, I would suggest that you look to, we have three foundations for approaching any form of conflict. Can I talk about this now?

Nathalie 12:34

Yeah, go for it. Perfect time.

Richard 12:36

We have three foundations that we use to underpin any preparation or any execution of any form of conflict, commercial conflict usually. And they're threefold. They are objectivity, their empathy, and their creativity.

Richard 12:53

Objectivity is all about really understanding what do I want? What am I trying to achieve? Not how am I going to achieve it, but what am I trying to achieve? How badly do I want it? Is it a realistic expectation?

Richard 13:08

Do I have all the facts and insight available to give myself the best chance of achieving that? We're normally reasonably good at that because I think we charge into these kind of situations knowing what we want.

Richard 13:20

What we're terrible at and we're bad at as human beings is the next one, which is empathy. And you're essentially doing the reverse exercise. You're going, what do they want? What do they need? How do they feel?

Richard 13:34

What's important to them? And do they want to make this work? So when you're confronted, as you just said, Nathalie, with what I would call effectively a bully or someone that's typically quite intransigent, that someone that pushes their way asserts or coerces their way to a solution, if you ask them questions and you seek to address their challenges and their needs, then they tend, and there are plenty of exceptions to this, but they tend to start to sympathise with your position because it's just a natural human thing, right?

Richard 14:15

I mean, if I care about you, if I'm interested in what's important to you, then I can then re-address my pitch to you and address your needs rather than just mine. And the third of these three is creativity.

Richard 14:31

And that's really about how can we create the right context? How can we satisfy both parties? Is there a more creative way to address the issues from both sides? Because it's very, very rare that both sides want something completely different, sorry, they want something identical to each other, identical terms.

Richard 14:53

You know, they've all got different issues. You can look at any conflict, this ghastly Russian Ukraine crisis, Brexit, political situations, any commercial deal. There's a thing in retail, which we call the uneasy tension in retail, and it's the relationship between the retailer, like the shop selling the gear, the brand owner, the people that are making the gear for the retailers to sell, and that poor soul, the shopper, who has their hard-earned cash sitting in their purse.

Richard 15:29

And the three parties in this relationship, and it's a very close relationship, have fundamentally different objectives. The retailer wants to flog more gear, the brand owner wants to stand out in amongst a competitive situation, and the shopper wants choice and value.

Richard 15:45

And they don't mesh very well together, those three, which means that different parties, probably not the shopper, have to give a bit. They have to concede a little bit in order to achieve those things, and then satisfy the shopper, because ultimately, it's the shopper that's paying for both of the other two parties in it.

Richard 16:06

So objectivity, empathy, and creativity goes a long way to try and soften up that relationship, not in a weak way. So collaborative negotiating, which is what we would... It's not about holding hands and skipping through the daisies.

Richard 16:21

It's hard-nosed commercial stuff, but it's commercial deals that get done that protect or build the relationship so that next time you can create even more value in the future, because that's the cost of doing it the way that you suggested, Nathalie, with the people that push back and try to win at all costs.

Ross D 16:40

What if I could ask what this looks like in the context of management? So to what extent is the role of a manager to manage and or promote conflict within their team? So to give you an example of why I'm asking this, I work closely with Ross Garner.

Ross D 16:57

There's another post on this podcast. And we were recently having a sort of full team call about a project that we were working on. And Ross and I had different perspectives on how to approach the project.

Ross D 17:12

We're both quite passionate that we were right, that our ideas were right. I think to sort of come back to sort of what the objective was, we're both trying to make the project as good as it could be.

Ross D 17:21

But I think there's also a slight risk that for the newer members of the team, it just looks like we're fighting and taking a swing at each other for its own sake. And I think, you know, we've worked together for six years now, we know each other really well.

Ross D 17:34

And so there's a sort of degree of comfort there where we can have these conversations and not worry about how the other person's... I mean, you do think about how the other person's feeling, but we both trust that we're headed in the same direction and we're doing this to make the thing as good as it can be.

Ross D 17:51

So how do you go about creating those kind of conditions for productive conflict as a manager and sort of setting a tone where that is permitted within your team?

Richard 18:00

Well, I mean, you've introduced a really interesting situation that comes up a lot in negotiation, which is essentially a difference of opinion, right? You think your idea is better than his idea. He thinks his idea is better than your idea.

Richard 18:14

And there are very few ways to resolve that. I mean, you can't negotiate difference of opinions, right? Because the only way to do it in our view is to just for the same, if my football team is going to be your football team, you think your football team is going to be my football team.

Richard 18:32

The reality is we can't resolve that. There's no rational way to do it, besides proving to him that he's rubbish and you're brilliant, which may well have been the case given that you're hosting this podcast.

Richard 18:49

So then what you have to do is have a bet, essentially. I mean, that's what insurance is. If you imagine, I say to the world, I think my house is going to burn down. An insurance company says, we don't think it is.

Richard 19:03

We don't continue to argue the point. They just say, give me 500 quid a year. And if it does, we'll rebuild it, right? So I'm on sale or return, or same with trials. And so in your situation, the way to resolve that, well, there's a couple of things that you can do.

Richard 19:20

First of all, you can hand over the responsibility of a casting decision to management. You go to somebody else and you say, we're going to present our two ideas and we'd like you to choose one so that we can move on.

Richard 19:33

The downside of that is that you're going to end up with a disappointed party and potentially a resentful one. And it's quite a divisive thing to do. And both sides will be looking at the relationship that you have with the person you're asking to make the casting decision.

Richard 19:48

But essentially it is a process of arbitration or mediation. The flip side and the responsible side, because I think it's a healthy thing, this conflict, by the way, because you're both striving to be better, not necessarily than each other, but you want for the best.

Richard 20:04

So it's in the interest, if I own the brand and I have you two battling your way through a sort of creative debate, then it has to be in my interest that that's existing in the business. So I love that kind of conflict.

Richard 20:19

But what I would do, which to some might sound like the abyss of compromise, but I'd call it testing or trialing, is I would say, okay, guys, why don't we test them? Why don't we create two different programs?

Richard 20:33

Let's agree a metric for success. Let's find out what the audience thinks because they, after all, are the casters of the decision I would have thought. But I think if I come back to what I think is also the question is, is conflict a good thing anyway?

Richard 20:48

And how does management sort of do it? Is that I promote it, but you have to be super careful around management of the kind of emotions within it, because for the reasons we talked about before, people's toys get thrown out of the cot quite early and people protect their positions and then the whole thing ends in tears.

Ross D 21:07

Is there a way to create structure around that, because there's a risk, I guess, when you have conflicting opinions that you just go back and forth endlessly and no decision is made, and how do you put guardrails up around conflict so that it's managed in a productive way?

Richard 21:26

Excellent question, Ross. You've given the structure for it. I mean, trying to prove rights and wrongs is a divisive thing to do and a difficult thing to do. I mean, I've given different jobs. I'd say, look, you can do this and you can do that.

Richard 21:40

And let's have some sort of creative forum where we can discuss each other's ideas and help make them better for all of us. But where you are in a situation where that sort of conflict is going to arise, you have to give them a structure and a set of skills around that to help them sort of navigate, which brings me rather neatly back to objectivity, empathy, and creativity.

Richard 22:03

Because, you know, you say to people, what are you actually trying to achieve here? And it might be that if you dig deeper and sort of fusing this example on you, that one of you wants to be seen to be better than the other one.

Richard 22:18

I mean, sometimes that people have different ambitions and trying to understand what their objectives are in the first place, you know, can often help resolve the situation. Because if that's the case, then what management will do, if you're not management, but if management do to kind of try and deal with that, is that you promote someone, you follow someone, you give people different responsibilities, and you kind of separate the negatives.

Richard 22:45

But it's okay to have, you want to protect the creativity that comes from that as well.

Nathalie 22:51

So many things to think about on this one. I think the creativity piece, there's also I think the individual capacity for friction, like how much can you handle? And I think one of the things that you mentioned at the very beginning of this conversation was emotional intelligence.

Nathalie 23:06

And some of the goals that we might have, for instance, say Ross and I want to be perceived as better than the other, but I just want to have an interesting conversation, that's mostly my goal, and not screw up too badly.

Nathalie 23:16

That's like the bar I've set. But if there are sort of motivations that are perhaps even unknown to ourselves, then that's a territory we're talking about, which is quite difficult to reach. So it might be that someone has a low self-esteem and they're trying to prove themselves through various means.

Nathalie 23:35

But if they're unaware of that being one of their primary motivations, then it gets quite complex.

Richard 23:40

Yeah, it does. And I mean, it's really interesting that all the more reason to have a sort of structure to this, particularly for people that lack confidence. And we work with a lot of people who are nervous, you know, who don't have the confidence.

Richard 24:00

And so, and it's a really odd thing, this, right? Everything we're talking about right now isn't taught, is it? I mean, it's so big. It's in our lives, every minute of every day, pretty much. Never mind doing big commercial deals, you know, and I've traveled the world working with some of the biggest companies in the planet, doing multi, multi gazillion-pound deals.

Richard 24:22

But then I come home and, you know, my daughter's having a fight with, I don't know, her landlord or something. And the problem is exactly the same. It's an identical sort of issue. And what happens is that because we're not taught any structure or skill, we default to what we intuitively think is the right way.

Richard 24:43

And what we intuitively or genetically think is the right way gets us into some quite interesting psychological territory around things like the amygdala hijack, you know, this kind of tendency to, in the face of a conflict situation, to fight or to flight, right?

Richard 25:01

And there's a freeze bit in the middle as well, of course, you know, where we're just going to utterly dumpstruck and not sure what to do. But for people in weaker positions, they will often, and out of their control, particularly if they're emotionally oriented, and let's face it, Will Smith's about the best example of this in the last few weeks at the Oscars, they will do what is genetically natural to them and go and punch someone or shout at them or have a massive straw.

Richard 25:34

But almost worse than that are the people that cower away, that hide from the confrontation, who have a perfectly reasonable claim. But because they're being dominated by or aggressively talked to by or perhaps feel weak because, sadly, because of a gender issue, an ethnic issue, a seniority issue, will shrink away from it and will flight from a situation before they've actually had a chance to go, that's not right, or I don't agree, or there must be another way that we can tackle this.

Richard 26:14

If you think about children, because they're our greatest inspiration for negotiating. I mean, they can stir up some conflict as well. But when we're about seven years old, which I'm sorry to say to you, too, is where you peaked at your negotiation skills naturally, you know, my son didn't come up to me and say, do you know what, Dad?

Richard 26:36

It's bowl me outside. I feel like I need a little bit of a sugar fix. I need to refresh the palette to get me in the mood for, you know, lunch or anything. He goes, I want an ice cream, fat boy. Sometimes you didn't always say fat boy, but, you know, I want an ice cream.

Richard 26:52

They are, talk about being specific. They have absolute.

Ross D 26:56

Where's the empathy in that?

Richard 26:58

Well, there is no empathy, and they don't have any empathy, which is why they're really good at it. But when you say no, they don't love you any less. They actually go, let's get started.

Nathalie 27:14

That's too icy.

Richard 27:15

So they go away, they reflect for what seems like a nanosecond, and they come back and say, I'm still going to need that ice cream. And then you say no again because you're a responsible parent. And then there's a moment at which you go, hang on a second.



Richard 27:33

I do want to carry on watching the telly, but the freezer's just there, right? And there's a box of Magnum ice creams in there, so I can get the little prick off my case, you know.

Nathalie 27:46

parenting tics.

Richard 27:47

for indulging for 20 seconds, for indulging 20 seconds of my life. So I get up off the sofa, I get the ice cream out, I go, there you go, my darling boy. And all I've done at that point, right? And this is what we do in our negotiations in real life.

Richard 28:04

All I have achieved in that single moment is a world of pain because I've taught a fertile little mind that for relatively little effort, he can have whatever the hell he wants. And then I'm screwed for the next 15 years.

Richard 28:23

Right? And this is what we do in our deals. When people say towards the end of the deals normally, oh, can I have that? And all we're doing is we're blinded by the finish line. We're going, I'm going to get away with it.

Richard 28:33

I'm going to be taking some good news back to my boss. I'm going to nail this deal here. And they go, oh, by the way, can I just have this, can you give slightly improved payment terms? And go, yeah, yeah, yeah, no problem at all.

Richard 28:46

Oh, good. By the way, can you show you another 2% of that deal that we did? Yeah, yeah, of course. You don't mind covering the legal costs. No problem, no problem at all. And we've suddenly killed a ton of margin out of the deal.

Richard 28:57

And that's what we do. But worse than that is that we do what I did with my son. So I've taught them that next time I'm dealing with them, come and help themselves. So we set precedent in these relationships.

Richard 29:08

So coming all the way back to Nathalie's question about how do you help sort of folk deal with that sort of thing is you have to have a structured approach to it, to preparing for your negotiations and then all your conflicts and then executing them.

Ross D 29:24

Okay, I think that's a good point to wrap up. Nathalie, what will you be taking away from this conversation and applying your life this week?

Nathalie 29:30

I think the thing that really struck me was going in, being able to say what it is that you actually really want, and as part of that saying, what is not on the table, so this is what I want, this is what I'm unable to be flexible on, and kind of making that super clear from the outset.

Nathalie 29:45

I think that's something that's really going to stick with me, so yeah. How about you, Ross?

Ross D 29:50

I think Richard's reflection on my conflict with Ross has caused me to question my own motivation for conflict. So I like to think that when, again, to conflict situations, that it is out of a genuine desire to make something better and is not just to boost my own ego, but I think I'm going to be more conscious of those situations, whether or not I'm just getting into fights for their own sakes going forward.

Ross D 30:15

Richard, if there's one thing that you'd want listeners to take away from this conversation, what would it be?

Richard 30:20

Well, I mean, what I would do is, I mean, you've just covered the point really about being sort of specific about what you do. The one thing I would always say to anybody going into any conflict situation is emphasize the empathy side of it and listen.

Richard 30:37

Listen really hard to the other side. Listen to what they say, ask them good questions, and then listen to the answers because most of the clues in terms of how to put the best pitch on the table to them will be in the answers to those questions.

Ross D 30:59

Before we go, we just got time for a regular feature one thing I've learned this week. Nathalie, do you want to go first?

Nathalie 31:06

Yes, so I went to London for a cheeky visit and because books are much cheaper there than they are in Spain

Richard 31:12

We'll just ask what a cheeky visit is.

Nathalie 31:14

It's cheeky visit. It's a cheeky visit. It was. Way too much. Saw way too much theatre and music. No, it was wonderful, but I brought back a bunch of books and I have started reading one called Bringing Back the Beaver by David Gell.

Nathalie 31:29

It's an amazingly witty book and I did not realise that beavers in Europe typically come in three colours. You've got like the really dark ones that are kind of black, the amber coloured ones and even the ones that he calls the Viking ones, which are blonde beavers.

Nathalie 31:43

I had no idea they even existed. So I'm learning loads of beaver facts, so they're good.

Richard 31:49

Thank you for that.

Nathalie 31:50

Um, yeah, totally relevant to our conversation.

Ross D 31:55

I'm going to try and shoe hard mine into our conversation, so Richard was just talking about this kid coming up and asking for an ice cream. I recently read Nudge, which is all about choice architecture and sort of encouraging people to make good decisions, and was talking about this book with my barber, as I do.

Ross D 32:19

I think I've mentioned my barber on this podcast before, quite an important relationship in my life, but he was talking to me about how cereal boxes, if they feature characters on the front, their gaze is often directed downwards to try and catch the eyes of children.

Ross D 32:40

So they will then ask their parents, oh, can I get some, insert cereal around here? I don't know if that's true. I was curious if that was true. And Cornell, some researchers at Cornell have actually looked into this.

Ross D 32:52

So on average, characters in cereal boxes have their gaze is a sort of negative degree of 9 .6. So not that much, but they're generally looking down. There was sort of some confusion about why that was.

Ross D 33:05

Often it's that they're looking down at a bowl of cereal rather than trying to look directly at the shopper. But they also messed about with sort of photoshopping the eyes of these characters and then asking, testing people's response to them.

Ross D 33:20

And they found that if the character on the front of the box is making direct eye contact with the shopper, they're much more likely to feel warmly about that brand and more likely to buy the product.

Ross D 33:31

So not clear findings. Not sure if this is some sort of secret conspiracy. These dastardly advertisers are trying to find ways to con kids into buying their cereal. But yeah, it's an interesting finding none the less.

Nathalie 33:46

The psychology of eye gaze.

Ross D 33:48

Richard, what did you learn this week?

Richard 33:50

Well, my greatest lesson I think I learnt last night, because I got home and had ordered a Chinese from a well-known delivery service. It cost me rather a lot of money as their share price has crashed and burned throughout the year since Flowtension last year.

Richard 34:08

And what they did was, and it never happened before, dropped off somebody else's meal, which is really, really disappointing. You know, when your mouth's watering and you're so excited about that, sort of, you know, salt and pepper squared and the ribs and that and the other.

Richard 34:23

So I rang them up and the person on the other end of the phone seemed terribly helpful, no doubt talking to me from the other side of the planet, but really friendly and efficient, but clearly no empathy with it.

Richard 34:38

It was 8 .45 at night and I was starving hungry. And they offered to give me the money back on the items that hadn't been delivered. But I pointed out to them that wasn't really addressing my needs because, you know, one rice and one seaweed and one crab meat and sweet corn soup does not make a meal.

Richard 34:59

So I suggested that perhaps they corrected this. And this is a really important point. If you're ever in a complainant situation, make sure, don't just complain and ask people what they're going to do about it.

Richard 35:12

Be very specific about what you think is appropriate. And if it's realistic, there's a very good chance you will get it. So I specifically said that I suggested they refunded the entire amount given that they'd ruined my evening and my meal.

Richard 35:25

It was very calm, professional ambivalence and all that. And I was then referred to, you know, the higher echelons of customer services who finally wasted another 20 minutes of my life, but nonetheless gave me the money back.

Richard 35:40

And then I sat really grumbly eating rice and seaweed and crab meat and sweet corn soup because it was too late to order a replacement.

Ross D 35:48

Did you feel vindicated, though? I did. I did. I was assuming they gave you a full refund.

Richard 35:52

Yeah, they did give me a full refund, except they didn't give me the £3 tip that I gave to the delivery driver, right? And I asked for that as well. I said, look, I've given the guy three good and he's giving me the wrong meal.

Richard 36:02

I should get that back too, right? And they said, oh, no, we can't do that. It's against policy, at which point I gave up the will to live, so I went to my price.

Nathalie 36:12

There's a lesson there in terms of the policy boundary. There is a lesson.

Richard 36:16

Yeah, yeah, sure, cook yourself for starters.

Ross D 36:20

Richard, before we go, is there anything else you want to mention? Where can people find out more about the work that you do?

Richard 36:26

Yeah, well, we'd love to hear from anybody. I mean, needless to say, I would highly recommend you come on one of our public programs. If you go to [www.savagemacbeth.com](http://www.savagemacbeth.com), you will see a hopefully light and cheerful approach to this essential life skill.

Richard 36:42

And you'll be very welcome to come on board one of our programs. We also do consultancy and coaching as well. So we help people navigate through any kind of deal really. So we'd love to hear from you.

Ross D 36:56

great. We will put a link to your website in our show notes. That's it. You've been listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast with me, Ross Dickey and Nathalie Nahai. Our guest this week was Richard Savage.

Ross D 37:08

Until next time, bye for now.