



THE RESPECT PODCAST with host Mike Domitrz

And Guest Chris Clarke-Epstein

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- Mike: Welcome to the Respect Podcast. I'm your host, Mike Domitrz, from Mikespeaks.com, where we help organizations of all sizes, educational institutions, and the U.S. Military to create a culture of respect. And respect is exactly what we discuss on this show, so let's get started.
- Mike: Our guest is Chris Clarke-Epstein. This is so cool. I always love when I get to have a friend on the show who has been brilliant and an inspiration to me in this line of work. Chris is a change expert. She's a CSP.
- Mike: Now, if you're not aware what a CSP is, it's an earned designation in the speaking industry that we are pushing for more and more to get so you know you have a great speaker. If you get a CSP, it's a certified speaking designation. And it's earned and Chris absolutely has earned that. She's spent over 30 years challenging diverse groups including senior leadership teams, middle management, supervisors, and healthcare professionals to apply new knowledge. Her presentations blend an innovative delivery of sound learning theory, activities that lead to practical solutions, and infectious enthusiasm that sends participants home ready to apply what they've learned. In short, Chris is the change expert. She's the person you want to turn to when it comes to change. Not only that, she's won every award imaginable in the speaking industry.
- Chris: So here's the deal. You know when you rabble like that?
- Mike: Yeah.
- Chris: All the women in the audience are sitting there going, yeah, and I bet you she grows her own tomatoes and makes homemade spaghetti sauce too. You know, eh, eh, eh. And I do not grow tomatoes. I don't make spaghetti sauce. Otherwise, I've got a pile of dirty laundry waiting for me as soon as we're through with our conversation. So reality grounding is important to me Mike.
- Mike: It is important. And trust me, we would've got there.
- Chris: I know. I know. But, you know, I am a speaker ...
- Mike: That's right.
- Chris: ... so it's hard to be restrained.
- Mike: Yes. And it's really neat because you've won the [inaudible 00:02:00], which in the speaking industry is the ultimate. It's like their lifetime achievement award. The cool thing is, like the Oscar Lifetime Achievement Award, you get to see that you've gotten this while you're here instead of, sometimes, it's done afterwards. And then last,



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recently we were just together at an event totally recognizing you for our State's contributions that are incredible. You've had such an impact. What do you think is the key to having a life of impact built on a respect of something you believe in? Right? For you it was change.

Chris: Uh-mm-hmm (affirmative). As I expected, our conversation would be running around important questions, and this is a very important one. I think it is a combination at a point in your life and it doesn't matter when the point is. Some people have it when they're very young. Others, it comes to them later but the real important thing is that you have it and it is the inner section of where your passion, your talents, and your values meet. And when you get to that place in your life, if it has to do with employment, that's when you find yourself saying, I would pay them to let me do this. It no longer feels like work, it just feels like an extension of your being.

Chris: And, when that magic happens, when you recognize that in yourself ... And I don't think it's because your lucky, I think it's because you've been on a quest for having those three things being very clear in your mind. What are your talents? What is your passion? What are your values? You have to do work on yourself to understand those things. And then, when that all comes together, then the opportunities that you can avail yourself of become pretty remarkable.

Mike: Let's think about two of those. The one is your passion and your values. Your passion has clearly changed.

Chris: Yes.

Mike: That's what you do. You live, you breathe it. In your values, how does respect play a role in this journey for you?

Chris: Well, you know, that's again, another great ... I'm going to have to stop saying that so it's not redundant. My mother said to me once years ago when we were talking about the focus that my business was taking on change ... And by the way, it took me a number of years to settle on change being the bulk of my work. And, again, the process revealed itself that this was the place that I felt the most passionate. But my mother said to me, she said, "Do you really think that people can change?" And it sort of stopped me in my tracks. And I said to her, I said, "Quite frankly, if I didn't believe that, then I couldn't do this work."

Chris: And, that's the respect, the respect for every human being summed up in a proverb ... a Turkish proverb that is my daughter's favorite proverb. "No matter how far you are down the wrong path, you can always stop and turn around." So every human being in my belief system has the capacity to change. So, knowing that, respecting that, it means that you have to approach everybody with that potentiality, seeing that potentiality in them.



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- Mike: I've had people who say, "Well, Mike. What are the odds you're going to change someone's life in a one-hour speech?" And when I'm in front of, for instance, military leadership or organizational leadership, I'll say, "How many of you in the room can remember a time in your life where somebody said something to you that took five seconds, ten seconds? And they just were like, whoa, and literally altered a part of who you were and how you moved forward after that?" Almost everyone who's had some level of success or somehow progressed or grown in life is like, "Oh, I absolutely had that moment." Whether it was my parents or a teacher, or they said that one thing that I've never forgotten and it changed who I was. And then I stopped them and go, "And you think you can't do that in an hour? They did it in five or ten seconds."
- Chris: Right. I'm a long time Weight Watcher's person, and I lost 60 pounds a number of years ago, and I've kept it off for over ten. And I often say, losing the weight was easy. Keeping it off was the hard part. So to your point about, can you do it in a flash, the motivation, the desire to change happens in an instant. It is the sustaining of new behavior that is the hard work that takes a long time. And why it appears is that people can change, is most people make a New Year's resolution ... you know, I'm going to exercise and by January 5th they have stopped. You know, they bought the gym membership, but they've actually stopped. Oh, that was not cute. They stopped being a part of actually getting up off the couch and going to the gym.
- Chris: So the question that people really are asking you, can you do it in an hour? The answer is, the seed gets planted in the hour. The harvesting, whatever it is, or admiring the flowers that you planted is going to happen at some time in the future and, in that interim between planting and admiring, you have got to weed the garden, you've got to put fertilizer in the garden, you've got to water the garden, you've got to convince the deer that they don't want to eat what you've planted in the garden. I mean, there's lots and lots of hard work that goes on in that interim. And, in our business, this is the thing that is often frustrating with the organizations that we work with is, they're willing to invest in the seed planting part, but they don't think through how are we going to cultivate this garden to get to what we really want to be able to harvest.
- Mike: Yeah. Seeing the whole picture is so ...
- Chris: Right.
- Mike: ... so important. And do you think on an individual level and maybe on the organizational level too, there's a lack of people respecting their commitment, their value and why I made that commitment in the first place? Why is that important to me?
- Chris: Well, I go in two directions with that one. First of all, the ultimate motivation to say I'm going to change something, especially if it's, you know, a significant habit or a significant mindset. The first level of that has to come internally.
- Mike: That's right.



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Chris: So I have to believe that there's a reason. You know, it's I have the heart attack and all of a sudden I think maybe that exercise is a good idea. Or I'm presented with my first child or my first grandchild and I think, you know, maybe smoking isn't a really good idea. So there has to be something internal that's pushing you in that direction.

Chris: And then, there has to be support for the change. Weight is a really good one to look at because there have been studies about this that says, if you look at your close circle of friends ... I mean, this is kind of a ticklish thing to even say out loud ... If your close circle of friends are overweight, there's a high probability that you will fail at a weight loss effort because the world does not want you to change. People want you to be predictable in the way that they know you. So it's amazing. You announce that you're going to watch what you eat, and your significant other brings home Ben & Jerry's ice cream in your favorite flavors.

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Chris: Ben and Jerry's ice cream in your favorite flavors. Not because they're consciously trying to sabotage what's going on, not because they don't respect your endeavors, but quite frankly, if you're going to start doing all this healthy stuff, that's going to impact them having to do some healthy stuff. And it would be just easier for them if you just stayed the way you were. So both personally and organizationally if you come into your place of business and you announce to your leader, your manager, that you have made a decision that you really, this is one that I was really bad at when I was in the corporate world. I was terrible at filing my expense reports, which is stupid because it was my money. You know, I couldn't get my money back if I didn't file the reports. But on the scale of things that I wanted to do, it was always at the bottom.

Chris: And so he was always coming in and saying, "You know, I got a call from the so and so department and you're behind on your expense reports, can you get those caught up?" Oh yeah, I will. And then I would do this monster thing and get them all in. And I know, I remember, going into his office one day after having one of those things saying, "You know this is ridiculous. I should just file these reports on time because it's such a pain when you let them go. And you get yelled at and then you have to yell at me and I just don't like it. So I'm going to do it differently." I had some internal motivation. I remember him looking me straight eye to eye and he rolls his eyes like yeah that's gonna happen.

Chris: So I had the internal motivation, but I had no external support of, "Wow that would really be great. What can I do to help you make that happen?"

Mike: Now what's interesting is your external motivation was him doubting.

Chris: Right, exactly.



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- Mike: Which is a lot of us. A lot of us as the friend or the family goes, "Yeah, right." And then we're like, "Oh yeah? Get ready. It's about to go down." Right? This is gonna happen.
- Chris: And sometimes, for some people, it works as that spur, I'll prove you wrong. For other people it's like why should I even bother? Because evidently they don't think I can do it. So I guess I don't think I can do it. So it's that curious combination and to our topic of respect, it's first of all you having respect for yourself. That you have this desired outcome. If I change my behavior, this is what I'm going to get for it. So that's I respect myself because that desired outcome feels good to me. And then it's the external, the respect of people around you who are willing to say, "Yeah, you can do this. I believe in you." So it comes from both those directions. And when you have both of that, you're more likely to see success.
- Mike: Without a doubt. And when you work with a trainer, speaking of health. When you work with a trainer they'll often ask, whoever your partner is or your spouse is, what are they making? If they're the one making the meal and you're not, what are they making? And you'll explain. They'll be like, "Have you told them what you're trying to do?" And so I think a lot of people make the mistake of thinking, "Well my partner's not being supportive," instead of realizing well it's not their job to change their meals because of a change I'm trying to make. So there's also respect of just because I'm making this change does not mean the others around me have to be in this change process. So I need to start making my own meals.
- Chris: Right. But you also, and you ... I'm sorry I should have figured out how to turn those things off. You also have to know that you have to have enough respect for your partner in the situation we're describing to explain why you're doing what you're doing and what it really involves. We go through life assuming if you loved me you would just figure this out. Especially with our significant others in our life. And the fact that they're clueless as to what you're doing and why you're doing it has nothing to do with their level of affection.
- Mike: Or their ability to push back in a loving way.
- Chris: Right. Exactly.
- Mike: They'll push back thinking, "You don't need that. You don't have a problem with that." And they don't realize it's not whether you think I have a problem with it. I mentally struggle with this. You may not get that, but I do.
- Chris: Exactly.
- Mike: And so do you think organizations, this is one of their biggest failures, when they kick in change they fail to paint the vision? You know? People ask me all the time, "Hey, Mike, when you started doing the work you're doing, you took a lot of risk. And your partner, Karen, your spouse, had to be on board with that or you would have never gotten



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through those difficult first five years." And that's true. Karen was on board all the way because we kept painting the vision together. But what I often see organizations doing is a quick paint and then walking away from the painting, never talking about the painting again. But the painting is this change they want to have happened. They go, "Look at this beautiful picture we're creating for you." But they didn't ask me to be part of the painting. They did not ask me to keep painting after the first vision. Do you think that's part of the problem?

Chris: I think that's part of the problem and I think it opens the door to some really interesting research that we know about why people in organizations resist change. And first of all, most leaders in organizations, when they feel resistance ... Step back. Okay, the leaders went away on a retreat. Or the CEO went on vacation, picked up the latest business book in the airport and read it on vacation and came back and said, "Oh we're gonna change all this stuff." So first of all, the leadership group is, if you think of change being a road, the leadership group has left the original location and has gone 150 miles ahead and has started figuring out what all the issues are. So they're 150 miles ahead and then they're turning back saying, "Come on guys, this is gonna be great."

Chris: And the people who are still at home base have no idea. Have had no processing time. And most leadership teams don't understand that human beings are biologically predisposed to hate change. Because it requires ... To engage in change it means you have to engage your brain. And your brain then takes more oxygen and your body likes to conserve energy more than anything else so the initial reaction of human beings to change is, "I'd rather not." And what the leaders do when they get that push back at the very beginning is they start thinking, "Obviously there's something wrong with these people." Because remember, they're 150 miles down. They've already got some of the benefits of the change. And I'm sitting here thinking all I see are problems.

Chris: So that's a disconnect at the very beginning. And the ability to paint the picture of what life is like 150 miles down the road, if you can't do that in a meaningful way, then you're making it even more difficult for what's going on. I was working with a company who was announcing that they were moving their headquarters from the downtown area to a suburban area. A beautiful new facility, less people would be driving, away from the traffic flow. So the leaders are all like, "Wow, this is really great." Now the leaders are all men, by and large, let's say 95%. The workers who are getting this announcement are 95% female. And they call me in and they said, "We had this beautiful presentation, we showed them the traffic flows, we showed them the new building, there's going to be a farmer's market in the parking lot once a week. It's all wonderful and everybody's sitting there with their arms crossed."

Chris: And I said, "Here's what they're thinking. My entire life is built around driving from my house to downtown. My kids daycare is on the way, the cleaners, the grocery store, the drug store, the doctors, everything I do is plotted that I'm driving from this point to this point. My whole life is organized around that. You are now telling me that I have to drive from this point to that point. So this is not a change about where headquarters is, this is a change about all the routines of my life." And as long as that's what they're



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thinking, this can be the prettiest building, the greatest farmer's market, the easiest drive time, but they're still stuck in the how am I going to get my kids to daycare on time?

Mike: Right.

Chris: And so it's not only not painting a magical, if you will, enough outcome, but it's not explaining how we're going to make this transition from everything that is part of our routine now to the change that you're seeing as the new headquarters and encompass all the change that goes with it that you are doing upheaval in people's lives.

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Chris: ... that you are doing upheaval in people's lives. And so if you don't understand what's really going on and you go to try to fix that resistance, you're probably going to do the wrong thing.

Mike: And what's amazing there and how often this happens is, not respecting the journey of the people who would have to live that change, to not have early on brought in if we move how will this impact you. How would this impact you? And create the chain based on the respectful values and feedback of everyone involved versus I'm going to explore this.

Mike: And I've made the mistake in my own organization about getting so excited about something that you almost over run everyone else. You're oh, we're going to do this and it's going to be amazing, it's going to be this. But they weren't part of the process and so they didn't get the journey, so now what you realize is you realize alright, I need those people in those phone calls as I think where I'm going to get excited, I need them in those calls because if they're getting excited too this is awesome. If they're not, I need to know why.

Chris: Right. And from an organizational standpoint, so if we look at three levels. The people who actually do the work, the middle management people, and then the senior leadership who get to make the decisions. So ironically when they do studies, it's the people at the lowest rungs of the organization who have the highest stress levels because they're not involved in ... I don't get upset about decisions I make for myself. I choose what I'm going to have for dinner, I'm kind of happy about what I have for dinner. Somebody else chooses what I'm going to have for dinner and I start to get a little cranky. That wasn't what I had a taste for.

Chris: But what you have is the people at the top of the organization who get to make the decisions, and then you have the people at the bottom of the organizations who have the changes announced to them. And then you have the poor people in the middle who neither get to make the decisions but have to implement the decisions, and they get



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squeezed and that middle management piece are where generally speaking change initiatives stand or fail. And-

Mike: Right, and it all falls on ... fails on respect. There's a-

Chris: Exactly.

Mike: ... total lack of respect of everyone's voices. It's we're hearing our voices, not their voices kind of mentality that causes so much harm in those environments.

Chris: Exactly. And the most recent statistic that I've heard about is it's still running at this. About 70% of all organizational change initiatives fail.

Mike: Isn't that wild? But it makes sense because we fail to respect all the voices that need to be heard on [crosstalk 00:24:58]

Chris: Exactly. Exactly.

Mike: We don't teach people to do that. And speaking of failing to respect voices, I'm going to go in a totally different direction here but you're the change expert and our ... politically things are constantly changing. So it comes down to, with all the change going on in culture, politically, how do we learn to respect other people's voices because I know people go, I'm not going to respect what they're saying. But they then don't respect them as a human being.

Mike: I believe every human being deserves a basic love of dignity and respect. That doesn't mean I want to hang out with you. That doesn't mean I want to spend time with you, but you still deserve that. How do you tread that water today with all the hostility, the vitriol feelings that are out there?

Chris: One of the lessons, and I was doing some rearranging on a bookshelf the other day and I found my Bible from when I was a young girl in the Lutheran Church, and it's the ever popular King James version with all the things that Jesus said in red so you would really pay attention. And I opened it up ... I hadn't looked at it for a long time, and I opened it up and in my eighth grade handwriting in the back I had written, love the sinner, hate the sin which was one of the tenets of, evidently, eighth grade Sunday School when I was in Lutheran Sunday School.

Chris: And it got me thinking down a whole path, and when I was a little girl and we would have friends over my mother would say, "Okay, so and so's coming over so look around in your room, and if there's anything that you don't want so and so to play with, give it to me and we'll put it up on the closet shelf." And so therefore, anything that's left was fair game, to be played with by this visitor. And now, while the visitor was there I couldn't play with the stuff on the shelf either. It was simply ... And this was part of my mother's philosophy, which was you don't have to like everybody but you have to love



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everybody. Back to our values that we talked about earlier, that's probably one of the most significant value statement of my life and I remember that from when I was five years old, my mother saying that to me. And this was not open to debate.

Chris: So it seems like we've lost ... we've focused on the you don't have to like everybody, and we've switched it to and oh, by the way you don't have to love them either. Because if you have somebody who you don't like very much but you know that you have to love them, that's the commandment if you will, that's respect that says look, I don't agree with what you're saying. And quite honestly, I might never agree with what you're saying but I will respectfully listen to you and I will expect, even demand, that you respectfully listen to me.

Chris: And I think we are in ... I was just reading an article before we connected about some new polling. How what happens when ... and using the parties as a dividing line. Excuse me. That when you ask Republicans what they think about Democrats and once you ask Democrats what they think about Republicans, the vitriol is so deep and it's so wrong, that there's just no place to start the dialog and that's where we are right now that is breaking my heart, because I don't ... It's very hard to see how we get ourselves out of this.

Mike: I think one of the contradictions in my line of work is people say treat all people with dignity and respect, but they won't do that with their political ... people they disagree with politically. That's a contradiction. If we're going to say it we have to live it, and so I've loved this story you just shared there because that's so powerful. Chris, you're an amazing writer. For anybody who's listening or watching, you have an email that goes out. Just a simple little blurb and a thought at Change 101. It's awesome. Where would somebody find that?

Chris: If you go ... I'm going to make this as easy as possible because it's a flaw in my website. It's buried too much, but if you send an email to Chris, C-H-R-I-S, at change101.com, and if you just put thinking in the subject line, I'll get you signed up.

Mike: Love it. So I'm going to make sure that's in the show notes too, so that we have that. We'll have it that they can email and just put thinking in the subject line.

Chris: In the subject line.

Mike: Fantastic.

Chris: Right.

Mike: So Chris you're also a huge reader, and I love to ask my guests what is a one book that has had a major impact on your journey?



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- Chris: That's a really ... That's coming close to which of your children do you love the most? It's sort of like what book did I read last? We have a professional colleague Rick Maurer, M-A-U-R-E-R, who wrote a book called Beyond Resistance, which is probably the most insightful book that I've ever read on change. And his work on change and resistance to change has been a model for me, so I would recommend that book very highly.
- Chris: I would recommend any book by P ... the initials P.J. Tracy, fiction. She writes a series. It's a mother daughter writing team. The first book in the series is called Monkeewrench. And if I was starting over again I would start at the first book and read them through because the characters develop. I love mysteries. I love mysteries that have a technology bent to them and these fall in that category and they're a seamless writing team which I find fascinating.
- Mike: Awesome. Thank you so much Chris for joining us.
- Chris: You're welcome. This has been a joy and I appreciate it.
- Mike: So thank you very much for all of our listeners sharing your brilliance.
- Chris: Thank you. It was my pleasure.
- Mike: Thank you for joining us for this episode of the Respect Podcast which was sponsored by the Date Safe Project at datesafeproject.org. And remember you can always find me at mikespeaks.com.

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