

Mike Domitrz: 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, create a culture of respect. And respect is exactly what we discuss on this show, so let's get started.

Mike Domitrz: And for this week's episode I want to introduce right away, Matt Beaudreau, which is a keynote speaker, entrepreneur, having spoken to over a quarter million people worldwide on education and generational-related topics. He's also the founder of Acton Academy Placer, the fastest growing K-12 program in California. Matt, thank you so much for joining us.

Matt Beaudreau: The pleasure is absolutely mine, my friend. Thank you for having me.

Mike Domitrz: Absolutely. Well let's dive right in here. So you talk on generational ideas, you help in education. So to get a little background, how did you get started working with youth?

Matt Beaudreau: Yeah, that's a great question. So I went into education, was actually working at Stanford for quite a while and working with a lot of the college population there, in kind of a corporate trainer capacity. And that really fueled my passion for working with the younger generations. And so I went on from there and got my credentials.

Matt Beaudreau: I was a public school teacher. I was a public school administrator, a private school teacher, a private school administrator. And throughout that time I started doing a lot of speaking in education, around how we were dealing with our youth and some of the things I'd like to change. And things just absolutely took off from there.

Mike Domitrz: Well let's dive right into there. What are things you would love to see change?

Matt Beaudreau: My goodness. If we're talking school, everything. And I'm a big believer and I want to say this up front too ... I am the most pro-teacher, and pro-school administrator person on the planet. I was one. I still have friends there. I absolutely love it. So I never have a problem with the people. My problem is with the system. And I'm a big believer in creating the change that you want, which is exactly why I founded a Acton Academy classroom here in Northern California.

Matt Beaudreau: The biggest issue that I think I have in school is the concept of standardization. I know you're big on respect, and we like to talk respect. And I think school, as it's designed, is really inherently disrespectful when we look at the concept of standardization. Everybody needs to learn the exact same thing at the exact same time. And if you're not ready, or interested in that, then labels start to get placed and we start to chip at away at that self-confidence and that self-awareness. And I think that's a dangerous thing, especially moving into this

society where information is ubiquitous at this point. And we need to help kids learn how to be in control of their lives.

Mike Domitrz: Well, I love this. There's a school very close to me. It's an old, converted, like one-room schoolhouse that is a school with a very unique approach. And I noticed that they don't use the title "teachers." They use the title "learning guides." Everybody in the school that teaches, is a learning guide. What is the difference in somebody thinking of a teacher versus a learning guide?

Matt Beaudreau: Yeah, that's a great thing. So my employees, we're not teachers either. We do the same thing, we call ourselves guides. And so it really is that concept of, "We're not going to stand up and lecture you. We are going to come alongside you, as much more of a mentor." And that's really what it is. It's much more of a mentor to help each student on that process of self discovery.

Matt Beaudreau: So we're big on what we call the "Hero's Journey." And we say every kid that comes into our school is on a Hero's Journey. And we're going to help them find a calling that is going to help change the world. And we really believe that there is a unique genius that everybody has, and our job is to unlock that for each child and come alongside them as a mentor.

Matt Beaudreau: So we're not lecturing, saying, "Do this. Do that." We're coming along and giving choices. We're creating a gamified atmosphere where we're a game-maker and we're inviting them on an adventure. And there's a whole slew of things. Learning ends up being a byproduct of that kind of culture. And we end up with kids that are truly self-aware and they're self-confident, and they have got a lot of self respect. And I think that's a powerful combination.

Mike Domitrz: So let's go back on a couple of those items. Let's talk about ... you're helping them on their Hero's Journey. For a lot of people who are listening, they might not even know the reference to Hero's Journey, which for a lot of the speaking industry, or in any kind of industry that's there's storytelling involved-

Matt Beaudreau: Yeah, and I think the concept a lot of times is accredited to Joseph Campbell and his work. And really, in the most basic definition, it is that concept of "every single person has something to offer the rest of the world." And us as the guides, we're going to be on the side of those individuals, both the parents and the kids, in helping bring about: What are your unique abilities that you are going to go forward and provide value to the rest of the world, and then in turn that's going to provide value to your life?

Mike Domitrz: So let's pause there. How do you help a second grader understand their purpose yet, if they're not in that path?

Matt Beaudreau: Yeah, that's a great question. I've got a second grader, living with me at home. So I've got three kids and our oldest is in second grade. And so of course she goes to our school. And the concept here, at this young age, is you want to

equip them to understand who they are and gain self-confidence. So when people ask me all the time, "What's the curriculum for going on this Hero's Journey?" I say, "Self-awareness and self-confidence." That's it. Everything else is a trickle-down effect.

Matt Beaudreau: So the self-awareness piece, and the self-confidence piece, come from getting them involved in real-world situations where they are setting goals for themselves. They're achieving those goals. And we do that with our academics. And then we also expose them to real-world projects, where they are actually building ... maybe they're building a business; maybe they're engineering the playground that we ... and then they get to build the playground, at our school. They do things like that.

Matt Beaudreau: And what we end up seeing is, you get self-confidence from actually having done some things. They've achieved some things. But more importantly, in the process of all this, the guides are looking at patterns. We're looking at patterns of behavior. So as we expose them to a number of different disciplines, and a number of different projects, what you'll inherently see is, kids will start to lean one direction or another. They'll take on these completely different ... engineering a playground, putting on a theater quest where you're putting on a play, and starting business, are all vastly different.

Matt Beaudreau: But you'll start to see patterns of behavior where they gravitate towards one thing or another. And you start to go, "Okay, well look. You continuously gravitate 'here.' This is what gets you excited. Even though all of these disciplines are different, your patterns look the same." And you start to have those conversations and that's where that self-awareness develops, i.e. the beginning of that Hero's Journey.

Mike Domitrz: So when you hear somebody respond back with a comment like, "Yeah, but is this, 'two plus two equals five'?"

Matt Beaudreau: Yeah-

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, I know that that happens-

Matt Beaudreau: Of course.

Mike Domitrz: ... for those that work in what are considered alternative forms of education, versus traditional. How do you respond to that?

Matt Beaudreau: I think we're actually going back to the most simplistic form. I think your "two plus two equals five" is really more of what that standardization has really kind of started to lean towards. The Common Core Standards, and things like that, I think have lent themselves more to that. We're really getting back to the basic nature of, "Who are you as an individual?"

Matt Beaudreau: The academics are academics. We're setting goals. We're teaching them to set goals. And we're telling them that, "Hey, here's the right answer. And the right answer is the right answer. How you get there is up to you." We don't need the full-on explanation. So no, we're very big into their personal responsibility and simplifying things as much as possible. There's no "two plus two equals five." We're really looking for: Who are you as an individual and what's going to create a happy life, for you?

Mike Domitrz: And so for parents who are listening who think, "My kid's in traditional school. They like being in a traditional school setting." How do they apply this to their current educational setting? Or being a supportive parent in helping their child bring the best ... their own Hero's Journey out of that child?

Matt Beaudreau: Traditional schooling, there's a lot of kids that do like it. And I'm a firm believer in ... There's about a third of kids that will play that game of traditional school and they'll like it and they'll do very well. You'll have about a third that will play the game and just kind of say, "Ehh. Weather, I'm figuring it out." And then you'll have the third that really struggled. For the kids that learn how to play that ... maybe they like it. My big thing for the parents is, still talk to them about what's next. Don't play the game for the sake of playing the game. Don't play the game for the sake of, "Well, everybody does school. And the next step is, everybody does college."

Matt Beaudreau: Because what happens is, and I hear this a lot from my corporate clients, we have a lot of kids who come out of college and they've just played the academic game. They did well in school. They did well in college. Now they're going into the workforce, and the employers are going, "Oh, my goodness. You don't have any idea how to provide value to what we're doing. You're not necessarily self-directed. You're looking for a rubric of exactly what to do, and then you don't want to take the next step. There's no inherent risk-taking. There's no .... " A lot of these things, they're not seeing anymore.

Matt Beaudreau: So that's what I would audit. If your child's really good in school, that's great. But don't make that the end-all, be-all. Still audit: What do you want to do? How do you want to provide value? What's the next step we can take? And pursuing those things outside of the school environment.

Mike Domitrz: What about for the parent whose child is struggling? So they're not thriving, they're struggling, but they're ... Maybe the kid doesn't want to leave a traditional setting. Is there a way to bring both into this, so that they can thrive? Are there techniques to thrive in traditional, with this mindset of what you're describing of that Hero's Journey approach?

Matt Beaudreau: It's a tough ... you're battling a system. And I spoke to a great group called Project Lead The Way. And we had the Administrator of the Year, and some of the Teachers of the Year. And we had this small group setting. I did a keynote for about 3,000 people that were involved; and then did a keynote.

Matt Beaudreau: And I had a question that was very similar from a superintendent. She was somewhere in the midwest. And she said, "So how do we do this? How do we bring this into a traditional setting, when I'm very handcuffed as a leader in this setting, of what I can and cannot do?"

Matt Beaudreau: ... and the reality, and I said to her how do you change the Catholic church? And that's not a knock on Catholics; I'm just saying that's a traditional system and that's not going to go anywhere. The school system is the same kind of thing so bringing this, that you're having to bring in the individuality at home. The system is not going to allow for that, so I'm a big proponent of home schooling if you do not have one of these, kind of an alternative environment near you.

Matt Beaudreau: I think home schooling is a great option if you can take it on, and I hope people around the world figure out how to do that easily. But trying to fit this alternative approach into a standardized system is, it's not something that's going to take place. There's going to be site level leaders that might shake it up, but I can't say that it's going to take place when it won't.

Mike Domitrz: What are signs that a student would thrive better in a non-traditional setting? If you have enough kids, if you're a parent who has more than one child, and some that have one child learn this right away with their own with that single child, but a lot of times you hear about that one child, you see one that thrives in traditional and you see one that struggles, and the struggling can really demolish the self-confidence of the one who's struggling. And it's not that that child isn't brilliant; it's that they're brilliant in a different way than the system is showing.

Mike Domitrz: And I remember a principal in the traditional system who said, "Don't worry," talking to me and my partner, my spouse, "Don't worry, this student's going to be great when he gets out there because he's such a hands-on learner and he has very great street smarts. So don't worry about it." But that was such a thing you didn't hear in traditional education, it threw you off. You're like, "Don't worry about whether at this point in their education they're getting their grades there or there," we weren't used to that and it throws you off.

Mike Domitrz: But it was wonderful to see somebody in traditional education go, "Hey, this is going to work out great," and then to watch that student in that case thrive exactly in that case when they got into what they loved and what they really do well, and where they're meant to be. So what are things parents can look for to help them recognize my child might be the one in traditional system and they're trying to teach him all learn like a fish does, and this one is an amphibian?

Matt Beaudreau: Yeah.

Mike Domitrz: The live, they breathe a different way.

Matt Beaudreau: Yeah. And that's a great question. There's a lot to unpack there, too, and good for that administrator with the "he'll be great when gets out there." I know many administrators feel the same way, they really do. I know many of them and I did as an administrator, too. The problem is within that system and the way that your funding works, and the way that everything has got to be geared towards taking these tests, and getting butts in seats, and having really just kind of the mass management of human behavior, and the kids staying within these age ranges, so what Ken Robinson calls their date of manufacture, all those things are set up in a way that you're hoping the kid is not damaged when he gets out there.

Matt Beaudreau: Look, I played the game perfectly. I had the straight A's, I had straight A's all through college and I came out going I have no idea who I am or what I'm good at. What do I want to do? I had to overcome and figure out at that point, so we hope they're going to be great when they get out there as long as their self-confidence hasn't been damaged to the point that they feel like they've got nothing to offer. That, I think that's the caveat. And so you're asking how do you know if your child's going to be good in this environment.

Matt Beaudreau: I would argue that every child is going to be thriving in an environment that focuses on his or her passions; that sets him or her up with the ability to set goals; allows him or her to go at their own pace from an academic standpoint, not competing with somebody else. I would argue that anybody is going ... because I think that's how humans are designed. That's what we do as adults. I'm 39, I don't have a set of standards and academic standards that I've got to do at the age of 39. I don't have the ability to only speak to other 39-year olds. It doesn't play out like that in real life. The schooling system is ... I would say everybody would benefit from that. The real question is who is benefiting in that traditional program, and I think it's less than we realize.

Mike Domitrz: You've designed this system now, the Acton Academy Placer. What is that?

Matt Beaudreau: Great question. We are part of, actually a network of entrepreneurs. There are, gosh, I think about 120 of us worldwide, we're in 20-some-odd different countries, and we truly are a network of entrepreneurs that are building what we think is a much better model. And so when I say network, it truly is a network where we're speaking to each other virtually on a daily basis. We get together physically in Texas once a year to talk about how we're running our schools. And anything that we design, any project we design, we throw it out to the network and vice versa, and it's just this continuous feedback loop of how do we get better for these kids. The one basic tenet that we all agree on is that there's three strong codas we'll operate within, and that's getting back to Socratic thinking and having Socratic discussions with our kids so they learn how to think.

Mike Domitrz: Let's pause there. When you refer to Socratic thinking, if you want to explain ... and I'm a big believer in it, but I'd love to have you explain that for our listeners.

Matt Beaudreau: Referring back to Socrates. The Socratic method is essentially a form of questioning that's use to pursue thought in a lot of directions for a lot of purposes; used to explore complex ideas, to get to the truth of things, to open up issues, open up problems, uncover assumptions, analyze concepts. At the most basic form, it is your 3-year old that goes 'why?' and you give an answer, 'but why?' And you have to give another answer that's a little more simplified. 'But why?' And they continue to dive deep in there.

Matt Beaudreau: That's essentially what we are doing there. We hold Socratic discussions every day with all of our kids, and our job as the guides is never to take a stand on any side; it's always to push back on why they believe what they believe. And it's to facilitate discussion, and it's to raise the stakes and get them to really think through why it is that they believe what they believe, and how they would make specific decisions. It's putting them in that scenario. So we actually don't even answer questions on our campus. We will answer questions with other questions, so we're very deep into the Socratic method. That's one of the big pillars for us.

Mike Domitrz: All right, awesome. And so let's say a parent is hearing this and thinking, "Wow, where could I find an educational location like this?"

Matt Beaudreau: For Acton's in particular? If they go to Acton Academy, just A-C-T-O-N-academy.org, we have a list on that site of all the various locations, and you can dive in there and click on the one specific that's close to you. So you're able to go there, and ours of course is Acton Placer in northern California. Again, that Socratic method is big, and then we all agree on a goal-driven education that's very individualized in terms of academics so all of our students are setting their own weekly goals for what they want to accomplish in an academic standpoint.

Matt Beaudreau: And our guides meet one-on-one with each student every week and say, "Okay, this week, what is that you want to do? What are your goals in math? What are your goals in the book you're reading? What are your goals as far what you're writing? What are your goals ..." And so, we're just working on helping them be accountable to those goals rather than saying you have to this and have to do that.

Matt Beaudreau: And then of course, that third pillar for us is the real world experience, so they're continuously involved in projects that are putting them out there in the real world actually doing some things, which is where that self-confidence comes from.

Mike Domitrz: So what is the difference in that environment and a Montessori?

Matt Beaudreau: You know what? We've flown very well with Montessori. We kind of call ourselves the Montessori 2.0. We're kind of like Montessori on steroids where we will implement a lot of times more technology than a Montessori will. We understand we live in a technologically-driven world, so we will allow students a

little bit more leeway on the technology that we use, both for gamification of some the academics, as well as using that as a tool for communication with others and with experts. And it's really taking that Montessori concept and then putting in entrepreneurial mindset with that. It really is a natural flow. A lot of our kids come out of Montessori early education.

Mike Domitrz: And you're a big believer in talking about respecting the occasional process. Where do you think respect is missing in the traditional setting?

Matt Beaudreau: I remember my father saying respect is something that you earn, and I understand that sentiment. But for me, true respect is an inalienable human right, right? They can only be lost. And humans are worthy of respect, which means you honor their free will and their decisions as long as they don't impose on somebody else's ability to exercise theirs. And that doesn't mean you agree with them on everything; far from it. But it does mean you inherently respect and give them value as a human being.

Matt Beaudreau: And I think schooling doesn't respect kids because it imposes on them a standard of being the exact same as others and it takes away some of those inalienable rights. Just the fact that a high school senior may be 18, but has to raise his or her hand to say may I go to the bathroom right now because I already kind of know what you're talking about here, or I'm really not interested in what's being discussed there that the teacher isn't interested in discussing either, and then that teacher can say, "No, you can't because what I'm saying ..."

Matt Beaudreau: Those kind of situations are really kind of inherently kind of creating a false hierarchy, and that's where a lot of our bullying and those kind of things come from, is because we've got these hierarchical structures that are a false social contract our kids are trying to rebel against. We don't find any of that in our community because kids understand they're on kind of a level playing ground. Their individual genius is being respected, and so there's a collective code of conduct, but those standards don't go over into academics.

Mike Domitrz: What about the person who says, yeah, but that's easy for you to say because you're not getting

Mike Domitrz: The same students those public schools are getting with the struggles, with learning disabilities, maybe coming from environments where there's no support for education. If somebody's in your school, there's a clearer support for education, how do you respond to that?

Matt Beaudreau: Here is what I firmly believe and this is ... You know when I taught in public schools I taught in Title 1 schools, and I taught in schools that gang prevalence was huge and so I understand that population very, very well. They are right in the fact that that is one of the biggest downfalls right now is that we've got organizations like mine that are private institutions and have to be funded

privately. We've got to be funded by tuition, so inherently there are some underserved kids who do not get that chance. That is a huge drawback.

Matt Beaudreau: It's actually one of the things that we are focusing on. We'd like to build a second campus whereas the profits from some of our first campuses can go towards scholarships for underserved youth to get those because I'm a firm believer that that population in that environment would actually potentially do better than a lot of the kids we serve here. You know there's a tendency ... You know we're in a good socioeconomic area, my kids are phenomenal, it's fantastic families. Those kids are getting all kinds of support, and inherently for some of them that actually creates a little bit of an apathy.

Matt Beaudreau: "Mommy and Daddy are always going to be there. They're always going to be able to take care of me." It sometimes can let almost an entitlement mentality creep in whereas a lot of the underserved youth in less socioeconomically advantaged areas don't necessarily have that. If we could give them that same environment and empower them that way I think they would do some amazing things because the truth of the matter is they're just as brilliant, they're just not getting that support at home, so we would actually give them the tools, that self-awareness, that self-confidence to pull themselves up from the bootstraps. I think you would see a revolution, unlike anything you've ever known.

Mike Domitrz: Well, and that's the neat thing. I'm fortunate in that I get to speak in alternative schools, and I get to see that. The students are brilliant, and yet so many people look and go "Oh that's just to get them through graduation, those alternative schools." And no, they're thriving there. They're doing work totally unique, and it is in their unique ability. It's really powerful to see.

Matt Beaudreau: So powerful, so true. Yeah, I mean it is unbelievable. I went from the Title 1 schools to the kind of a higher-end socioeconomic and kids are kids. They're dealing with ... You know sometimes a lack of support and too much support from parents create the same issues. You know, it's kind of that law of extremes, and so just because you're in a higher socioeconomic area with more support, it's not necessarily a good thing. A lot of times it kind of equals out and the kids themselves when it boils down to it are brilliant, brilliant people who respond very well to respect, love, and that self-confidence and self-respect driven kind of environment.

Mike Domitrz: Yeah, absolutely, and Matt you have a couple of books you absolutely love. One is called *The Underground History of American Education* by John Taylor Gatto. What do you love about that book?

Matt Beaudreau: My goodness gracious. John Taylor Gatto was a brilliant man who just passed away a couple of months ago. He is somebody that I fully believe is going to be kind of this national treasure now after passing. John was a public school teacher, was the New York State teacher of the year many years, was a phenomenal educator, but he first kind of got notoriety when he resigned, and he had started diving into why school is the way it is, so what was the purpose

of the system that we've designed that we continue to use, and that's what that book really is, is a historical deep dive into how we created this environment. It's one of the most eye-opening books I've ever read, and for any educator it's an absolute must, absolute must-read because it really dives into the system that we've created and why.

Mike Domitrz: That's awesome, and then you have a very unique pick for the other book that had a huge impact on you and not one people would think of in education. That's Fight Club.

Matt Beaudreau: Yeah. Yes. Yeah, not one that many people think of, and when I say that people go, "Oh my gosh. What is this?" That book if you've had a chance to read it, yes it uses violence. It uses that. For me, it has nothing to do with that. What it has to do is everything about self-discovery. You know, there is a line in there where the main character is talking about letting everything that does not matter truly slide, and I have absolutely taken that to heart.

Matt Beaudreau: It's kind of cutting away the fat to get to the root of back to that hero's journey. Why am I here? Who am I? What are my deepest desires? How can I go back and be that person on a daily basis? I think in education that's at the root of what we're really trying to do. I wake up at night, and I find myself deconstructing the mindset of some of the kids that I'm working with saying, "I wonder why he made that decision? I wonder why?" And I really want to get down to that root of who they are and help them just be their truest self, and I think that's what that book represents for me, and that's what I want to do for each one of my kids.

Mike Domitrz: Well, I want to thank you, Matt. This has been an awesome conversation. For anyone listening you can find Matt at mattbeaudreau.com. Now, like me, you have a nightmarish name to spell.

Matt Beaudreau: Absolutely.

Mike Domitrz: So we're going to provide that link to everybody in the show notes, so if you're listening on a podcast just look at the show notes. All the links to Matt are there. The Acton Academy is there, everything is there, all the social media, the book recommendations. Matt's working on a book, so all that information is going to be there for our listeners to be able to find. Matt, thank you so much.

Matt Beaudreau: Pleasure is mine. Thank you, Mike. Thank you for all the work you're doing my friend. You do great stuff.

Mike Domitrz: Well, I appreciate that. Thank you. And for our listeners, you know what's next. It is Question of the Week.

Mike Domitrz: Before I answer this week's question of the week, I'd love to ask you a question. Would you please subscribe to this podcast, the RESPECT Podcast with Mike

Domitrz. By subscribing you can make a huge impact. Now, you might be wondering "Mike, how does my subscribing to your podcast make a huge impact?" Well, here's how. For every person that subscribes, it raises the rankings of the show in the search engines, so for people who care about RESPECT like yourself when they're doing a search for podcasts they're more likely to find the show thus providing an awesome opportunity for us to spread more respect around this world, and all you do is hit subscribe under your podcast. Plus the second benefit is by subscribing, you automatically get every episode right into your phone or whatever device you are listening to the podcast on. It happens automatically, so subscribing makes your life easier.

Mike Domitrz: Now, let's get into this week's question of the week. Oh, and by the way you can always ask your questions of the week by joining us on Facebook in our discussion group. It's called The RESPECT Podcast Discussion Group. Go there on Facebook and ask whatever questions you would like me to answer and/or address in this segment of the show and then listen to each episode to find out when your question is included.

Mike Domitrz: This week's question of the week is, Mike, how do I protect my kids when it comes to their own personal sexual decision making when they get to that age and/or those situations? The answer is you don't. You don't protect your kids because you're not going to be there with them in those moments. You're not able to protect them, and by understanding that helps you to pause, step back and go "Okay, I can't protect them. What can I do?" What you can do is empower them, educate them, give them so much knowledge and content that they're going to be able to make great choices for themselves and help their friends make better choices. Now, that doesn't mean fear, right? That's not scaring them. That's educating them.

Mike Domitrz: Giving them the A to Z of the discussions, so if you're talking about sex you talk about all the wonderful gifts and positives it can be and everything it takes to get to that place for that to happen and when those things don't happen how it can be uncomfortable, awful, awkward, painful and honestly even criminal or horrendous or traumatic, but you give the A to the Z. You don't lead with fear only. You don't lead with the positive only. You educate them fully on the topic so they can make the best choices possible. People love learning what to do. They hate being told what not to do. Focus on the what to do so they have enough knowledge to make those right choices.

Mike Domitrz: Do you know what I would love? I would love to hear your answer to this week's question of the week so would you please answer what your answer would have been if you were asked that question today on the show. All you do is go to our Facebook page. We have a special group where we have these discussions called The RESPECT Podcast Discussion Group, so the RESPECT Podcast Discussion Group, and share with us what would your answer have been to this week's question of the week, and, if take a moment, post us a new question for future episodes. What question would you like hear me answer on an upcoming

episode? That's all done on Facebook in our special group which is The RESPECT Podcast Discussion Group. Can't wait to see you there.

Mike Domitrz:

Thank you for joining us for this episode of The RESPECT Podcast which was sponsored by The Date Safe Project at [datesafeproject.org](http://datesafeproject.org). And remember, you can always find me at [mikespeaks.com](http://mikespeaks.com).