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My career really took off, things were going well. What didn't work so well for me is that I was becoming less and less me. I was becoming more and more this clinical efficient, robotic version of myself. That is very difficult for an individual to lose their agency, and it creates a lot of uncertainty. A lot of uncertainty creates stress, create anxiety, create depression, create trauma, the whole shebang. We tend to discount that.

James Robert:

Greetings and hello. I am James Robert Lay, and welcome to episode 274 of the Banking on Digital Growth podcast. Today's episode is part of the Digital Growth Journey Series, and I'm excited to welcome Peggy Van de Plassche to the show. Peggy spent over a decade as an executive leader in banking, and now she's a leading speaker and author who writes and speaks about personal transformation as well as mental health. These are important topics to me as I personally know how important both personal transformation as well as mental health is for any leader looking to maximize their own future growth potential. Because when a leader is maximizing their future growth potential, they're going to maximize the future growth potential of their team, they're going to maximize the future growth potential of their organization. So together we are going to venture into some new territory on this podcast that we have never explored before, and I invite you to join me on this journey with an open heart, with an open mind as Peggy shares her personal story of growth and transformation. Welcome to the show, Peggy. It is good to share time with you today.

Peggy:

It's wonderful to be here. Thank you for the invitation, James.

James Robert:

Well, before we get into talking about, I would say, even the need for personal transformation as part of any type of transformational journey, regardless of if that is digital transformation, brand transformation, cultural transformation, I would like to start the show out on a positive note. What is good for you right now? Personally or professionally, it is your pick to get started.

Peggy:

Well, many things are great right now actually. I'm at the ski resort. We have some construction happening at our home, and my husband and I decided to spend six weeks at the ski resort, thank to working from home. For us, it's a big change because just six months ago we would've never dared leave Toronto for that long of a period, so it's a big change. It's very good, and it's a big change of mindset for us, so that's great.

James Robert:

Well, it's interesting you talk about this idea of change of mindset, because I think when you talk about transformation, mindset is such an important part of the narrative. You have been speaking, you have been writing, you've been podcasting around personal transformation, mindset, mental health, all important subjects here to have conversations around. I too have been thinking about this. When thinking about digital transformation, I feel organizations have struggled because they've taken an outside-in approach. They've tried to transform at an organizational level. Well, people and teams, teams feel confused of, "Why are we doing this?" And then the individuals on that teams feel confused. And so this outside-in approach maybe isn't the best approach. Maybe we should look and explore another possible path, which would be an inside-out approach. Because if you transform the self, then you'll transform the team. And if you transform the team, then you'll transform the organization. I want to get

your take on this to start here because you know have been in banking and venture capitalist for 20 years, you've seen things. What's your take on this idea of transforming from an inside-out versus an outside-in approach?

Peggy:

Yeah, thank you. Thank you so much. We tend to forget that an organization is a sum of individuals, it's a sum of self. It becomes an entity by itself, but it doesn't start like that. It always starts with one person and several people. Change is scary. We're human being, we don't like uncertainty, and it is just the reality. Some of us are more scared by change than others, but it's nonetheless true for most of us. What I've seen in the corporate world in in large organization, especially I worked in very large bank, I also worked in small organization, but I saw it in large organization mainly, is the impact on mental health of this control and command approach that most organization have. I saw it, I would say, first because individual lose their control of themself.

James Robert:

Their agency.

Peggy:

Exactly. They're losing their agency. And that is very difficult for an individual to lose their agency, and it creates a lot of uncertainty. A lot of uncertainty creates stress, create anxiety, create depression, create trauma, the whole shebang. We tend to discount that. For 20 years you work in an organization day by day, it creates a lot of challenges for your mental health. So that's the first thing, when you look at transforming an organization, well, do you have healthy individuals, and do you interact with your employees or your members in a way that is healthy for them? I would say mostly no. To bring it back to the transformation of the self, I think we need to be honest with what is the status we're starting with. And it's mainly people who are not at their best every day.

James Robert:

Honesty. One of the things I'm writing about in my second book, Banking on Change, are the three Ts for transformation. The very first one, probably the hardest of them all, is to tell the truth, to tell the truth first and foremost to ourselves about where we've been, where we are, and where we could go next on our own journeys of growth. If we have been desensitized to a degree to not even think about that, have that conversation with ourselves, how do we even know if we're on the right path as an individual? As I mentioned, you were a banker, venture capitalist 20 years, you're writing a new book, and I think it'll be helpful for the dear listener to provide them with some context of just your own journey of transformative growth to get to where you're at today. Take us back.

Peggy:

It's been an interesting journey because I'm sure you can hear my accent, I'm from France originally. I moved to North America 20 years ago at the beginning of my career. I just worked in France for a few years. The work environment is very different, very, very different in North America and in Europe. I started reading all these books on leadership and managing your career and how do you get to the corner office and all that stuff. And the advice, when I look at it right now 20 years later with, I would say, a bit more wisdom, this advice are literally sociopathic advice, which is really lie, cheat, fake your way to the top. That's what I was fed... or what I fed myself-

James Robert:

Of course.

Peggy:

... when I studied in because I thought, "Okay, I'm in North America, I need to understand how the game is played." Even if some of this advice didn't seem very honest, maybe that's the word, well, I applied them because well, I think that's the way people here play the game. And it worked very well for me. My career really took off, things were going well. What didn't work so well for me is that I was becoming less and less me. I was becoming more and more this clinical, efficient, robotic version of myself. Amazing to be successful in a corporation, not so good for your mental health.

James Robert:

So let me pause you right there because this is an important part of the journey to maybe just unpack a little bit further. I think some people feel this, some people don't feel this. It's a matter of, I think, just personal awareness of self. How am I feeling? When I look at myself in the mirror, what do I see? Who is looking back at me? What was it to where you realized that... I think your words, and I'm going to paraphrase, so please correct me, you said, "I wasn't feeling like myself anymore." Did this happen over a week, a month, multiple years? What did this look like for you?

Peggy:

It happened over multiple years. My last gig in a bank was seven years ago. I was an exec. I was leading innovation, so talking about change. I realized the way I was managing my team, I was managing the relationship with the people I was working with was very tough. I had no compassion anymore, it was just about efficiency. I didn't really like that version of myself. And just before taking that gig, I was managing a family office for a very, very wealthy tech entrepreneur. I saw in him a version of myself I didn't like, a controlling, tough as nail version of myself. So it started with him, and then when I went to the bank I realized, "Okay, that thing is not working well." And as life has it, the person I was working with was very insecure, which made him very difficult to work with, a bit of a bully type of person.

When I spoke about that to my chain of command, what I received as a feedback was, "Oh yeah, we know he's a bully, we had many people complain, but you're going to have to deal with that. It is just the way it is. It's your problem." No, that's when I resigned, and that's when I really started spending more time on my personal growth trying to go back to being a person who was kind and compassionate versus ruthless, angling for the next promotion at all cost.

James Robert:

You brought up a key point there when talking about this experience: insecurity. I've talked about this a lot on the podcast, but in 2012, my business was 10 years old, very successful at the time, but I was a bad person. My wife was probably the one who helped me the most then, but at the time, maybe even seemed a little bit like the enemy because she was calling me out. Not a good husband, not a good father. We had two small children, one was two, the other one was a newborn. She pretty much said, "You're going to have to make some choices. It's the business or it's the family. You're going to have to figure this out."

But I always looked at things of, "Well, I want the business and I want the family, I just need to figure out a new way forward to integrate both." I think the idea, and maybe this is where my mind is coming out of COVID, is like work-life balance, it's more like work-life integration. It's, "How can I just be me in both sides, personally, professionally?" Because when you take those two worlds, personal growth, professional growth, and combine them together, that's what leads to exponential growth for the individual.

James Robert:

Because if you're struggling personally, you're going to struggle professionally. If you're struggling professionally, you're going to struggle personally. If you're able to align both sides of the equation, personal and professional, that leads to exponential growth as an individual. Now bring individuals together in an organization who feel the same way, that makes up a team. The team's now growing exponentially.

But you said you started to have to work on yourself. For me, it was my wife basically saying, "You're going to have to make a choice." So it was an outside driver. I had to bring in some outside perspective because I couldn't see the label on the bottle. I was stuck in the bottle, so I needed some external perception. It was David C. Baker, who had worked with other marketing agencies like mine at the time, and he said, "Hey, just blow up, blow the business up, start over, and go down a new path." And it's exactly what I did. It's been over a decade now.

But I want to go back to where you had this moment of awareness, this experience, and you said, "I started to do more personal development, focus more on personal growth." What did you do? How did you do that? For the dear listener who might be thinking... We're having this conversation, they're like, "This is me, this is how I feel right now, but I don't know what to do next." How can you share your experience, maybe provide them with this is what Peggy did. How can Peggy help them?

Peggy:

Maybe as a disclaimer before I go in what I've done, and it's very similar to what you mentioned, is that you will probably have to blow off a few things. Very often when starting a personal growth journey, people don't really give you that warning. And then when it happens, you're just like, "Oh my God, I didn't see it coming. If I had known, I might have still done it, but maybe I would've done it a bit differently." So that's something I'm always very, very mindful when explaining my personal growth journey is that it wasn't clean, it wasn't easy, and it wasn't fast.

James Robert:

I want to reinforce this. It wasn't clean, it wasn't easy, and it wasn't fast. I agree with you 100%. Now a decade plus later since I've gone down this own path myself, and if I look back, it wasn't clean, it wasn't easy, it wasn't fast. I would say I'm still learning. I'm still growing. I don't think that there's a final destination, at least from my own perception right now. I don't know, maybe there is, but I haven't achieved that because I feel like I can always learn and be even better than what I was before based upon the new knowledge. I mean, even this conversation and all the conversations that I've had on the podcast, I'm always taking something and it's getting deposited up into to my mind that is then maybe I'll forget about it, but it's still there, it's in the subconscious so that it's going to influence me one way, shape, form, or fashion or another. So it wasn't clean, it wasn't easy and it wasn't fast. So that's a great disclaimer for the dear listener that if you want to commit to go down this path, know it is a journey, and it is about progress, not perfection, right?

Peggy:

Like many controlling or at least recovering controlling person, perfection was the goal. Because if you're perfect, no one can catch you and tell you you're not good enough. So there's a catch catch 22. So what did I do? I did plenty of different things, to be very honest. I tend to try many things. I'm a bit of a tendering the coal mine. So from coaching, meditation, journaling, hypnosis, to things a bit more

random, sweat lodge in Mexico, energy healing, homeopathy, acupuncture, shiatsu. Anyway, so I tried many, many things, I'm telling you.

James Robert:

A lot of modalities, it sounds like, a lot of different-

Peggy:

A lot of them.

James Robert:

... experimentation. Okay.

Peggy:

Yes. Well, because I believe that you'll never twice the same person. So sticking to the same thing over and over again I don't think makes sense. It's the same story even, okay, you are going to tell me if the best diet for you. Well, we're not even the same gender. Again, this 1, 2, 3 step trick for your diet, your personal transformation, your whatever, I just find it so stupid because we're different people. And I'm not even the same person that I was yesterday and that I will be tomorrow. So one thing I really want to mention because it has worked very well for me and you know, is that I started microdosing psilocybin, so magic mushroom, nine months ago. What I really, really, really like with that is that it helped me on, I would say, three buckets. The first one is performance and focus, the second is mental health, and the third is spirituality and awareness.

I mentioned a lot of the modalities I used. The beauty with microdosing is that it really augments and deepen and fasten the results of this other modalities. So if I had started microdosing at the same time, I might have started doing hypnosis, meditation, and all that great stuff, it would've probably accelerated the path, because the beauty we've psychedelics is that they rewire your brain. And so, for people like me who had high level of anxiety but also depression, PTSD without knowing it, without even knowing it, all the traditional personal growth tools unfortunately don't work very well. Because you are not really starting from a very healthy foundation. While working with microdosing, microdosing many, many psilocybin, many clinical trials and clinical studies are showing that it's extremely helpful for people with depression, anxiety, PTSD and addiction, which was probably the only thing I didn't have. Or maybe [inaudible 00:20:42] addicted to work, but-

James Robert:

That's where I was going to hop in. Because in the back of my mind I'm hearing Joe Polish who has spoken frequently about addiction. And one of the addictions, I forgot how he says this, but it's almost like the commonly accepted addiction is workaholism. We get addicted. I've been there myself. I would say I'm a recovering digital addict and I'm a recovering workaholic. I'm trying to find balance in my life because what is it that we're trying to avoid or what we're trying to get affirmation in? There's a lot that comes back into family of origin and childhood upbringing and all of these things. This has just been my own personal experience here, I'm trying to get affirmation from different things. But then when you create this sense of awareness, back to your point, I like the way you framed it, the magic mushroom, because there's this perception, and I want to roll this back in just a bit like, "Oh, that's a little bit different."

I've heard bad things about this, but no, your experience and having experiences of talking with others who've gone down the same type of a journey, it literally rewires the mind and it creates new neural pathways. It can help you perceive and see things differently about yourself and just the world around you. What would you say to the dear listener who is a financial brand leader at a bank, at a credit union, at a FinTech, who is very smart, very analytical, a left brain driven leader, and they're thinking, "Wow, this podcast has just gone off the deep end. We're talking psychedelics now." But it is your experience, it is your story, it is your journey, and one that I just hope helps to create some awareness of the world is transforming around us. What was true, and truth, that's a whole nother conversation for another day.

But what was true a decade ago, 20 years ago... I even think growing up in the United States as an elementary student, they had a program called DARE, Drug Awareness Resistance Education, I think is what it was. It's like dare to keep a kid off drugs. But it's almost like we're looking at this now through a different lens of, "Well, this is plant-based medicine, and it is part of certain individual's personal transformation that is required for their continued growth." Otherwise, you stagnate and you get stuck in what I call the cave of complacency, which is a very dangerous place to be. So what would you do for the dear listener to help maybe reduce some of the stigma around psychedelics in your own experience here?

Peggy:

Well, it's interesting what you mentioned truth. Truth is very contextualized. What was accepted even 10 years ago is absolutely not accepted anymore. We can go MeToo, Black Lives Matters, or this movement where when I was working in organization I heard and seen things that were absolutely courageous that you could see. But at the time, no, well, you'd be fired on the spot. So truth doesn't really mean much.

The thing with psychedelics versus drugs like anti-anxiety medication, the only difference is that we've been approved by the FDA. But OxyContin was approved by the FDA as well. I'm not always totally bullish on what is legal, meaning right or illegal meaning not right. Things change. For the executive, or the very traditional person, conservative person, which I am, I never taken any recreational drugs before and I have never taken any prescription drugs before either. So you could not find more conservative than I in that regard, so I absolutely understand where people stand. For me, it has been reaching a level where I can continue doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, or I can change something in my life and see what happens. I'm not saying you should try a regimen of cocaine, [inaudible 00:25:41], and Marlboro, that's not what I'm saying.

James Robert:

Of course not.

Peggy:

Do some research. That's what I've done. Because it doesn't matter what I'm going to tell you, people need to do their own research. What I noticed when I did my own research was, okay, it's not because all the people do it, but it's right, it's stupid. Many people do stupid things and there's not necessarily a trophy numbers. Nonetheless, I could see many, many people in my space, in the venture capital space, in the technology CEO space actually microdosing. I mean, the psychedelics resurgence really came from Silicon Valley, that's why it came, because people wanted to use that first for performance and focus, and second for awareness and spirituality.

This is when people realize, "Oh my God, it has amazing impact on anxiety, depression, and all that." So today you have tons of companies and VC funds, people don't really know that, but billions are being allocated to psychedelics right now. If you are an investor, you should really look into it because there will be a lot of money to be made, I can tell you that. Do your own research. You have documentaries on Netflix, you have books, you have articles, posts, podcasts, any information you want to find, you can find. My point is very simple, is do you want to continue your life the way you do or do you want to bring more life in your life? I was just tired of having no life in my life. But for me I was just like, "Okay, if I die, I'd be very disappointed. And that's not something I can deal with." But I think that's probably, hopefully, the best thing to say to convince anyone to look into it.

James Robert:

I think that's the key takeaway. Before you look at any type of the modalities for personal growth that you have experienced, all the way from meditation and coaching to hot sauna to-

Peggy:

[inaudible 00:28:03].

James Robert:

... to psychedelics, I think it's about asking yourself, are you truly happy where you are today, or do you feel that there's an opportunity, and this is key, not to be better, but to be even better. The reason I always like to add the word even, because we can be good, but what can I do to be an even better person, to be an even better father, husband, entrepreneur? Because there are things that I cannot see, that I cannot perceive that are blocking me from achieving-

Peggy:

Exactly.

James Robert:

... that next level of growth in all these different areas of my life. I appreciate how you shared that. This is not telling someone what to do, but to just go explore and what are the possibilities, what's the potentiality? I think it's because there's a lot of untapped potential in people-

Peggy:

Exactly.

James Robert:

... because they're stuck. And I want to get your take on this. Why do we get stuck?

Peggy:

I want to jump on what you just mentioned-

James Robert:

Sure.

Peggy:

... with potential. I think for me it was this struggle which is very much linked with being stuck and the limiting belief you mentioned, which I know I can do more, I know I want more from life, but I'm stuck. I cannot get that. This internal turmoil of, "I want bigger things in my life," and it's not necessarily, "Okay, I want a bigger house, da da da, the usual." Of course I want more monetary success, that's not what I mean, but I just want more of everything. And I'm stuck not able to get it. Why? That has been the place where I've been struggling and, I have to say, being extremely frustrated at myself. Because once again, you open an magazine, "Manifest your life, it's so easy. Your thoughts make your life, da, da, da, da."

Which is not wrong. It's just that my thoughts were 100% limiting belief. These were belief that were telling me, "Well, you cannot do that. Well, oh no." So the world was a small dark box while I was hoping and striving and knowing that it wasn't true, that I could have an amazing life. And that's really it. I was stuck, why? Because of all the limiting belief. I was doing the same thing over again thinking something else's going to happen. If you don't change something, I mean, it's just the definition of insanity. For me, that was really, really that deep suffering of I'm wasting my time away and I'm going to die and I'm going to be so upset at myself.

James Robert:

So this idea of death, and it's two words, it's Latin, memento mori, and essentially it means remember your death. It's not from a morbid perspective, it's like if I was to die and go... "Whatever happens next, whatever happens next, but if I was to die, would I be happy, would I be satisfied with the life that I lived?" And I've watched some YouTube videos on people that have talked, they're kind of, they're at their end of days, they're at the end of life, and they talk about regrets. I think those two words, memento mori, remember your death, are so important because we're gifted just a limited amount of time. And then this bigger existential question of, why are we here? Maybe this is just a major classroom to learn and grow and become even better than what we were before. I mean, there's this whole other conversation that we could have about that.

But you talked about just, "Is there something bigger? Is there something bigger that I can do?" That's just the big house. I've been thinking a lot about this for a future book that I'm not ready to write just yet because I still think there's more thought to give consideration, but it's the five dimensions of wealth. What I mean by the five dimensions of wealth, there's obviously financial wealth, but then there's health, then there's mental wealth, there's emotional wealth with that, there's relational wealth, there is spiritual wealth, like purpose. There's all these other things that I think that if we just thought a little bit about and maybe created the space and the time, I think that's an important point too. So many leaders get stuck doing work that they don't create space and time to review and reflect what they've done, why they've done it, learn through those experiences, think about how they can apply those insights to do even better through the next iteration. What do you see, as we start to wrap up here, as one action that the dear listener could commit to take on their own personal journey of growth?

Peggy:

Look at the patterns in your life. What has been happening over and over again in your life? And that will give you a big idea on one or two limiting belief that are really, really, sorry for the French, fucking up your life. For me, I was able to look at the way my career was constantly, boom and bust, boom and bust, boom and bust. I'm sure you know that great book, the Big Leap from Gay Hendricks where he is talking about the upper limit, where you think you are upper limit of happiness. And I was a victim of that 200%. I was absolutely oblivious to that because I could always find a reason, an external reason to justify the boom and the bust, the boom and the bust. But you know what? The only variable that was a constant was me. So maybe the problem was there, and it was there.

So that's what I mean, look at your patterns. That can be in your career, in your relationship, in your health, money, anything, patterns, and then you're going to have the best discovery of your life. And then you will never stop at that because, "Oh, I need to find more. I need to find more."

James Robert:

So this is where in Banking on Change I'm writing about the need to just stop, pause, and do reflection at least once every 90 days because the world is now moving at an exponential rate. If we don't create the intentional space and time to pause, review, reflect, we will never identify the patterns. I've talked a lot about this from the lens of marketing and opportunity, identifying common patterns that cause common people problem, that cause common people pain. But I like taking that thinking now and applying it through what you've shared today. Take time to identify common patterns that are causing you problems, that are causing you pain, and just create some self-awareness. Don't beat yourself up. Don't think that you're bad. But just that sense of awareness, and maybe then use the five why's, kind of going down to first principles of why. Why am I like this? Why am I thinking this way? Why am I feeling this way? And then answer the question. Well, why? And then answer the question. And then why? Then answer the question. Keep going deeper and deeper and deeper and then I think you'll learn some things that you never saw before, right?

Peggy:

Yeah, exactly. It works for your organization, works for you, your family, for everything. But at the end of the day, last thing you want is to be a product of your childhood, education, family, da, da da. 95% of what we think and who we are is not ours, is something that we've been fed.

James Robert:


Subconscious programming. That right there, you're a product of your environment, you're a product of your family of origin, you're a product of your upbringing. It's like writing a book, we get to choose to write a new story. We get to choose to write a new chapter. Dare I say, we get to choose to write an entirely new book and an anthology that has multiple chapters if... I think this is the most important part right here in my own mind, if we have the courage to commit to just take a little bit of a different path forward, it's like that one degree on an airplane. If the airplane exactly shifts one degree to the right or shifts one degree to the left, you might not notice it in a minute, you might not even really notice it in 10 minutes. Do that one degree for hours and days and weeks and years and months, you're going to really see that that major compounding change going forward.

Peggy, this has been a fantastic conversation. Thank you for your wisdom that you've shared today through your own journey of growth. What is the best way for someone who's listening, they're like, "I understand. You're connecting with me," how can they connect with Peggy to continue the conversation we've started here today?

Peggy:

Yeah, so we can look on my website, which is my name, peggyvandeplasse.com. I understand Van de Plasse is not an easy name, but it's my name. And they can also obviously find me on all the social media, LinkedIn, and so on. I have a weekly newsletter if they're interested, where I speak about all that great stuff. So thank you so much for having me, James. It was a wonderful conversation.

James Robert:



Absolutely. Connect with Peggy, learn with Peggy, grow with Peggy. Peggy, thanks so much for joining me for another episode of Banking on Digital Growth. As always and until next time, be well, do good, and make your bed.