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Robert Glazer: Welcome to Elevate, a podcast about achievement, personal growth, and pushing limits in leadership and life. I'm Robert Glazer and I chat with world-class performers who have committed to elevating their own life, pushing the limits of their capacity, and helping others to do the same.

Robert Glazer: Welcome to the Elevate Podcast. Our quote for today is from Fred Rogers, and it is, "One of the most important gifts that parents can give a child is the gift of accepting that child's uniqueness." Our guest today, David Rendall has helped many people embrace what makes them unique. He's a leadership professor, nonprofit executive, standup comedian, and keynote speaker to clients such as Microsoft, AT&T, US Air Force and many more. He's also the author of four books, including The Freak Factor, The Four Factors of Effective Leadership, and Pink Goldfish. David, welcome. I'm excited to have you on the Elevate Podcast today.

David Rendall: I'm excited to be on the Elevate Podcast.

Robert Glazer: So you've described yourself as being a class clown as a kid. Can you talk a bit about how the adults in your life tried to maybe push you away from your natural tendencies and how that went for you?

David Rendall: Yeah. So they didn't call it my natural tendencies, they called it being bad, they called it being irresponsible, they called it a lack of self-control, they called it being rebellious, they called it being naughty, all sorts of things. Yeah, I mean, they yelled at me, they punished me, they physically disciplined me, they threatened me, they intimidated me. So I mean, it was just a constant barrage of messages that this is wrong, this is bad, and even if you take it from a positive standpoint like they were trying to help me, which I do think they had the right intentions, they were convinced, and then convinced me, that the characteristics that I had had no upside, had no positives, and needed to be completely eradicated from my life if I was ever going to have any shred of success or happiness.

Robert Glazer: That's very optimistic of you. I want to break this down a little bit because I never liked the word they. So can you explain who are the theys and what is it exactly that you were doing that was so abhorrent?

David Rendall: Yeah. Okay. So there's a bunch of theys. Let's start at home, mom and day called me motormouth. A lot of go to your room, a lot of getting spankings. What am I doing wrong? I'm talking. I mean, literally my mom sometimes in the car would be like, "No talking. Nobody gets to talk." It's like wow, that's like, I mean, I've had kids, I've had three kids. I've never put in a no talking rule. So breaking that rule, not doing what you're told. There was a lot of rules at our house growing up. Pretty much everything was wrong, pretty much you were never supposed to be doing anything. So when I would break those rules, we were a very, very religious family too, you weren't just going against your parents, you were going against god. You weren't just doing something wrong, you were doing something morally wrong by going against god's authority in your life. Those are pretty heavy things to take on as like a nine-year-old, you know?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

David Rendall: At school same things. You can't talk, you got to stop talking, you stepped on the grass, off the sidewalk, you were supposed to stay on the sidewalk. You argued with a teacher when you didn't like something. You asked a question. You didn't participate, you did participate but you participated inappropriately, you made a joke. I mean, just on and on. I mean, I got kicked out of art class because I was talking too much, when art class was just drawing. It was us sitting and drawing. It wasn't against the rules to talk, but the teacher didn't like my talking. She kicked me out, said, "I think we're all tired of listening to you." The other kids took a poll and said, "We aren't tired of listening to him. Let him come back."

Robert Glazer: Speak more.

David Rendall: Then she hated me more than she hated me to begin with. So that just gets repeated grade after grade. I mean, I'd get kicked out of class, that's another thing that would happen, a punishment, which wasn't much of a punishment. But then a teacher would see me in the hallway who hadn't even ever had me in class, and be like, "I've heard about you. When you get to my class I'm not going to take your crap." So I was pre in trouble with people.

David Rendall: So yeah, it's just a constant message that it's like being a fish in water. The constant message was there's something wrong with you and I had no ability at the time to see that anything other than that might be true. That I wasn't one of those kids who was like, "I'm going to show you. I'm going to make a million dollars and then you're going to be sorry." I was like, "Oh, I'm going to be a loser. Well, that's disappointing, but I guess you win some you lose some. You're adults, you must know." Right? I figured they must have the inside scoop. So I didn't question what they said because I figured they must know, and when everybody is telling you, there wasn't anybody who said, "Dave, don't worry about it, you'll be a speaker some day." Or something like that. It was just a constant message.

Robert Glazer: Was the school, was it a public school or was it a religious school?

David Rendall: It was also a religious school, yeah. Then different ones over time.

Robert Glazer: They moved you around. You said something the first time I saw you speak. It's one of those things that I've used it a lot, I've told the story, it really, it stuck with me. You said, in school you got told to sit down and shut up all the time, and if someone had told you that you could get paid to stand up and talk, and the type of money that you are paid now to do that, you would've said, "That's what I want to do." And that's really clear. It gets to this whole kind of paint-by-number career thing that I think we have for kids. I think if they're really good at dribbling a soccer ball, we know what to do with them. If they're really good at playing the piano, we know what to do with them. If they're good at talking, if they're good at marketing, if they're selling homework and showing entrepreneurial tendencies, I'm not sure the traditional education system knows what to do with these people, even when they're demonstrating high aptitude at an early age.

David Rendall: Well, and let me even push back on even that a little bit because I think you're right to some extent, but if somebody is really good at dribbling a soccer ball and they're getting bad grades, what do we do? We threaten their athletic participation if they can't improve their grades.

Robert Glazer: Right.

David Rendall: So we threaten to take away the thing that they're the best at if they can't do these other things, and the message is if you're not good at everything, then you're not going to be successful and you have to be good at all the things or else you're disqualified. Then let's keep going because athletics, you're right, but even think about somebody who is crushing it in band, but if they're doing bad in other classes, what's the message? Well, it doesn't matter that you're doing well in band. It doesn't matter that you're doing well in art class. It doesn't matter if you're doing well in drama class if you're not doing good in reading, writing, and arithmetic, even now more it's if you're not doing good in the STEM classes, then you're not going to be successful, then yet who do we pay the most in the real world? We pay artists, we pay actresses and actors, we pay musicians, and we pay athletes more than we pay anybody else, but when you're doing good at those things in school and not doing good at traditional school, the message is if you can't figure out traditional school, you're going to be a failure. When that's not even close to the reality of real life.

Robert Glazer: Do you know anyone that takes tests for a living?

David Rendall: Yeah, right. I was just thinking about this the other day. My daughter wasn't feeling well and I picked her up from school, and my other daughter was driving because she's got her temporary license and she's trying to get in some miles and she does online school, so she was free to just do what she wanted. So she drove me over there, and we were driving past these little kids after we picked up my daughter, these little kindergartners who were walking in a line and the teacher literally had them walking holding their index finger up to their mouth

like the shush sign, and that's how they were apparently supposed to walk. Walk in a line and remind yourself to be quiet by holding up your finger to your mouth to be quiet as they were outside. There's literally nobody they could bother, and what we all agreed in the car is there is never really a time in your adult life when you are not allowed to talk, right?

David Rendall: You don't get on the airplane they're like, "All right, everybody shut up. No more talking. That's the end of it." You don't walk into the airplane lounge, the airport lounge, "All right. It's a no talking zone everybody." They're preparing you for literally a situation that just doesn't exist, right? And how many times do you have to walk in a line? We're not in the military. When was the last time you walked in a line and had to stay carefully behind the person in front of you. So right, I think we're teaching all sorts of skills that aren't as important and then we're negating the ones that are.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, it's been brought up a lot recently, which is interesting, because I think what we're doing, particularly in the US school system, is going against all the data. So every year Norway wins all these awards for the best educational system, and their no structure, no standardized test, free play, [inaudible 00:09:25]. There was a great article, I think it was in Vanity Fair or The New York times that I read where a couple from New York moved to Norway, and a couple from Norway moved to New York City, and I think the Norway couple got to New York City and they had a three year old, and the school met with them, they came in and they said, "Well, do you have her test results?" What do you mean her test results? Like what are you talking about? She's like three years old. And it just doesn't seem to be backed by any data or reality, but we're doubling and tripling down on.

David Rendall: Yeah, and that's another good one. I was talking to somebody about schooling earlier today, and both of my older daughters, they're 17 and 15, they both are in situations, one where she is able to take community college classes while she's still in high school. She goes to high school in the morning and community college in the afternoon, and she's already got almost three semesters of college credit and then they want her to take the ACT and the SAT to see what her college aptitude is, to see how she might perform in college. I'm like, "I'm pretty sure we're clear on how she is going to perform in college because she's already done a year and a half of college." Right?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

David Rendall: So it doesn't make any sense, and yet, and the same thing. Well why don't you take this AP class in high school and if you do well enough, a college with accept it as a course if you can pass this test that proves you know enough of it to opt out of the college class, or you could just take the college class and prove that you can do this college class.

David Rendall: So there's all these sort of nonsensical things that are happening, and then she's even applying to colleges who will give her a scholarship based on her SAT

scores, not based on the 30 credits of college class that she's already taken because they feel like that's, without even thinking about it, right? It's just the standard predictor. Well, what's your SAT? Well that tells us how you'll do. Well, I have straight As in every college class I've taken to this point. Yeah, I don't know, we'll just, we'll focus on the predictor instead of the actual results.

Robert Glazer: What I actually think is interesting is I thought about this in the context of business school, and I did not go to business school, but I've had friends, were past that cycle, who applied to business school and they are going back and studying stuff that they haven't used for 20 years for the entrance exam, like geometry, and shapes and stuff like that. Now it's a GMAT, that's what it's called. So they're going back, and stuff that they ... They've been leaders of companies and managers, and tops in their field, and they're going back and studying stuff for a test that they literally haven't used since they probably studied for the SAT.

David Rendall: Yeah.

Robert Glazer: And then they're getting recommendations, but the way that most people get recommendations, they ask for recommendations. Someone says, "Sure. You write it and I'll submit it." So the things that you're giving the most weight to are stuff that, and not what they've actually been doing, but the standardized test where they're going back and studying this stuff, and the recommendations that most people told them to do themselves, and any good business that I know would call the reference, they would back check, they would ask for reference that they didn't give. Is this person actually who they said they are? But none of those best business practices are actually used to get into business school. So it does seem out of whack.

Robert Glazer: Well, you talk a lot about how your strengths were really painted as weaknesses. At what point did you realize that this hyperactive energetic personality actually wasn't a weakness but was a strength and was something you could lean into?

David Rendall: Yeah, it was probably my late 20s. I started seeing that when I did stand up and talk instead of sit down and stay quiet, people liked it. People laughed at the five minute speech that I gave for the Chamber of Commerce when I was volunteering on the board. People chuckled and paid attention when I gave the 10 minute talk to my team to wrap up the year. When I was in a group and somebody had to share what the group had done with the wider group, people would volunteer me to do the presentation even though I was trying to control myself and not be the communicator because you're supposed to sit and listen. When I took charge of things and led things instead of doing what I was told, it seemed to work and people seemed to like it, and it seemed to be effective. I just, I was listening to some stuff about positive psychology, which is about focusing on your strengths, but I didn't think I knew what my strengths were yet, you know?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

David Rendall: And then I just had a realization, I was like, "Well, wait a second. What if the way you know your strengths is what if my biggest weaknesses are my biggest strengths?" And in fact, it wasn't multiple. It was like I wonder if my biggest weakness is also a strength. I just had that question, and as soon as I had that question I just started finding the answer was yes and the answer was everywhere, and it's not your weakness is a strength, but your weaknesses and strengths, and not your weaknesses are strengths, everyone's weaknesses are strengths. To this day it's been 20 years almost since then, I just see it every single day and people send me stories, and people get it, and people tell me about their kids.

David Rendall: It's everywhere in the world, we're just blind to it because we don't think weaknesses are strengths. We think weaknesses are weaknesses and strengths are strengths, and we think we know what even strengths would be, and we think we can test for them going back to what you said, and we think we know what good looks like when we see it, and we think we can tell you who the good students are going to be, and who the good adults are going to be, and who is going to make it and who is not going to, and we're wrong almost every time. There was a study recently that came out that said, "Most valedictorians don't outperform the other students in their future lives."

Robert Glazer: There's been a lot of this coming out because they're maximum conformists and don't want to get everything wrong. We're going to dive into Freak Factor a little bit, but before I do that, I'm curious. So between that time when you figured this out, and the time when you were being shunned by everyone early on. How was your self-esteem during that period?

David Rendall: I think it would be an exaggeration to say that I had any.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

David Rendall: I mean, it was demoralizing. It was difficult, it was ... Because there was also other things. I also was very, very skinny, and we'd change schools not because I got kicked out or anything but just because the school would move or the school would close. So I went to five different schools by the time I was in eighth grade. So if I made friends I'd lose those friends and have to try to make friends with kids who already had friends. I got teased mercilessly because of the way I looked. So when you add that on top, when the kids don't get you and like you, and the adults don't get you and like you, I mean, it leaves you kind of alone. I remember I would tell my mom I was sick so I didn't have to go to football practice even though I loved football because it was a bunch of kids I didn't know from different schools, and they would all gang up and make fun of me and call me names. I didn't like going to school because I was always in trouble, and I didn't like coming home because then I was always in trouble.

David Rendall: So I mean, it was devastating, it was awful and it was ... I don't think I had a self-esteem. Like I said, I wasn't one of those kids who fought back. I was just kind of demoralized. I thought well, this isn't going to be good, and so I'll just try to hang in there and hope for the best, but I didn't really have any hope for the best, and I didn't think there was a best that was sort of around the corner.

Robert Glazer: So that's a good segue into what is the Freak Factor and what inspired you to write a book about it?

David Rendall: Yeah, what inspired me was just I wish someone would've told me what I discovered on my own much sooner. I wish they would've told my parents, I wish they would've told my teachers, I wish they would've told my managers. I wish more people knew about this sooner. So the reason I wrote it is because I wanted to share that message, and the way I came up with it was just realizing, it was just self-reflection and realizing this was happening to me. Realizing this was true for me, exploring it, seeing it's true for other people, sharing it, and then having people share their stories or other stories with me, to show me that this is true, I mean, just all over the place, all over the world. Then the more I share it, the responses I get from people.

David Rendall: I turned it into a kid's book and a lady gave it to her son with ADD, and he said, he sent me a note and said, "Thank you Mr. Rendall for the book. It made me feel better about who I am." I was the first person who told the 10-year-old that his worst quality, his ADHD, was actually an advantage that he could use to be successful. The first person that told him there was hope for his future, and that was transformative, right? So then when that happens, then that inspires me even more to keep going and to share it with more and more people. So it was just seeing that lesson and weaknesses are strengths, that's the essence of the Freak Factor. So you shouldn't fix them because there's nothing to fix. You should actually amp it up. You should dial it up, you should embrace it and increase it instead of trying to moderate it or reduce it and be more of who you are instead of trying to conform more to what other people tell you success looks like, and that that's the true path of success.

Robert Glazer: So in addition to a doctoral degree in management, you also have a graduate degree in psychology, which I'm impressed that you could sit through that. That seems like a lot of class. How did your understanding of psychology help you with developing the Freak Factor? Which came first? Was there a chicken and an egg?

David Rendall: Yeah, my understanding of psychology didn't help at all. So two things I'll say before that, is you said you were surprised I could sit through that. What's interesting, I think about just about anybody, some parent might say, "My kid can't focus." But they actually can. They can play Call of Duty for 19 hours in a row without ever taking bathroom break. My kid's not motivated. Yeah, they are motivated, they're motivated to play soccer. We have all these things we say about people that aren't true. I could sit still when I was doing something that I wanted to do. It kind of goes back to not wanting to do what I was told. When I

was in college and I discovered psychology and I was naturally interested in it, and I wanted to learn it, my grades improved and my focus improved because I was doing what I wanted to do. So I think that's a key factor is I'm not good at doing what I'm supposed to do, but I'm a goal oriented person and when I want something, I can do just about anything to get it, but I'm not going to do that for the goal you want me to achieve. So that helped with school.

David Rendall: The problem with school was that was still me trying to conform. I mean, I got a master's because I thought I needed it to get the kind of job I wanted to have, and even the kind of job I already had in nonprofits, helping people with disabilities, a master's degree is kind of the basic requirement. So it was still me trying to prove to them, whoever they are, future employers, those kinds of things, that I'm worthy of the opportunity to work at their organization. So that was one problem with it.

David Rendall: The other problem with it was there was nothing I learned during really any of my degrees that I speak about or teach in the Freak Factor. There wasn't even positive psychology. I mean, I have four years of undergraduate in psychology and two years of graduate school in psychology, and there wasn't even a paragraph in one of the books in one of the class on positive psychology, and it's been out for 20, 30, 40 years. There wasn't even a mention that hey, we're all focused on mental illness, and we're all focused on what's wrong with people, and we're all focused on the DSM and pathologizing people's problems, but there is this other side of the coin that says what if we looked at mental health, and what if we looked at happiness, and what if we looked at strengths, and what if we looked at what was working for people and try to help them build on their successes. That wasn't even a suggestion in six years of education that was supposed to kind of span all of psychology.

David Rendall: So even through my doctoral work, I never really read or learned anything any different than all the stuff we're all taught every single day. It was just more of the same and more of do it this way, do it the right way, and do it the way everybody else does it. There's nothing I really teach or speak about that really has anything to do with any of those educational experiences that I had.

Robert Glazer: Can you give an example? You did an exercise one of the times that I saw you speak where everyone pick their strengths and then their weaknesses, and then they went to this thing where you saw that they actually matched up. So can you share a couple of examples of strengths that are weaknesses or weaknesses that are strengths just to kind of eliminate this for everyone?

David Rendall: Yeah, the easiest one to share is you got someone who is stubborn, right? Your kid is too stubborn. They don't want to do what you ask them to do. They don't want to give up on things when they're not working. They stick with things longer than you think is reasonable. They drive you crazy. They'll ask you 18 times if they can have a sleepover even after you told them no.

Robert Glazer: Have you been talking to my third child [inaudible 00:22:15]?

David Rendall: That is my third child as well. So we'll play a game, instead of me telling you, so that's the weakness, stubbornness. What's the strengths? What's the upside of being that way and what do we call it when somebody is positively unwilling to let go of the things they're trying to accomplish?

Robert Glazer: Determined, perseverant.

David Rendall: Yeah. Persistent, right? Determined, and wouldn't we all love to have determined, persevering, persistent children? We just don't like it when they're doing it to us.

Robert Glazer: Once they're out of your house.

David Rendall: So that's the key, right? So while it's happening to us we see it as a weakness, but we'd love for them to have that quality as an adult, and yet we don't realize that at the time. So we deliberately try to break them of that characteristic and reduce those kinds of behaviors and we sanction and criticize those behaviors often tell them things like, "This isn't going to work for you and you shouldn't behave like this, and nobody wants to deal with somebody who is so difficult." When none of those things are true. What you really should say is, "I don't like this right now but this is going to be awesome for you in the future, so I need to be the grownup in this situation and not criticize you for it." Right? And that's a hard thing to do most of the time because we don't see that upside, right? At the time we don't see that upside, or then we still would tell ourself, even if we see the upside, we'd start talking about balance and things like that. Well, you don't want to be too persistent, and yet we have billboards about Thomas Edison trying the light bulb 10,000 times, and then someone would say, "Yeah, but you don't want your kid to be too persistent." But what do you think 10,000 times is? That's bordering on being a lunatic, not just being a little bit too persistent.

David Rendall: So that's one of the easiest examples for people to understand. Other ones are people who are organized are oftentimes inflexible. The weakness of being inflexible is related to the strength of being organized and wanting things to be all in the right place, which means the place you think they're supposed to be. Yet messy people are oftentimes very creative. So they're not organized but they're not bad people, they're very creative, and that's not bad that an organized person is inflexible, they're oftentimes less creative, but they're very good at putting things in order that already exist. Every weakness has a corresponding strength, every strength has a corresponding weakness. When we see that in ourselves and others, it's first to change the way we try to get better and the way we try to help other people get better.

Robert Glazer: All right, we're going to take a quick break for a word from our sponsors and we'll be right back with David.

Robert Glazer: Whenever I'm doing an interview and someone asks me about the best productivity tool I use, my answer is SaneBox. I've been using SaneBox for four years and cannot manage my email without it. SaneBox artificial intelligence monitors your inbox and moves email you don't need to read right away to your SaneLater folder. All that's left in your inbox is the important stuff. You can also snooze emails and have them come back to you in your inbox at the right time. If you know how email folders work, then you know how SaneBox works. Find an email in the wrong folder? Just move it. There's nothing to learn, nothing to install. SaneBox works directly with every single email server or service that's ever been created. Get a free two week trial and a \$25 credit by visiting SaneBox.com/elevate. That's S-A-N-E-B-O-X.com/elevate.

Robert Glazer: And we're back with David Rendall. So I just want to circle back to this hypothetical example of my friend and their persistent child. So in this case though, not telling them it's bad, but maybe a strategy, would a strategy be to talk with the kid about how to pick their battles and that actually maybe a battle about everything isn't helping them, but learning where and when to maybe modulate? I think we need to be coached on how to understand when our strength becomes a weakness and where maybe it doesn't get us what we want, right?

David Rendall: Yes. So where is a crucial word. So let's talk really fast through the framework. So step one with your kid, you want to be aware that the weakness has a corresponding strength. If you don't even see that, you can't do anything else. The next one is to accept it, that the kid can't be less stubborn and more persistent at the same time. You have to accept that those two things are two sides of the same coin. Then you have to actually appreciate it, right? Appreciate it for the future but also appreciate it in the present. This is going to be a characteristic that helps him in the future, and also appreciate it right now. It's a good quality to be persistent, and there's probably times in their schoolwork and in potential friendships, or maybe in sports where their persistence is already paying off. So don't just accept it, appreciate it.

David Rendall: But then like what you're talking about, okay, what do you do to kind of help them be a successful person? So one actually goes against your initial suggestion, which is not only would you tell them to pick their battles, you would actually do the reverse. You would actually look for opportunities for them to crank it up, right? You'd tell them hey, this persistence thing is awesome. Let's start looking for opportunities for you to be even more persistent than you already are, and that's just a mindblower, right? It's like that's not what I want, right? That is the absolute, not what I want, but that's where your next question was so crucial. So after amplification is alignment. So part of the way that you find opportunities to turn it up is you find situations where massive persistence pays off. So you start telling that kid, not so much pick your battles, but let's look for opportunities for you to be more persistent, and let's talk about environments in which persistence really, really pays off.

David Rendall: So for example, people in medical research, and that's not an opportunity for a child most of the time, but a medical research can sometimes go on for 20, 30, 40, 50 years just grinding away at these little minuscule kind of fragments of hope before this huge breakthrough happens. You can't just be a little bit into it in order to create something like that. So talking to them about those kinds of things. Looking at situations in their current life like sports, like school, where their persistence is paying off, and having them choose projects or activities, or to your point earlier, why not teach a kid to be an entrepreneur at a young age and have them start persisting at building a business at a really young age before they even have an idea of what couldn't be done, right?

David Rendall: So those are really the things that I would encourage people to do. To not try to reduce it or moderate it, but to actually look for opportunities to amplify it and to find that alignment and find that fit where the kid does learn in these situations my weakness is a strength. In other situations like maybe school, it looks more like a weakness. When I'm interacting with my parents it might look more like a weakness, but there are situations in which this is a massive strengths and that goes back to helping the kid accept who they are and appreciate who they are, and then the last two are to avoid things that aren't in alignment, and that's a really hard one for kids because they have to go to school, or we think they do, and they have to take all the classes, and they have to pass all the classes.

David Rendall: So we have a hard time with that, but let's just take chores at home. What if we assign chores to our kids not based on everybody has to do everything, but what if we gave the person who loves to be active and do physical things active physical chores, and what if we have somebody who was really good with technology and computers but wasn't very active, what if we gave them chores like paying bills, and ordering things online, and making sure we always had toilet paper and paper towels in stock from Amazon, instead of everybody has to do everything, everybody has to chip in. Sure they do, but why can't they do it based on their strengths instead of their weaknesses? So what can people not have to do? What can people avoid? And then the last one, which kind of goes with the one we just talked about, is affiliation. Can we look for opportunities to show our kids that you don't have to be good at everything, you just have to have relationships with people who can do things you can't do. The reason that's such a hard lesson to learn is because in school that's called cheating. If you pay someone to do what you can't do from age five from age 22, that's cheating. From age 23 on, it's collaboration.

Robert Glazer: Delegation too.

David Rendall: Yeah. Well, it's both, right? It's collaboration, it's delegation, it's outsourcing, it's a lot of different things, but in school it's just straight up cheating. So that's the process, but it all starts with even just emotionally being able to look at your kid and being able to see that upside, that persistence that really you weren't seeing before because you were so honed in on that stubbornness that you couldn't even feel good about that characteristic at all, and you felt like really

less is probably better. Once you can get rid of that instinct and see the upside, it starts to change the ways you would try to respond to them.

Robert Glazer: I assume that parenting has been really affected by the achievement oriented culture today, where there's a lot of pressure to get the best grades, go to the best schools, conform to the standard, as we talked about before. There's been some interesting data on valedictorians lately. How can Freak Factor sort of change the conversation on parenting? How can you get people to really realize that this paint-by-numbers and do all of the stuff that a lot of people just don't want to do is not the right path maybe for their kid.

David Rendall: Yeah. So I think it's simply redefining what good is, right? Good isn't necessarily getting good grades, getting into a good school and getting a good job, and especially for entrepreneurs. When we've had unconventional success in our life as entrepreneurs, why are we trying to help our kids have conventional success?

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

David Rendall: As employees, so why can't they have the same permission to drop out of school, to fail classes, to completely reject the status quo, to not go to college at all, to sell homework to their friends at age 11 as a way to learn marketing? Why did we have permission, or at least we see that that worked out for us in the end, and then we want our kids to conform to a new model of success that's more traditional because that's what our friends and neighbors would respect?

Robert Glazer: Failure is a great teacher, and our inability to let kids fail young and to make that a bad thing I think is setting us up for just colossal failure down the road.

David Rendall: Yeah. So I think it's redefining what success is, and success in the Freak Factor is helping your kid discover who they are and find a place in the world where that's valuable. That's really a whole lot different than go to a good school, and get a good job, et cetera, et cetera. There's a million different ways in fact. There's seven plus billion people on Earth. There's seven plus billion ways to do that, and none of them involve getting into a really good preschool. Regardless of what stats you look at, I've managed in my entrepreneurial career without having any kind of crazy Jeff Bezos kind of success, and just making a little more than the average person, I'm probably in the top one to 2% of wage earners in the United States just working on my own out of my house, and I went to the freaking University of Phoenix for my doctorate online while I was working full-time. I went to University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee for my master's in the evenings while working full-time.

David Rendall: Nobody has to get into a good preschool to go to those schools, and then oh, by the way, those schools, and even my degrees at those schools wasn't part of me developing my speaking business. None of it was required. You don't have to have a doctorate to start a speaking business. You don't have to have a master's degree to write a book, and like I already said, I didn't write about any of the

things I learned in those scenarios. I got the doctorate so I could be a college professor, and I've quit that to do my business full-time. Success, and you can see it in story after story, after story, doesn't ... I mean, even look at Bill Gates and Zuckerberg, right? They dropped out of college. I think even the people we point to as college success stories would've been successful anyway, they just happen to run through that school on their way to success, and you can see that's true based on the people who dropped out and then had massive success. The schools are picking the winners and then just letting them live there for four years, and going, "Look at what we turned them into." No, you didn't take a loser and turn him into a winner, you took an already top 2% person and you kept them in the top 2%, good job.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, I love that argument, and it's ... Look, Harvard Business School, Stanford, a great business school, but if they had blind admissions and could produce someone at the same level, then it would be a very different case than taking the top 1%, because the top 1% are going to do well.

David Rendall: Well, it's the same thing we understand in athletics. Nobody thinks that the University of Kentucky basketball program takes terrible basketball players and in one year turns them into national champions and then sends them to the NBA draft. What they recognize that they do is the University of Kentucky picks oftentimes the best five high school players in the entire nation, puts them all together on the same team, wins a national championship, they all leave and go to the NBA, just like they were going to even if they would've went to Towson State. It doesn't matter that they went to the University of Kentucky, and the coach does not pretend that he somehow transformed these people in nine and a half months from bums who ate a lot of potato chips and watched movies into top quality basketball players. Yet with college we act like that's the same. We take every success those people have after they graduated from X, Y, Z university and act like it was the responsibility and somehow was accomplished by what the university did for that person, when oftentimes there's no connection there.

David Rendall: So I think that's, I mean, that's what I try to teach parents. Is A, there is a million definitions of success, therefore there is a million and one routes to that success. So what we have to do is be willing to individually define success for each of our children, one at a time, and not be so concerned, and I'll say this is a parent because I know it happens to me, we have to be not so concerned about what other people think about our kids or what other people think about us because of our kids, and care more about our kids than we care about how that makes us look to other people and be willing to take an unconventional path.

David Rendall: I mean, right now I'm at home and my middle daughter is in the room right next to me, and she's on her Mac, and she's going to online homeschool and she has for the last two and a half years. Every course she takes from now on is a college course. She's already got eight college credits and she's on her way to more. She'll graduate high school with a two year college degree from a place no one's heard of, and she skipped first grade. She's had an entirely unconventional

school career because my goal for her is for her to be successful. My goal is not for her to fit into some system, and when she didn't fit into the school system, we skipped her. When skipping wasn't enough, we put her into a completely different program that's based on her.

David Rendall: She works at her speed, she wakes up when she wants to, she does her stuff in her way, she schedules her stuff on her own time, and she does gymnastics 16 hours a week, and so she asked for a differently lifestyle because school didn't really fit in that lifestyle and we adapted her life to her instead of saying no, good kids go to college, good kids go to regular school, good kids socialize at school with other kids, good kids. What are the other parents going to think? And sure enough, what do people say? "What about socialization? Do you really think that's a good idea? And what do you think she's going to miss about the school experience?" Nobody questions what their kid is doing because my kid is doing a weird thing, I've got to defend myself. So we have to be willing to take some of the heat that's going to come from building a life for our kid based on who they are instead of trying to teach out kid that success in life is figuring out what the world wants and giving it to them so that you don't get made fun of, or you don't get in trouble, or that you don't stand out.

Robert Glazer: Let's flip this for a second. So now you're no longer a kid and you're a functioning adult. Not you, but the person where ... Okay, so we're done. Now both I think individuals and businesses. How should one approach ... Let's say I realize I am that really organized person that can tend to hold things back. I mean, how should I, I mean, we have [inaudible 00:38:33] strength finders and stuff like that, but how do you suggest that people approach their strengths once they've identified them, understand their weaknesses, and what can organization learn from the same approach?

David Rendall: Yeah, so I'll answer those separately and we'll use that same framework. So it starts with like you said. Do StrengthsFinder, do the assessment that's on my website in my book, pick your strengths, pick your weaknesses, see how they're connected, that's awareness. The next one is acceptance. Go okay, this is me. Stop trying to fix it or go, "Well, yeah, I'm a little inflexible, but I can adapt, I can change. It's not that bad." It's like stop that, just you're organized, you're inflexible, things need to be in the right place. There's nothing wrong with that. What do we do with that, right? Accept that. Then appreciate it. Look at all the ways that that's helped you have a better life. Look at the way that's helped you organize your schoolwork, or organize your business, or organize your personal life. Think of all the praise and appreciation you've gotten from people over your lifetime about how you have things together. Appreciate that part of who you are and then look for opportunities to amplify it, right? Let's take organize. Join the national organization of professional organizers and find a bunch of people who are even more organized than you and you're like, "Holy crap, there's another level." Right? And that's the first step, amplification, right.

David Rendall: Then dial it up. You're like, "Oh, there's better label makers than the one I already had." There's a whole different world out there. Then you're getting

paid for it, right? These people are professional organizers, whereas the people in your life are like, "You've got OCD. Why don't you calm down?" And then these people are like, "You're not hardcore enough. You know what I mean? You don't organize your clothes by hue and by fabric." Holy cow, let's take it up a notch, right? Then so you try to find that alignment, so you look at starting that business on the side, or you look at volunteering in some area that really taps into your strengths, or you look at getting a part-time job that allows you to really play to your strengths, and now you found that alignment, you're amplifying, and then you look for opportunities to unload that other stuff.

David Rendall: I started my business, avoidance, I started my business by paying the neighbor kid 20 bucks a week to mow my grass, and I took those three hours that I was mowing the grass. And I said I don't know what I'm doing but I'm going to read a book about starting a business and I'm going to read a book about starting a consulting company. I'm going to read a book about starting a training company. I'm going to read a book about how to write a book. I'm going to find my friend that I used to work a couple of years ago who could put up a quick website for me. I'm going to get my father-in-law who does graphic design to make me a business card. I started my business because I was doing something that was in alignment and amplifying my strengths of running my own thing, doing my own thing, being an entrepreneur, and I was avoiding those tasks that required me to do repetitive things that I'm not good at, or do what other people wanted me to do, or do things that weren't helping me to achieve my goals.

David Rendall: Then the last one was affiliation. I mean, throughout my business, the number of people I've hired to do just about everything, I literally work by myself, and I don't try to run my website. I certainly don't make computers, I don't design all my slides, I don't print my own books, I don't design my own book covers. I mean, I literally pay everyone to do everything for me and I speak. I talk for an hour at a conference and people pay me enough money for me to pay my bills and pay a bunch of people to run the other parts of my business. So that's the same process. Once you're an adult and you have more freedom as an adult to do the things like avoidance. It's really hard to avoid those three classes you don't like in high school. It's not hard to avoid those tasks in life. You just outsource it, you put it on Fiverr, you put it on Elance, you hire a part-time person, you partner with a person, or hire an employee who can do those things for you. That's affiliation and avoidance at the same time.

David Rendall: Then that same thing works for your employees. When you have employees you sit down with them, you share your strengths and weaknesses and how you're not perfect, and then you ask them for their strengths and weaknesses. You do the assessment together and then you accept that these people aren't about to be someone different. You got who you got, and you can either deal with that or you can let them go, but you're not going to turn them into somebody else. Then you appreciate it, you look for those situations where their style has been helpful to your business, or it's been helpful to you as a person. Then you look for opportunities for them to amplify it.

David Rendall: What if I gave them an opportunity to be even more creative? What if I gave this person the opportunity to be even more organized? What is a project where this person could be even more persistent and even more stubborn, and you find the alignment. What are roles that we have in this business? What are roles we could create in this business that would really let this person come alive? How do I take work away from them, avoidance, that doesn't let them build on their strengths, that requires them to use their weaknesses? I'm not getting a 100% from somebody who doesn't like it and isn't very good at it, so I don't want them to be doing those things. Then affiliation, how do we all do this on a daily basis to where we're consistently trading work, and sharing work, and communicating in such a way that we're partnering with people who are strong where we're weak, where no one is being stuck doing work they don't like and no one is in a situation where they don't get to use their strengths. Everybody comes to work and gets to do what they do best every single day.

David Rendall: Peter Drucker, I share this on my talk, he said, "Organizations exist to make people's strengths effective and their weaknesses irrelevant." So if you're running the organization, that's your number one job. How do I come into work every day and make sure I'm making my strengths effective and my weaknesses irrelevant, how do I make sure I'm doing the same for my employees?

Robert Glazer: What about the company? I mean, does the company need to get better, the whole thing? Look, there's a sort of saying that when you're starting your company saying yes to everything is how you're successful, but then soon it's what you say no to that makes you successful.

David Rendall: Yeah.

Robert Glazer: So how do you look at that as it were coming and just say look, that's not us, that's not what we do and they need to sort of embrace that more.

David Rendall: Yeah. So everything we've been talking about so far is The Freak Factor and Freak Factor for Kids, and then my friend Stan Phelps writes a goldfish series of books on marketing and strategy and things like that. He said, "Dave, we've got to write The Freak Factor for companies." So we called it Pink Goldfish, and it's this idea that companies can do exactly the same thing. So I'll just give you a quick story that should illustrate it. The company's weaknesses can also be their strengths. You're never going to make everybody happy, you're never going to have all the products, your product is never going to be just right.

David Rendall: I just saw this this morning. Burger King is being sued by vegans.

Robert Glazer: I saw that.

David Rendall: Who say that the Impossible Burger is cooked on a grill that also has meat residue. It's not that it's being cooked in meat residue as a french fry might be cooked in an animal fat where it's part of a process, it happens to happen, and

vegan isn't arguing they have an allergy or something like that, but the point is that they've just done this thing where they've made a massive improvement to their menu for someone who doesn't want to eat meat, and the response they get is, "You suck and we're actually going to take you to court."

Robert Glazer: Right. But what's interesting is they did that for meat eaters. So even to dive into this more, they're very clear, and the whole Impossible thing is not really targeted towards the vegan market. They've even said, "Look, that's like 2% of the market. We're targeting meat eaters who want to eat less meat."

David Rendall: But they want it to taste that way, right.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, they want it to ... So it's about the impact. So what's interesting is I wonder if those people are even, that's not, you don't have a lot of vegans that tend to go to Burger King and McDonald's.

David Rendall: So then here's the point. So let's say you're a 100% right about that. I wouldn't pretend to know. I just saw the surface of it. Let's say you're a 100% right about that. So then here's how Burger King does the Freak Factor. Burger King says to those vegans, "Yep, you're right. That's exactly what happens, and if you're not comfortable with that, don't come to Burger King. It's called Burger King." It's called Burger King, right?

Robert Glazer: Do you know the famous Southwest story where a woman used to write Herb Kelleher every week and be like, "I hate your plastic tickets. I hate being in line." Then he wrote her this note saying, "Please, it seems like there's a better airline for you to fly."

David Rendall: Yeah. So we call that antagonizing in Pink Goldfish. Another example of sort of, we call it flaunting. So it's being unapologetic and unashamed of who you are as a business, of what you do and what you don't do, of who you serve and who you don't serve. So it might seem like a company can't succeed by flaunting a weakness, by being unapologetic about something bad. No one is going to stand for that. So my favorite and the quickest example is a company called Buckley's, and they're a Canadian cough syrup company, and their cough syrup tastes terrible. Absolutely terrible, and they know it tastes terrible, and they want to expand in Canada and into the American market, so they have to come up with a marketing campaign, and their marketing campaign is a fake taste test in which people taste Buckley's in a blind taste test and then also taste a cup of trash bag leakage. In the fake taste test when the person sips the trash bag leakage after having the Buckley's they're like, "Definitely trash bag leakage. Give me more of the trash bag leakage before I ever want to drink whatever was in that other cup again."

David Rendall: Buckley's didn't say it's new and improved, we made it minty, we made a cherry flavor, we toned it down, there's a light version, we added sugar. They said, "It tastes worse than you can possibly imagine." They're like, "You cannot even

fathom." In fact, I was about to use that example and I put up a Buckley's slide, and before I got to how bad it tasted this Canadian in the room shouted out that it tasted like crap. He just had PTSD without me asking or without any prompting, he just had this violent reaction to seeing it on the screen. That's how bad it is, and yet they are not trying to fix it, and yet they're very successful, and they're successful because basically the message is it works because it tastes awful. Why would it taste so bad? You need your cough to get better, you're not looking for a tasty beverage, it's a medicine, right? They've actually had, they've done other kind of antagonizing ads in the past where they're like, "If you really cared enough about getting rid of your cough, you'd take some Buckley's, but apparently you're not man enough, or you're not adult enough, or you're not strong enough, or you don't really care enough. If you really wanted it." It's like a mean coach or a drill instructor, right? If you really wanted it, you'd do this, right?

David Rendall: So they were tremendously successful by saying, "Our cough syrup not only tastes bad, it tastes incredibly bad, worse than you can possibly imagine, and we're not going to fix it, and if you don't like it, you have a problem, not us." Wow, right? And it worked, and that's what Herb Kelleher did with Southwest, and they're not just the most successful airline, the most profitable airline, they're one of the most profitable businesses in America in the world over the last 30 years, and yet nobody can really get the message. Everybody goes, "Yeah, but I mean, sooner or later you got to, kind of, you know for some people. I mean, you can't just, you know, you got to, if there's something." We always want to hem and haw about it. We can't just take the lesson and learn it, and do it. We end up conforming to what everybody, we follow all the other airlines and they all end up looking the same, and we can't copy the Southwest model, even though it's obviously working.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, Fran Frei from Harvard has done some great work on this about what makes companies great. The Southwest example or the IKEA example, the worst thing that can happen is a board member's spouse gets on a flight and then writes to them and says, "Oh, they have these paper tickets, and they wait in line." And then they complain to them, and they say, "We got to change this." Or they say to IKEA, "Oh, your furniture falls apart." When that's the feature, right? That's not the [crosstalk 00:49:45] and then it causes them to go change the direction and make something to everyone rather than just sort of owning it and saying, "Yeah, you know what? This isn't lifetime furniture. This is like two or three years."

David Rendall: This isn't for you.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, exactly.

David Rendall: If you're on the board of Southwest, fly your private plane, don't fly Southwest. Yeah, and another good example of that is I was listening to an audiobook about Airbnb and Uber and things like that, the way these companies are kind of virtualizing things that used to be physical, like hotels and taxis and things like

that. When they would pitch Airbnb to really wealthy investors, it didn't make any sense. It wasn't one of this classic like, "I don't think that will make money." The person would put themselves in the shoes of someone looking for some place to stay and said, "I'm not staying at your shitty apartment and sleeping on your couch. What are you talking about? Who is this for?" Because it wasn't for them, right?

David Rendall: They couldn't imagine a world in which, because they don't know anybody that's looking for some place to crash when they're visiting San Francisco, right? So they didn't invest because they couldn't get it. So we do need to be able to say yeah, this might even look like a flaw to me. This isn't for me. This is not for my life, this is not for my kids, and that's part of the point, and that's the antagonizing part. Is sometimes the people that need to be antagonized is even maybe the people that we're friends with. Tell your friends hey, I own this business but don't sign up. This isn't for you, you won't like it, and I'm not going to change it for you, but don't think like you're going to help me out by buying this. This isn't good for you.

Robert Glazer: Totally. Well that's very good advice. So last question for you, Dave, and this could be a singular or repeated, but what is the personal or professional mistake that you've learned the most from?

David Rendall: I think some people are impressed by my schooling. If I could start over I wouldn't go to college, I wouldn't get a master's degree, I wouldn't get a doctorate. All of those things were my effort to prove to someone, no one in particular, society, the world, employers, that I was a competent valuable adult who could provide a valuable service, and if I could start over I would start my business in high school. I wouldn't work at Kmart, I wouldn't work delivering newspapers. I would start my business in high school and I would make my own way from the very beginning, and I would do my own thing, and I would trust myself. I think that's my biggest mistake, not trusting myself. I believed everybody else, I believed they were right, I believed I was wrong, I believed their way worked and my way wouldn't. I believed that I was weak and they were strong, and it turns out none of those things are true, and it turns out not only was I not wrong, I was way, way, way more right than most of those people were, and I've gone on to do way, way more than most of those people who told me that I wasn't going to make it.

David Rendall: It's kind of like my daughter the other day. She was in school, and she goes to a small private religious school here in a rural part of Eastern North Carolina. We're not in any kind of metropolis, we're an hour outside of Raleigh, and this teacher at this little school who probably makes \$25,000 a year, and I don't think they even offer very good health benefits, a student used some bad grammar, some Southern slang, and the teacher said, "You're never going to be a Fortune 500 CEO talking like that." And what my daughter thought but didn't say out loud was, "Well, you're not exactly a Fortune 500 CEO, are you? What would you know about how a Fortune 500 CEO does or doesn't say, how they do or don't talk?"

David Rendall: That was my problem growing up. The people who were telling me what it took to be successful didn't know what it took to be successful. They didn't know what my potential was and they also didn't know what the options out there in the world were, and I took their advice and their guidance far too seriously because I thought they had a secret that I don't have. I thought they knew something that I didn't know, and it turns out they didn't. It turns out nobody really knows the secret. It turns out that no one is really in charge. It turns out there's a lot more opportunities than we really think they are and there's not as many rules as we think there are. So that's the thing that I would change. That's the biggest mistake that I made, was trying to conform to other people's definition of reality and believing that they had a true definition of reality and I needed to live my life based on that.

Robert Glazer: That's a great answer and a great example. I really wish I had a video camera and that your daughter had answered that, and we could've captured that moment because yeah, it would've been priceless. Well, David, where can people find more about you and your work?

David Rendall: Yeah, so DRendall.com. So D as in David, R-E-N-D-A-L-L, DRendall.com. It's got shorter versions of my talks. It's got links to the books, it's got the assessment that we talked about, it's got the kids' assessment we talked about, the kids' book. There's a free video on YouTube and it's right on my website as well, and share that with your kids who have dyslexia, or ADHD, or autism, or they're just being bullied, or they're standing out in some way. I mean, I've had people, I wear so much pink that I've had parents who show their kids pictures of me on stage so that their son stops feeling bad about the kids who tease him for wearing pink, and then he confidently goes in the next day and can say basically, "Screw you, I wear pink just like this awesome speaker guy, and if you don't like it you can fight him." You know? So that's on the website. There's everything you need. Links to everything that you might want. Most of it's free, and I'm just trying to get this message out there as far and wide as I can.

Robert Glazer: Great. Well, it's an important message. So I hope we've helped to do that. David, thank you for everything that you do and sharing your story. You're definitely changing the conversation on what it means to conform and fit in. I know you've helped a lot of people embrace what makes them unique and lean into their strengths.

David Rendall: Thanks, man. I appreciate it.

Robert Glazer: To our listeners, thanks for tuning in to the Elevate Podcast today. We'll include links to David and his books, and his work on the detailed episode page at RobertGlazer.com. Quick favor, if you enjoyed today's episode, I'd really appreciate if you could leave us a review, as it helps new users discover the content. If you're listening in Apple Podcast you can just select the library icon, click on Elevate and scroll down to the bottom to leave your review. It takes about 30 seconds. Thanks again for your support, until next time, keep elevating.

