

Jacob Morgan 00:00

You just say, Hi, my name is Dan Pink, and you're listening to leading the future of work with Jacob Morgan.

Daniel Pink 00:07

Hi, this is Daniel Pink, you're listening to leading the future of work with Jacob Morgan.

Jacob Morgan 00:12

Perfect. Alright, I'll push record on my camera here. And I obviously have a ton of questions for you about all sorts of fun stuff. So I'm excited to dive into these things. All right, laid on me. All right, let me all set to go. Yep. All right. And so for this intro, I'll introduce you best selling author of numerous books. I'll talk about your your latest book that just came out. And then when we actually do the episode, I'll do a much longer intro where I'll talk more in depth about all the stuff you've done. That's fine. Alright, cool. So I'll jump right in. Hey, everyone, welcome to another episode of leading the future of work. My guest today, Dan Pink, best selling author of numerous books, including win and drive. And he has a brand new book out called The Power of regret. How looking backward moves us forward. Daniel Pink, thank you for joining.

Daniel Pink 01:01

Jacob Morgan, thank you for having me.

Jacob Morgan 01:04

And do you prefer Daniel or Dan? Either one. Okay. So very first question for you. And I think you've talked about this a little bit before. But why why did you decide to write this book? Because you've covered a lot of different topics during the course of your career? Why focus on regret?

Daniel Pink 01:21

Well, the short answer is that I had regrets. And I wanted to try to make sense of them. And I found that when I began talking with people about my regrets, I got a kind of reaction that is really interesting for a writer and that people were leaning in they were they were very keen to talk about this, which was a great surprise, given that we tend to be kind of oh, I don't want to talk about regrets, regrets or taboo. What I found is that the taboo was paper thin, and that people actually didn't want to talk about that. And that's always a promising topic for a writer.

Jacob Morgan 01:58

I saw an interview that you did, where you talked about what some of your regrets are, but it seems like most of the regrets were around you seeing things happening in your past and that kind of speaking up about them? Is there like a specific moment or very specific regret that you have that you can point to?

Daniel Pink 02:16

Well, they're all I mean, you know, there's, there's certain jobs, there are a couple of jobs that I took that I wish I hadn't taken my first job out of college was a complete fucking disaster. So I regret taking that I had another as another job that I took, that was a complete colossal failure. And I really regret taking

that. So those are, you know, those are two things. I think they're the ones that you're talking about Jacob, or regrets that I talked about, about kindness were about being in situations where, you know, I can remember a situation in college where, you know, somebody was sort of treated very, very rudely. And I thought, and, and I knew that it was wrong, but I didn't say anything, you know, this person will, you know, was first. So I, again, without going into all the details, because they don't want to betray anybody's privacy. But the you know, there's so many instances where I mean, that's the sad part is there's so many of them, where I saw people not being treated well, people being excluded. People not being treated fairly. And, and I saw it, that's the thing. I can't deny that, oh, I didn't see anything. And I also can't say, oh, I didn't know it was wrong. I saw it and I knew it was wrong and didn't do a thing. And that's vexing to me.

Jacob Morgan 03:31

Yeah. It's kind of a weird question for you what exactly is a regret? Because I think we all have those experiences of like, Oh, I wish I would have done that. I wish this would have been different. I regrets that simple in nature, like they don't have to be like these deep, profound life changing, it's just something that you wish would have gone differently, would that classify as a regret?

Daniel Pink 03:52

Sort of? I mean, it's a great question. And and regret is, in some ways, kind of elusive. Because at the start, it's an emotion. So that's the thing to understand. It's an emotion, it's a feeling, and it's a feeling, it's a negative emotion. It's an emotion that makes us feel bad, worse, not better. That's, that's really important. But it's also as much a process as as as an emotion. So it's a process by which we go back in time. We think about a decision we made or an action we took or a decision we didn't make or an action we didn't take, and wish we had done things differently. And a reason we wish we had done things differently is we feel that if we had done things differently, the present would be better. So that makes it incredibly cognitively complex, because what you're doing is you're doing mental time travel, you're going back in time, that's amazing in itself that we can do that in our brains and minds. That's amazing right there. But what we can also do is actually change the course of events back there in our head, and then get back in our time machine returned to the present and say what The President wouldn't be different if I had reconfigured the past. So, so it's so it's. So it's an emotion that makes us feel bad when we look back and say, Oh, if only I had done that or hadn't done that, but it also shows incredible cognitive muscularity and dexterity. I mean, almost unfathomable, breathtaking amount of cognitive firepower.

Jacob Morgan 05:20

Yeah, it's interesting. So I'm working on a new book now on on vulnerability, specifically in leadership. And so I've been interviewing a lot of business leaders, and I talked to a couple researchers. And there was a study that was done a little while ago by a professor named Anna Brock. And we were talking about vulnerability. And she has this concept that she coined a beautiful mess effect. And now it's specifically related to vulnerability. But it's this idea that when you imagine somebody else being vulnerable, you tend to ascribe more positive attributes to them, oh, that person is brave, they're courageous. But when you think about yourself, you think more in terms of negative, but she also applied it to time. And she said that when we think about something very concrete, let's say you're going on a vacation, if you think about the vacation is a year down the road, you have all these great

images in your mind, right? And you think about very abstract things, I'm gonna lay on the beach, I'm gonna hang out. But the closer the time horizon is, the more specific things get, like I got to pack my passport, I got to check in for my flight. And there too, she found that when we try to think of longer time horizons or longer periods, sometimes we can be a little bit more negative. And when we think about the more shorter time horizon, I think she said, we can be a little bit more more optimistic. I forget what the technical term for that was, but not not directly related, but I just something that I found tangentially related to some of the stuff that you're you're focusing? Yeah, no, it's

Daniel Pink 06:45

interesting. I mean, some of it, some of it is a some of it is a form of pluralistic ignorance. So yeah, so basically, and pluralistic ignorance is, is when is when we believe something, but we think no one else believes it. Because we think that we're somehow we think that we're somehow singular. So we say, you know, if, if, if if person X revealed their vulnerabilities, Dan, would you think less of them are more of them? And I say, I might think more of them because they showed courage. Well, what if you revealed your vulnerabilities? Oh, everybody would think I was a wimp and a loser, you know, and so we don't, you know, so we have that. You know, the other thing is that the, for Anna Brooks work is also there's even a sturdier finding from years and years ago, I think was Elliot Aronson, who talked about pratfall effect. People are a legendary social psychologist. Yeah. And it's, it's pretty simple. It's essentially that if you have people, let's say that you're let's say that you're a distinguished professor, let's say you're Nobelist, and you're giving a lecture and you drop your clicker or you spill coffee on yourself, you would think, Oh, my God, people actually don't think Oh, my God, this person is a frickin loser in combat, they actually heightens your appeal.

Jacob Morgan 08:03

Yeah. Yeah, I think I remember seeing some of those studies. Yeah, I mean, it's fascinating how the brain works and how we like think about these things. And the relation they have with each other. Okay, so speaking of regret, I know one of the things that you've talked about quite a bit is the no regrets. Mantra is a bad one to live by. which is completely counterintuitive to what we've always heard write live a life where you don't have any regrets where you don't want to look back and say, wish I would have done that. Why is that such a bad way to live?

Daniel Pink 08:35

Well, I mean, trying to reduce future regrets is not a bad way to live, if you do it, right. Saying that I never look backward. And that I when I look backward, I don't have any regrets. Because that's because that's what got me where I am today. And that, and you know, never acknowledging your mistakes, and always being positive and always looking forward and never looking backward, is dangerous. It's wrongheaded. So the idea that you should never look backward, which is what the no regrets philosophy says, No, don't look back. Nope, nothing you can do about it. Don't look back, always look forward. Don't dwell on the negative nope, gotta be positive. That is a recipe that is not an effective. First of all, it goes against the science because because what the science tells us is that everybody has regrets. So you're actually going profoundly against human nature. The second thing about that is that it's a bad idea for effective living. What we know from a pile of research is that if we, we shouldn't ignore our regrets, we shouldn't wallow in our regrets. We should just confront them when we confront them. Listen to them, learn from them. We use them as data use them as information. They

are a powerfully transformative emotion. They can help us become better negotiators, better decision makers, better problem solvers, better strategists better parents find more meaning. And so you know, we've sort of been sold a bill of goods that that when we say no regrets, I don't have any regrets. I never looked back. I always look forward. I never know Get up. I'm always positive. That's, um, that's a delusional.

Jacob Morgan 10:04

Yeah, I agree. I mean, it's something I struggle with sometimes too, right? I try to be optimistic and you know, things are not going well. And sometimes in that mentality, like, forget about the regrets, but I realize of course, like, I'm sure a lot of people do that that's not a very effective way to live.

Daniel Pink 10:20

Optimism is a good thing. Yeah. Positive emotions are good things. They're not the only thing. Yeah, if you are optimistic all the time, you're gonna get yourself in trouble. If you have positive emotions all the time, you're not going to live a full life. There's a whole line of research on what's called defensive pessimism. Sometimes it's actually helpful to be somewhat pessimistic, not all the time, not most of the time. But sometimes the idea that you should be uniformly optimistic in all circumstances, is delusional. The idea that you should have, we should have plenty of positive emotions. I want you Jacob to have lots of positive emotions. I want to have positive emotions. But we don't want to have only positive emotions. Imagine if I said to you, you know what? You want only positive emotions. I'll tell you what, I'm going to banish. I'm going to do a little operation, I'm going to banish your ability to feel fear. That's a negative emotion. You want to live without being able to feel fear?

Jacob Morgan 11:23

No. Do you know? I don't think so.

Daniel Pink 11:28

If I eliminate it, you know, but why?

Jacob Morgan 11:31

Um, I think fear has helped me in a lot of different ways. So for example, speaking writing books, I think the the fear helps me perform better. I think fear helps me overcome obstacles I probably wouldn't overcome. I think it helps me exist and do certain. Yeah, yeah.

Daniel Pink 11:49

I think that's an interesting way to put it. The other thing is that, if you don't have the ability to, to, to feel fear. What's going to happen when you're in a burning building? Yeah. You'll die. Right? You know, so so there's a reason we have fear. You know, there's a reason we grieve, why do we grieve, we grieve? Why do we experience a horrible feeling of grief, because we because we love, we eliminate grief, it actually makes a lot of, I think, a little bit more, more challenging. So so negative. So again, you know, I'm not saying we should, again, I don't want people to wallow in their regrets, no way. That's terrible. That's a disaster. But I don't want people to ignore their regrets either, because that's really bad advice. And we've gotten some really bad advice on that front.

Jacob Morgan 12:32

Let's talk a little bit about the research that went into the book just to give people some context, and you collected 1000s of stories. So share a little bit about what went into writing this book as far as your world regrets survey that you did?

Daniel Pink 12:46

Well, I did two pieces of research. One was the American regret project, which is a giant public opinion survey of the US population. We sampled 4489 Americans, a very rigorous public opinion survey, the largest survey of American attitudes about regret ever conducted. And we did it largely to try to draw some demographic differences, to see their demographic differences in the what, why and how of regret, then at same time, we did a qualitative I did. At the same time, we did a qualitative piece of research, which, as you say, is called a world regrets survey, which is a giant collection of regrets. So so far, we've collected regrets from over 20,000 people in 109 countries.

Jacob Morgan 13:27

Wow. So people were just sharing their deepest personal stories with you by email.

Daniel Pink 13:34

Me by by by a format by online, you know, they would they would they would complete a form online at World Record. survey.com. Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 13:41

So what what were some of the types of things that people were sending in as far as regrets or I mean, were these like deep, profound things that people were going through, or were there so

Daniel Pink 13:49

a lot of them? A lot of them, a lot of a lot of them were and as you know, from the book, one of the things that that comes out is that around the world, people ended up having basically the same four kinds of regrets. So there were regrets. There were what I call foundation regrets, which are, if only I'd done the work about people regretting not taking care of their health, not working hard enough in school, saving too little spending too much things that compromise the stability of your life, there were a lot of regrets about boldness. If only I'd taken the chance. There were regrets about morality, if only I'd done the right thing. And there were a lot of regrets about relationships, not only romantic relationships, in fact, mostly not romantic relationships, but relationships, the full gamut of relationships we have in our lives, which are if only I had reached out to around the world where I kept saying the same for regrets over and over and over again.

Jacob Morgan 14:38

And it's interesting. You talked earlier about this idea of why dwelling on regrets is bad. And I'm sure like intuitively, people can hear that and say, oh, yeah, of course that doesn't make sense. But why is it bad? And what happens to us when we start to dwell and think about regrets a little bit too long and they start to take over a little bit

Daniel Pink 14:59

because because as what we want to use, we want to use regret as a tool we want to use as an instrument, we want to use it as an engine. And so if you simply think about it and dwell on it, you're not going through a process that allows you to drive lessons to go forward. You're simply luxuriating in it. All right. And so, you know, and so it's a really profound question because it goes to, you know, what is the purpose of emotions, particularly negative emotions? Alright, so there's one, you know, some of us believe that emotions like just forget about it, like we should be thinking and not feeling, forget about emotions, be, you know, be be rational and don't get swayed by these emotions. I don't think that's right. Another, there's another, I think, even more insidious view that emotions are the only truth that like bask in your emotion so like, like, celebrate your emotions, especially your negative emotions all the time, I think that's a terrible idea. Feelings are not for ignoring, feelings are not for feeling feeling is for thinking. Feelings are signals that our cognition and our emotion works together, that emotions are signals, they're, they're their information, their data, we should be thinking about them. So when we feel crappy, right, like, like regret, it's, the world is telling us something. Now, if we simply luxuriate, in that feeling, if we simply wallow in that feeling, we're not properly receiving the signal we're bathing in, you're using it as a bath, rather than as, as a prod. And what we want to do is used is used as, as, as, as a way to stir us into thinking and processing and driving lessons from the regret and then acting on it.

Jacob Morgan 16:39

Yeah, which makes a lot of sense, why we shouldn't be dwelling on these things a little bit too long. So you talked about these four regrets, I thought maybe we can unpack them a little bit. So Foundation, boldness, and then moral and connection. So let's start with foundation regrets. So maybe you can give us a little just a background on what those types of regrets are. And then we can look at maybe some action items or things that people can do if they identify those in their lives.

Daniel Pink 17:06

Sure, that's a hard the financial regrets are somewhat hard to, to solve, because of the nature of what they are their regrets of small decisions that you make early that accumulate to pretty nasty consequences later on. So let's say that you let's let's say that tonight, I don't eat very well. All right, I terrible food, unhealthy food, okay, that's not cataclysmic. But if I do that regularly, over and over and over again, for years, that's going to catch up to me. All right, that's, that's, that's the foundation i If only I'd eaten better. Let's say don't exercise, if only I'd exercise more a lot of regrets in this category about finances. If only I'd saved more money and been less frivolous with my with my money, not a single person in this database, regretted said, Oh, my regret is that I saved too much money. Nobody has that regret. And I mean that and, and so and so that's what these foundation regrets are small decisions that happen early, small decisions you make early that accumulate to pretty as I said, negative consequences much later in life. Now, those are hard to address because it's, it's, you can't undo them immediately. So if I have if I've gone if I've gone 15 years without exercising regularly, I can't fix that today. You know, so what you have to do is and again, I quote this in the book, this this hoary Chinese proverb, which is that the best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago, the second best time is today. So with a foundation regrets, the most important thing is that you look back on them, you treat yourself with some degree of kindness rather than contempt. You talk about them, you disclose them, and then you start taking small actions now, recognizing that you're not going to repair the damage immediately.

Jacob Morgan 18:47

Yeah, okay. So I guess part of it is, it seems like you need a little bit of self awareness there, right? To be able to address some of these things like to understand that you have to move on to under like, I mean, if you don't have self awareness, do you think it's possible to really address some of these regrets in the right way?

Daniel Pink 19:03

I think that I don't want people I think self awareness is is difficult and challenging. I think what people really need is a process. Okay, that is don't rely on people's capacity, innate capacity for self awareness, which is not massive. What you want to do is you want to equip people with the process in the book I talk about a process by which people can deal with their regrets systematic way to deal with that with with regrets and then ultimately to use them as an instrument for progress.

Jacob Morgan 19:32

Okay, all right. Well, yeah, we'll talk about that process in just a minute. Okay, so we got the foundation part covered. What about boldness? Regrets

Daniel Pink 19:39

boldness Are you know that those regrets that people have about not asking people out on dates have regrets about people have have I not traveling and going on adventures? Is it words that people have about not speaking up about not asserting themselves about not starting businesses? As I said earlier, there's these are regrets if only I'd taken the chance.

Jacob Morgan 19:56

Okay. And then next one, we have moral regrets.

Daniel Pink 20:02

You know, again, a lot of these regrets as you know, they begin at a juncture. So you know, with with boldness, regrets the juncture is take the chance or play it safe. And when people play it safe, they often regret it. You know, when people are really when people don't take the chance, they often regret it. Not always but a heck of a lot of the time more than I would have expected. With more regrets the juncture is do the right thing, do the wrong thing. Take the high road, take the low road. And it's always tempting to take the low road, it's always tempting to, to cut corners to be less honorable than you know you should be. And when we do that, not all of us, but most of us, most of us end up regretting it. And the big the specific regrets in this category that had the biggest numbers were regrets about marital infidelity and about bullying

Jacob Morgan 20:53

with the moral regret. And I don't know if you have data on this, but when you think about leadership or business, for example, is the moral regret piece, the one that appears most common in a business setting?

Daniel Pink 21:05

I don't know. I don't think so actually, because and I'll tell you why. I don't that's my real answer is I don't know. But But I don't think so because moral regrets were the smallest category of all interest. And I think that what I saw most in the what I saw most in the realm of careers. Were boldness regrets.

Jacob Morgan 21:24

I wish I would have taken that opportunity years.

Daniel Pink 21:28

I wish I would have if only I'd started a business rather than stayed in this crappy job if only I had focused more on succeeding rather than not failing. If only I had been entrepreneur more entrepreneurial in my career, if only I had spoken up more in meetings.

Jacob Morgan 21:43

Okay, yeah, that makes sense. And then the last one, which I think are pretty self explanatory, but we can talk about those anyway, connection regrets. I think these are the ones that I perhaps struggle with sometimes, you know, building close relationships with family, reaching out to friends, having more of those, those deeper connections, which does require vulnerability, I think, to be able to really make those strong. Yeah.

Daniel Pink 22:06

I agree. So these are people though. But but but but again, I mean, so so I'll see your razor, I'll see your vulnerability and raise you awkwardness because one of the things that stands as a barrier to connecting is our feelings of awkwardness. So if, if you and I were friends 10 years ago, and we haven't talked for a while, yeah, you know, I might say, oh, I should really reach out to Jacob. But, man, it's gonna be really awkward. Alright, so that's the, that's, you know, and I'm putting myself out there. So we think it's, oh, it's gonna be so awkward. That's basically a version of vulnerability is configured to really awkward. And besides, he's not going to care. And on that, coming back to pluralistic ignorance, we're wrong. We're wrong on both counts. A it's not that awkward. It's very rarely anywhere remotely as awkward as people think and be. The other side almost always welcomes the overture, I mean, 99 times out of 100. And so and so, you know, if there's a lesson in the connection regrets, it's that is, if you're thinking about reaching out, reach out.

Jacob Morgan 23:09

Now, now. Okay, so those are the four types of regrets. I'm kind of curious how so people who are listening and watching this trying to figure out, you know, which one of the regrets they have, I suppose it's pretty easy to identify, are the steps different depending on which one of the regrets that you identify in yourself as far as what as far as what you should do?

Daniel Pink 23:28

Not necessarily. I mean, I think the big difference is, is the difference between action regrets and inaction regrets, because Okay, action regrets, you can take a slightly different approach. So so but but again, some of these things group more readily an action in action, for instance, moral regrets tend to be actions. I cheated. I bullied. Alright, and so with with with action, regrets, one thing that you can do is you can try to undo them. You can make amends, you can apologize, you can make restitution. And so

that's a way to extinguish certain kinds of action regrets. I mean, you can still draw lessons from them, but but at the outset, you can, you can, you can sometimes do something about action regrets. The other thing about action regrets, too, is that you can do what's called a downward counterfactual, and then you can imagine how things could have been even worse. And we see this, we see this a lot in the data, the data that I have, when it comes to marriages, there are a lot of people in bad marriages. And so people say, oh my god, I can't believe I married that idiot. But at least I have these two great kids. So they find the silver they find the silver lining now you can still draw lessons from your bad decision. You can still regret it, but you can ease some of the sting by using that at least inaction regret, you can undo them and you can't at least them you know, you have to you have to. You have to go through it. You know, it you have to go through. I think they're a very simple process. says that you can also use for action regrets. But again to belabor the point here, action regrets give you a couple more remedies than inaction regrets.

Jacob Morgan 25:08

What happens when you suppress them? Again, this is one of the things that I think regrets, like, this is one of the things that I feel like I've struggled with before. You know, I think about it, and I try to dismiss it, push it down, distract myself, don't think about it. And then I find that it like creeps up later on, and, you know, keeps creeping up, and I keep trying to stuff it down and get rid of it. Why is that not a good approach?

Daniel Pink 25:33

Because it doesn't work. Because you can't, you know, you're what you're what you're trying to do is you're trying to you're trying to extinguish this flame. But now, occasionally, these flames will die on their own. But if you if the flame is if the flame is still working, you have to you can't extinguish it, you have to actually enlist it to offer some light. I mean, at the risk of sounding cheesy here, that, that again, the fact that you can't do that is itself a signal, the fact that it keeps popping up, is telling you something. And so what it's telling you if it pops up the second time, the third time, what it's telling you is not, hey, try to suppress this the fourth time. No, that's not what it's telling you. It's telling you. I have a message for you. I'm clarifying what you value. And I'm instructing you on how to do things differently. So go back to me for it. For instance, if I have kindness, regrets, if I have regrets, interesting, it's a moral regret that happens to be about inaction. But leaving that aside for a moment, if I have regrets about kindness, about not about about seeing bad things happen and not doing anything about them. And the fact that that bugs me 10 years later, 20 years later, 30 years later, that's telling me something, it's clarifying what I value, what I value, kindness, and it's instructing men how to do better. And so, so So, so that's why I do think, Jacob that there are regrets that we have, that ended up dying and extinguishing on their own. So if I regret something, you know, if I did something when I was, I don't know, 22 years old, that maybe I regretted when I was 23. But today, at my advanced age, I don't even remember it, let alone regretted whatever, that's fine, that's just that's a signal that whatever that was, I don't really value it that much. But if I do something at age 22, or 32, and I remember it now, and it bugs me. Now, that's a pretty strong signal about what I value. And it's a pretty strong knock at the door, that I need to do something.

Jacob Morgan 27:34

Part of regret. I mean, we're talking about like feelings and emotions, I find that a lot of people have a hard time even identifying their feelings, or identifying their emotions. And, you know, there's something called the feelings wheel, which I'm sure you're familiar with, which kind of lists all the different feelings that a human can have. And I found that oftentimes, when people just asked me how you're doing the default is good, you know, are you? I'm fine. That's not really an emotion or a feeling. Do you find that there's a relation between being able to, I guess, address or learn from these regrets with being able to know how to talk about your emotions?

Daniel Pink 28:14

Maybe I mean, I think that it's I think what's important, and I think we see this, you see this in something like cognitive behavior therapy, and you see this a little bit even in the in the writings of the stoics. Going back way, way, way back is that the ability to name something is important. The ability to name what is bothering you is a way to reduce its menace big time. And you know, we treat we do this with a little we do this with little kids, I don't think I don't think well enough. So if a little kid is exploding, and feels like somebody didn't treat them well, it's important to understand that what that person is experiencing is something called anger. And anger is something that all human beings experience. I don't like we don't nobody likes feeling anger, but you sometimes feel anger. So when you feel this way, I want you to think about what this what this feels like, that's something called anger. And when you feel anger, that, you know, there are certain things that you can do with that you can think about why do you feel anger, you can actually restrain yourself from treating people poorly, because that's usually not the best response to anger. And so So, so again, naming is for little kids and for people like us. I mean, it's actually really, it's actually really important and it's more important, I think, than we realize for another reason, which is that emotions by their feelings, by their very nature are abstract. You know, and so that's what makes negative that's what makes positive emotions feel good and negative emotions feel bad. So when we name them at least or in it, certainly when we even more, systematically write about them or talk about them. We convert this abstraction in to concrete words, and that makes it less that makes it less menacing, truly anything that we name by naming something, we reduce at least a little bit of its menace.

Jacob Morgan 30:10

Yeah, I think a lot of therapists say right and name it to payment.

Daniel Pink 30:14

The famous, better said than I,

Jacob Morgan 30:16

yeah, if you're struggling with something you don't know the emotion, you got to name the emotion to be able to figure out what to do with it as a result. I'm curious if you've noticed anything differences as far as age, so I'm thinking about, for example, my regrets versus my grandmother, right? She's She's turning 85. She was born in Odessa, Ukraine, and she's had unbelievable things happened to her and her family and just all sorts of tragedies. Have you found differences in how people have a different age approach and think about regrets whether they're younger or older.

Daniel Pink 30:50

There's one big difference in age with age and regret. It's an it's a pretty profound difference. And it's this when we are younger, say in our 20s, we have about equal numbers of regrets of action and inaction, equal numbers of regrets about what we did, and what we didn't do. But as we age, that balance changes considerably. As we age, the inaction regrets take over when you get to be in your 40s and even 40s and 50s. Roughly two to one inaction regrets to action regrets big. It's one of the few very strong demographic differences that we've that we found. Not only in my, in my quantitative research, but also in other you know, existing research, especially in social psychology has found this true over time, what gnaws at us are in actions.

Jacob Morgan 31:43

Why? Why is that the case?

Daniel Pink 31:46

Well, I don't think we know but I mean, we can speculate, I think part of it is stuff we've already talked about, you know, in the sense that if you have an action regret, you can make amends, you know, so if I've heard somebody, I can go say, Hey, I'm sorry, I'm really sorry. I can't believe I did that. I want you to accept my apology and maybe get forgiven. And that could end up not extinguishing it, but reducing it considerably with inaction regrets, you can't, you know, it's you, you you can't, you can't undo them. I think that's I think that's a big, big factor. The other thing is that is that the two when we go back to our four core regrets, the most common regrets are regrets about connection and regrets about boldness, those connections, we got to the biggest category bonus regrets are the second biggest category. And almost all of those are inaction regrets. So the things that say substantively, what regrets about connection and regrets about boldness are themselves almost always regrets of inaction. So that's another reason why inaction regrets tend to predominate.

Jacob Morgan 32:42

And I'm assuming that we probably experience many of these regrets probably on a daily basis, right? It's not like something major needs to happen for you to feel regret you. Um, you can go during the day, have a conversation with somebody and say, Oh, I wish I would have said that, or I wish I would have done that. Let's see. I mean, we can have regrets all the time. So I guess let's talk a little bit about the process of what happens when you identify the regrets. Again, using myself as an example, one of the things that I struggle with is the should haves, right? I should have said this, I could have said that. And I oftentimes replay a conversation in my mind or replay a situation in my mind thinking like, oh, I should have said this, or I should have done that. And it can be very annoying. It can be very frustrating. You know, sometimes you're trying to go to bed at night, and you kind of like just replay what you should have done or could have done. So what's what's a better way helped me Dan, what's a better way to think about and process these regrets so that you can learn from them instead of just having them? You know, eat you up? Yeah,

Daniel Pink 33:45

I mean, here's the thing. So you make a really interesting point about there are things that are kind of sort of like regret, it's like, oh, man, I really regret having that burrito for lunch. Okay, but that's not you know, that's not You're not going to think about that a week from now, what I care about, and what gives us guidance are the regrets that linger for, you know, years and years and years and years and

years. If you are somewhat rude to somebody on the subway or at the coffee shop once and you might regret that the next day, or you know, the next hour, you know, and then on that one, maybe you just forgive yourself. But if you do that routinely, and you say God, I'm really an ass, I'm really acting like an ass. Maybe I should stop doing that. That that's a different thing. So let's talk about what you can do about I think the most important thing you can do is, first as a first step is change how you frame the regret and yourself. A lot of times when we make mistakes of anything of any kind, we tend to be very harsh on ourselves. We talk to ourselves in very brutal ways. Our self talk is absurdly vicious sometimes, I mean, it's okay nuts. We talk to ourselves in ways we've never talked to anybody else. So don't do that. I'm not saying that you deserve more tender loving care or kind And then other people deserve, but you don't deserve less. So treat yourself with kindness rather than contempt. Recognize that your mistakes are part of the human condition. Again, I keep coming back to this idea that we think we're much more special than we really are. You know, I used to think that these are regrets about kindness I had were somehow singular that oh my god, like, I'm really a flawed person, like, I get these regrets about kindness. And whoa, that's I'm really messed up, there's gotta be something wrong with me. And then I get this database of 20,000 regrets, I'm like, Oh, my God, I'm so not special. There's so many people who have these kinds of regrets and recognize that you're missteps are part of the human condition. Also, the other thing I think is really important is that when we have a screw up, we often leap to the conclusion that this mistake that we made, or the stupid thing that we did, somehow fully represents us as human beings, that his thing that occurred in one minute of our lives on one day, is the fullest and most accurate representation of who we are as human beings. And that's not true. It's a moment in your life, not the full measure of your life. So I think that that can begin that can that can arrest this kind of march toward rumination, or this march toward always revisiting it, you can interrupt that with this practice of self compassion. I think it's super powerful. And it's very easy to do. We just haven't taught people how to do it.

Jacob Morgan 36:22

Yeah, I was just going to ask you about self compassion, I think, what's her name? Dr. Kristin Neff, is she I think she's the compassion expert. Yeah. And she, I know, she has a couple of compassion exercises that she walks people through too. So without self compassion, it sounds like it's very hard to process regret, and to turn them into learning moments, unless you can be kind to yourself, if you're just beating yourself up and throwing yourself against the wall. And again, this is something I struggled with, too, I tend to my default is more of the negative self talk than the positive self talk. So it's something I'm trying to work on on a regular basis. Let

Daniel Pink 36:56

me give you some advice. So let me give you some advice. You know, that old joke where a guy goes to the doctor's office, and he says, doctor, it hurts when I do this. And the doctor says, Don't do that. That you're still solution, Jacob, don't do that. You know, and again, when you find yourself with that negative self talk, you say, when I talk to anybody else this way? Probably not. So don't talk to yourself that way. And I'm not saying talk to yourself completely, you know, with, with utter tenderness all the time. And you know, what I'm saying to yourself is don't treat yourself worse than you would treat somebody else. Why do you deserve worse treatment than everybody else? There's no, there's no logical reason for it. Right? You deserve the same treatment as as everybody else. So treat yourself with the same the same way you treat that the same way you treat somebody else. The other thing to

appeal to the very rational side is that we have, there's there's a pile if you think about something like self criticism, the practice of self criticism, particularly self is critically this kind of lacerating vicious self criticism. There's no evidence it's effective. If it was effective, if it was effective for you to trash yourself and beat yourself up, I would say go for it, man. But there's no evidence effective. So what it does is it makes you feel worse, and it doesn't make you do it doesn't help you at all. So why do it what you wanted, you know, what do you again, what do you want to do it again, I'm being very, you know, you have to be very pragmatic and practical here. I just want stuff that works, right. And what works is self compassion, self compassion, interrupts that March, toward rumination, and spinning. And when you do that, you interrupt that March, you can begin other things to make sense of the regret and to extract lessons from it.

Jacob Morgan 38:42

How do you practice self compassion?

Daniel Pink 38:46

I try to I try to treat my I try to treat myself a little bit better. And it's hard. It's not my it's not my go to move. It's not my muscle memory. I'm not saying that. I do it perfectly all the time. But if I say to myself, you know, if I do something, I say, you fucking idiot. And I say that to myself. I say, Well, wait a second. Would I say that to anybody else? And they're very few people. I would say that to in very few circumstances, what I say that to another human being. So why say it to myself, you know, yeah, you know, I'm not. And again, I'm not I'm not going to the other extreme, saying, you're awesome. You're the greatest. You're wonderful. I self esteem is totally overrated to what I what I say to myself is okay. You messed up. People mess up. It's part of the human experience. It doesn't define you fully. So, make sense of it, draw a lesson from it and move on.

Jacob Morgan 39:47

Okay, and what's the next step in the process? Okay, self compassion. We've done.

Daniel Pink 39:51

So we got so we got self compassion. Okay, so we talked a little bit about disclosure disclosure is an unburdening. So that's important. But again, And the other thing, which we talked about too is that is the is the is the move from abstract to concrete, which we talked about in the realm of naming emotion. So what we do, again, emotions are abstract. When we talk about them or write about them, we make them concrete, and anything that's concrete is almost inherently less menacing than something that that's abstract. And so and so that's, I think, a big factor in writing about our regrets or talking about our regrets. And then it also begins a sense making process because if I've written about my regret or talk about them, there's something out there beyond this blobby, amorphous, terrible feeling that I can try to make sense of. And when I make sense of it, I can move to the next step, which is drawing a lesson from it. Do people usually the way to draw a lesson from it? Yeah.

Jacob Morgan 40:44

I was gonna say people usually do this via like journaling, or is this all mental exercises that people go through?

Daniel Pink 40:50

I actually, well, it depends, because most people don't do it. What I actually think that doing it only in your head is not effective, because it's still a little bit too abstract. What I think is important is to talk to somebody about your regret, disclose it to somebody else, even you know, if you don't want to do that to another human being. So because again, you're taking it out of the abstraction in your head, and making it concrete with the words that you're uttering that's powerful, that's a powerful way to defang the regret. And it's a way to be open up the possibility of making sense of that regret. The however, writing about your regret is also very powerful. There's a pile of research on this. So if you want to do so if you want something very tactical, write about your regret, for 15 minutes a day for three days. That's it. So put some boundaries on it 15 minutes a day for three days. And what's going to happen is that you're going to, you're going to move it from the realm of abstraction to the realm of pure emotion to the realm of cognition you're going to be in to be able to think about your regret makes sense about your to make sense of your regret, and begin the process of saying, Okay, what lesson is this teaching me? And what should I do about it?

Jacob Morgan 41:58

So it seems like that's the key, right? Because if it's abstract, it's very hard to figure out what to do about it. But if you can make it concrete, then you can kind of take steps and figure out what to do as a result.

Daniel Pink 42:08

Name it to tame it is the is one way of doing it, as you already said, but also again, writing about it or talking about it, it defends it. Here's the thing. Emotions are abstract. That's why not that's why positive emotions feel good. Sonja Lyubomirsky has research showing that if we actually try to make sense of our of our, of our positive emotions, you know, if we try to explain our positive emotions, it makes them less positive. Because we've we've taken it from abstract to concrete. So don't do that for positive emotions. Don't try to explain why you feel joy, just feel joy. But when you feel regret. That doesn't that's, that's aversive. So what you want to do is, is take the abstract and make it concrete through through words.

Jacob Morgan 42:55

I also heard I can't remember where I heard this, but somebody was telling me that also when it comes to emotions, instead of always trying to figure out why you're feeling a certain way, try to figure out what is making you feel a certain way. Because if you always try to put away yeah, because if you always try to put away behind it, you might not know and you might just kind of jump and guess and kind of you know, create all sorts of weird fantasies in your head. But if you did, but you can be very concrete about what made you feel a certain way. And that's something that you can change.

Daniel Pink 43:22

I think that's a really I think that's really excellent advice. And it's also another move from abstract to concrete. Because if you say, what are the situations in which I feel this way? That's an easier question to answer. And you can answer that question specifically and concretely, in a way you can't the why question, but I think the why is often mysterious.

Jacob Morgan 43:41

Yeah. Yeah. And then how do you reframe this as an opportunity? So you're kind of going through this process? I'm assuming, like, one of the things that you want to do after the regret is, what's the what's the opportunity here? How do I transform this into something that can

Daniel Pink 43:56

I want to draw, you want to draw a lesson from it, you want to draw a lesson from it. And the way you do that is you take a step back and through something called self distancing. And that's partly because once again, we tend to be pretty bad about solving are pretty not pretty maladroit pretty inept at solving our own problems, because we're too close to it. And but but not bad at solving other people's problems, because we're not caught up in all the details. So essentially, you want to treat yourself like another person, which sounds weird, but it there's a pile again, lots of evidence on this. So talk to yourself in the third person's they don't say what should I do say? What's your Jacob to ask yourself? Ask? There's huge amount of research on that Ethan cross at Michigan has done a lot of that Igor Grossman at University of Waterloo in Canada has done that too. So moving from the you know, moving from the, the the third person to moving from the first person to the third person is helpful. You can also do things I think like the one of the most one of my favorite decision making tools ever Is that is to ask yourself if you're stuck, what would what would you tell your best friend to do? And anytime people hear that question, they always know what to do.

Jacob Morgan 45:10

Yeah. Yeah, very simple, very effective. So we only have a couple of minutes left, I thought we can spend our last few minutes talking about how this applies in the realm of business and leadership. So obviously, you collected a lot of regrets. You've been doing a lot of work and research on this. Have you been looking at how this applies to the workplace? how this applies to leadership?

Daniel Pink 45:32

Oh, yes. And a number of different ways. So let's think about let's say boldness. regrets. Okay, so here's the thing. So if, if these are the four regrets that people have those these four regrets, offer us some hints about what people want out of their lives. foundation regrets suggests that people want stability. Bonus regrets suggests people want growth and learning and richness of psychological richness. Moral regret suggests people want to be good. Connection regrets suggests that people want love, right? Okay. So if this is if this is what people want out of their lives, why wouldn't they want it out of the half of the waking hours of their lives, that they're at work? Why would work? I care about these things, but not not during my work? Not not between nine and five? Now, so what you want is that these these, these regrets, give us a reverse image of what makes a coherent culture. And so I think it gives leaders a lot of lessons. So so let's take foundation regrets. Establish conditions of fair pay and predictability. Don't underestimate how much that people feeling precarious, undermines their ability to feel good and, and to be good at their jobs. When I hear regrets about people saying, I wish I had spoken up or I wish I'd been more entrepreneurial in my career. Some of that a lot of it sometimes isn't only on them. It's about being in environments and situations and contexts in which they didn't have psychological safety to speak up. So create psychological safety where people feel emboldened. I also think that if you think about more regrets, I'm convinced that that people not only want to work for great organizations, they want to work for good organizations, they want to work for places that are that are

decent and humane and do the right thing. And then finally, when you think about leaders and connection regrets, a big part of why people work in places and get value and meaning out of places is that sense of connectedness, that sense of belonging, that sense of friendship, and so put a premium on those. So I do think that these regrets, offer a kind of a reverse image for leaders about what makes a coherent culture. At the same time. I do think that there's a lesson for leaders in the boldness regrets, which is, I think there's a lesson in all the regrets but certainly in the boldness in the moral regrets is like, do the right thing. 99% of us if we do the wrong thing, we regret it. And I think that's a good thing. I'm glad about that. I'm glad that people are tormented by moral indiscretions. You know, I wish, I wish, I wish it was 100%, not 99%. Because that 1% really messes things up for the rest of us. But I think with boldness, regrets, there's a lesson for leaders too, which is that you should have a slight bias for action, that when people look back on their lives, they regret what they didn't do they regret not taking chances. They regret not, you know, stepping up. And so I think that there's a there, especially in large organizations, there's so many pressures for, you know, not trying stuff and timidity and risk aversion. And I think that good leaders need to push against that in their own leadership practices.

Jacob Morgan 48:27

I mean, obviously, you're not going to go as a leader, you're not going to go up to all of your employees and say, Hey, what are your biggest regrets? So would you say, why not? Like, what?

Daniel Pink 48:36

Oh, you can? Why wouldn't you do that? I don't have evolution. Or better yet, don't do this. No Better yet. Better yet, do this. Tell your team and next meeting you have with your team, if you're a leader? Describe a regret that you have. Tell people what lesson you learned from it, and tell them what you're going to do about it. And watch what happens.

Jacob Morgan 49:00

Yeah, certainly, when I interview a lot of CEOs on this podcast, I always ask them for their greatest business failure or their greatest mistake. And it's amazing the stories that that people are willing to share when you when you ask them those types of questions. Okay, so I like to say very simply, right,

Daniel Pink 49:15

because people, yeah, because people do want to talk about this. And so but the thing is, is that, you know, this is I mean, you know, this, it's every leader will tell you this, that people don't listen to what you say that they watch what you do. So they watch you disclose one of your regrets, find a lesson in it, find a path forward from it, they're going to do the same thing.

Jacob Morgan 49:36

And I liked that piece of advice. It's very simple and practical. So your next meeting, like you said, I'm asking about the regrets. I wonder if another piece for leaders could be to try to get to know your employees more as human beings not just as workers like their passions, what they care about. Do you find that an important aspect for the leadership piece?

Daniel Pink 49:54

I think it can be I think it can be helpful. The I think it's I think it depends a little bit on. I think it depends a little bit on the person like, not everybody welcomes that kind of, yeah, you know, get get to know you. But I think if you if you if you read the room, you can figure it out.

Jacob Morgan 50:20

Okay, I like it. And maybe last question for you. Do you do any kind of prioritization for the regrets? Because if you're going through a lot of these, and you have quite a few regrets that you're dwelling on? How do you How do you tackle them? And you just go one at a time systematically? Do you process these in any kind of way or prioritize them in any kind of way?

Daniel Pink 50:40

I'm not sure my best advice is pick one.

Jacob Morgan 50:43

Pick one and start with one.

Daniel Pink 50:46

Just pick one and start with that, see what happens. I like it. I don't think that I don't have a systematic I don't have a systematic way to prioritize. I'm so Bolton's regrets are more important than more regrets, or, you know, the, it's like your mileage will vary. And who based based on today might be different from yesterday, which might be different from tomorrow, the person you are today might have different regrets, and the person you were 10 years ago. So my best advice since since people tend not to do anything, is to do something, pick one. Trend himself with kindness rather than contempt. disclose to make sense of it, write about it, talk about it, to make sense of it. Take a step back and say what I learned from this and what am I going to do?

Jacob Morgan 51:24

What's your next your next book going to be about?

Daniel Pink 51:27

I have no idea. still planning on that one? Nine out of 10 planning I haven't even gotten to planning.

Jacob Morgan 51:33

Yeah, still early stages. Oh, well, at the end, thank you so much for joining me let people know where can they go to grab your book? Anything that you want to mention for people to check out?

Daniel Pink 51:42

Well, I mean, you can find the book The Power of regret wherever books are sold online or in stores. What's more, is that you can find anything pink related on Dan pink.com da npink.com.

Jacob Morgan 51:57

Yes, and as I mentioned before I hit the record button. I'm a fan of the pink casts that you create those once a month,

Daniel Pink 52:05

twice a month, once every other week. Twice a

Jacob Morgan 52:07

month. Yes, short, inspirational videos and very practical advice. Oftentimes filmed in your house or around your neighborhood, as I've learned,

Daniel Pink 52:15

often, often often shot right where I'm talking from right where I'm talking to you, Jacob right here at the beating heart of pink ink world headquarters. The garage behind my office.

Jacob Morgan 52:26

Very cool. Again, thank you again, so much for taking time out of your day. Really appreciate it.

Daniel Pink 52:32

A pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Jacob Morgan 52:33

All right, don't hang up.