

DON'T PUT YOURSELF IN A BOX

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And then you look at it one day and you realize the safety net is actually a straitjacket because it allows you to only play in this one safe area.

Eric Weiner [00:00:10 - 00:00:24]

At least I know that I don't know. Right. That is the beginning of all discovery. Because if you think you know it all, that's just another way of saying you're shut down to new ideas and new ways of thinking.

Tony Martignetti [00:00:25 - 00:01:14]

Sometimes the box is security, sometimes it's expertise, and sometimes it's simply the story we've become accustomed to telling about ourselves. So how do you know when it's time to step outside? Around every campfire, stories have shaped who we've become. They remind us we're not alone. They challenge the way we think, and sometimes they change the direction of our lives. Welcome to this special series of the Virtual Campfire. I'm Tony Martignetti. Together, we'll explore powerful conversations inspired by the themes of Campfire Lessons for Leaders, uncovering the moments of transformation, courage, and growth that shape who we are and who we become. The fire is lit.

Tony Martignetti [00:01:15 - 00:02:20]

Let's gather where stories spark transformation. We spend much of our lives trying to answer a deceptively simple question. Who am I? We become the executive, the entrepreneur, the teacher, the expert, the artist, the parent, the successful one. And those identities can give us confidence and direction, but there's a danger in becoming too attached to the answer because sometimes the very thing that tells us who we are Eventually begins telling us who we're allowed to become. Today, we're exploring what happens when we stop allowing titles, expectations, expertise, or even success to define the boundaries of our lives. Because growth sometimes requires more than stepping outside the box. Sometimes we have to realize we were the ones holding the lid closed. Our first guest has never followed what most people would describe as a conventional career path.

Tony Martignetti [00:02:21 - 00:03:02]

Ozan Varol moved from Turkey to the United States at 17. He studied astrophysics, worked on the Mars Exploration Rover project, and went to law school, practiced law, became a tenured professor, and then— He began questioning whether the accomplishments that defined his career were also beginning to define his boundaries. But long before he walked away from academia, Ozan had learned something important. Often the greatest limitations in front of us isn't the obstacle itself. It's the story we tell ourselves about it. Here's Ozan.

Ozan Varol [00:03:03 - 00:03:54]

You know, I did not have a plan B, but I did have, and, you know, a lot of credit goes to my parents here. They really instilled in me a sense of autonomy from a very, very early age. So one example that's, I think, emblematic of the way they raised me is, so when I was about to go into kindergarten, the way that the system works in Istanbul is like, you know, you've got maybe 4 or 5 kindergartens within driving distance of your house, and you can pick anyone you want, and then you get enrolled there. And my parents basically did some work on their own. So they researched these schools, they went and visited them. And then they came home to me and they said, you are now going to start kindergarten and you've got 3 choices. We're going to take you to them and you get to pick which one you want. So think through what questions do you want to ask? What do you find important? And I'm 4 or 5 years old, right? Like a little boy.

Ozan Varol [00:03:55 - 00:04:46]

And to give me so much autonomy, having set up these guardrails, right? Because any one of these 3 kindergartens would work well for them. Having set up those guardrails and then allowing me to walk into these schools and I felt like an adult. Like, I would go in and like ask them the questions that I found important. Like, what kind of toys do you have? You know, what kind of books do you have? Do you have, you know, science fiction books? And all of that, the things that I found important at that age, that really left a lasting mark. That the poem *Invictus* comes to mind, right? I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul. That idea was instilled in me by my parents at a very young age that regardless of the circumstances we were in, economic and otherwise, that really the possibilities in life are limitless. And that if you want something, it's up to you to go and get it.

Ozan Varol [00:04:46 - 00:04:48]

And that lesson stayed with me to this day.

Tony Martignetti [00:04:48 - 00:05:04]

That's fantastic. I love that. I mean, that's something that, you know, everyone needs to hear, right? That you have to go get what you want. And, you know, don't let anything hold you back from really reaching out for that thing, even though sometimes there's so many people in your path who say, oh, that's not possible.

Ozan Varol [00:05:04 - 00:05:05]

You can't do that.

Tony Martignetti [00:05:06 - 00:05:15]

I've started getting the practice of just really saying, what's holding me back? What is truly in the way? What's the obstacle that I can overcome to get there? That's so—

Ozan Varol [00:05:15 - 00:06:19]

Yeah, and often the obstacle tends to be, at least in my experience, the story that we tell ourselves. And a story, of course, doesn't necessarily come internally. It's a story that we were told to believe in by societal conditioning or by conditioning from our parents, by

conditioning from our education system, which I think plays a huge role in curbing our autonomy, which we can talk about, and basically seducing us into believing that smaller dreams are wiser than moonshots. And I think when you combine those 3 factors— society, family, and the education system together— you end up with really limiting beliefs that stay with you for a very long time. And identifying those beliefs and knowing how to manage them is really important. I remember, so I had gotten into Cornell. I was still in Turkey. And a few weeks before I arrived on campus, still in Istanbul, I was researching what the astrophysics department was up to, and I learned that one of the professors in the astrophysics department was in charge of a NASA-led mission to Mars.

Ozan Varol [00:06:19 - 00:07:15]

So he was the principal investigator for what would later be called the Mars Exploration Rovers project. There was no job listing, but I thought to myself, you know, I'm gonna email him. I had taught myself how to code in high school, and I'm gonna email him to see if I could get a job working on this Mars mission if there was any room for me to work on it. And I remember drafting that email expressing my burning desire to work for him, attaching my CV. And when I was about to hit send, this voice came in my head, right? The voice that I think we all know, we're all familiar with, the voice of the inner critic, the voice of the you can't do this. In my case, it was the voice of the, you know, you're a skinny kid with a funny name. from a country halfway around the globe, right? Like, what could you possibly contribute? There is no job listing. Why are you even sending an email to this really important person? And, you know, when that voice comes— by the way, that voice hasn't completely disappeared.

Ozan Varol [00:07:15 - 00:07:37]

It still comes up from time to time. I ask myself 2 questions. The first one is, what is the worst that can happen? And what would I do if that worst thing were to actually happen? In that case, it was like, the worst thing that would happen is he'd never write back to me, right? Like, he'd just ignore it. He'd think I was out of my mind, and that would be that. I'd never hear from him again. And then I asked myself, well, what's the best that can happen?

Tony Martignetti [00:07:38 - 00:07:38]

Hmm.

Ozan Varol [00:07:39 - 00:08:42]

Well, the best that can happen is I would land a pinch-me-now job working on the operations team for this Mars mission. And when you put it that way, then the choice is so obvious, right? And I clicked send. And I'm so glad I did because mustering up the courage to send that email, you know, triggered a series of events that led to me writing *Think Like a Rocket Scientist* and publishing that book this year. So those 2 questions still I use on a regular basis. Like, whenever I'm afraid of taking a leap into the unknown, I ask myself, what's the worst that can happen? And if that case were to actually materialize— actually, it's a little bit more nuanced than that now. What's the worst that can happen? How likely is that thing to actually happen? Because usually our worst-case scenarios are highly unlikely.

And if that were to actually happen, what would I do? And then what's the best that can happen? Because our minds are really good at generating, you know, horrible scenarios. And so, it's very nice in my view, and really important to counterbalance that with what is the best that can happen.

Tony Martignetti [00:08:43 - 00:09:06]

Ozan's opportunity didn't begin with an invitation. There wasn't even a job opening. What stood between him and that email was a story. You don't belong here. You're not qualified. People like you don't do things like this. And I think that's important because some of the strongest boxes in our lives don't have walls. They have sentences.

Ozan Varol [00:09:07 - 00:09:54]

I had a really hard time initially growing my following because I think I was having read like so many articles online when I was starting out. Well, actually I made a couple of mistakes. The first major mistake I made was waiting way too long to get started. So I thought I had the idea of doing something like this for years, and I didn't do it until 2016. That I think was mistake number one. And the reason I waited, by the way, was that I was telling myself this story that serious law professors don't blog for the general public, right? They don't have—I'm supposed to be writing serious academic articles that only like 10 people in my subspecialty field of comparative constitutional law read. Like serious law professors don't do this. And I kept telling myself that story and that story was reinforced by the people around me.

Ozan Varol [00:09:54 - 00:10:33]

They were like, well, don't do that. And when I would broach that idea, the unanimous response was like, no, just put your head down and keep writing academic articles. And I waited way too long to get started. And looking back on it now, I easily could have started earlier. And even after I started, by the way, like, I remember getting a call from one of my close friends in academia, and she said, you are risking your scholarly significance. She said, people are going to look at your website, and they're going to laugh at you. And you're going to ruin all chances you've got of moving to a different law school, to a different city. You're going to get stuck where you are because people are not going to take you seriously in academia.

Ozan Varol [00:10:33 - 00:11:22]

And that really hurt because she was coming from a very good place. She was trying to look out for me, but the message was like, don't do this. And then there's a poem I love from Donna Markova called I Will Not Die an Unlived Life. And this is a stanza that I've memorized. And those lines, the stanza being, I choose to risk my significance so that what comes to me as seed can move on as blossom, and what comes to me as blossom can go on as fruit. And that line particularly, I choose to risk my significance, whenever I'm afraid of taking a leap now, that line comes to me as echoes from my subconscious, just reminding me that I've got nothing to lose. And so telling myself, I am willing to risk my significance as

a law professor. And by the way, if I hadn't done that, you wouldn't be hearing me right now.

Ozan Varol [00:11:22 - 00:11:56]

You know, I wouldn't have a blog. I wouldn't have a podcast. I wouldn't have a book. And that I find to be really powerful. So that was mistake number 1. And I think that was a major mistake, but such an important lesson learned. And then, you know, a couple of minor mistakes along the way was when I first started, you end up with such inflated expectations about what your growth is going to look like because there's so many articles online, right? Like, you know, get 10,000 email subscribers in 6 months that give you this like ridiculous expectation. And it's someone who supposedly did this before and then they teach you how to do it.

Ozan Varol [00:11:56 - 00:12:08]

And then they charge you a bunch of money for it. And I think having gone through some of that, I was just expecting to hit such high numbers early on. And I think at the end of year 1, I had maybe 600 subscribers to my email list.

Tony Martignetti [00:12:09 - 00:12:32]

Sometimes the box doesn't feel restrictive at all. Sometimes it looks like credibility, recognition, expertise, a title we worked years to earn. And that's what makes stepping outside it so difficult. Because we're not simply asking, what might I gain? We're asking, who will I be if I let this identity go?

Ozan Varol [00:12:33 - 00:13:10]

It's so hard to do. It's so hard to do. And this is why it took me so long. It's like, your ego gets in the way, right? Because your ego is the part of you that's attached to the accolades, that's attached to the titles, that kicks and screams the moment you say, I'm going to leave behind, I'm going to shed my old skin the way a snake does. and put on this new skin. So I made the decision recently to make this year my final year in academia as a law professor. And again, in the lead-up to that decision, my ego still, by the way, sometimes will come up and say, you're making the worst call of your life. You have a future-proof career.

Ozan Varol [00:13:10 - 00:13:53]

You have tenure. You know, that's a guaranteed paycheck for life, guaranteed safety net for life. Why would you ever give that up? What are you going to do? And more importantly, who are you going to be? People have been calling you Professor Vural now for 10 years. Who are you to be without that title? And that can be a really hard question to answer. And for me, you know, a lot of it is experience. Like, I've made so many of these pivots that I know what's on the other side is going to be exciting. And I've been preparing myself for this moment now for a few years, experimenting with different ideas and waiting for them to bear some fruit before I actually take the leap. But I was still, even with that, telling the story to myself that, no, this is a safety net for me.

Ozan Varol [00:13:53 - 00:14:01]

Academia is a safety net. I don't think I'll ever give that up. And then you look at it one day and you realize the safety net is actually a straitjacket.

Tony Martignetti [00:14:02 - 00:14:02]

Yeah.

Ozan Varol [00:14:02 - 00:14:17]

Because it allows you to only play in this one safe area. Like you said, Tony, like to box yourself into that area because you're not— you don't have a safety net anywhere else. So you're only going to play in this one area. Yeah. You can do all sorts of moves there. And safety nets are important, by the way. Don't get me wrong.

Tony Martignetti [00:14:18 - 00:14:18]

Yeah.

Ozan Varol [00:14:18 - 00:14:28]

But over time you outgrow them. And even if you outgrow them, they have a way of confining you, which is the point at which when the safety net turns into a straitjacket.

Eric Weiner [00:14:29 - 00:14:29]

Yeah.

Ozan Varol [00:14:29 - 00:15:06]

And at that time, you got to take it off. Because if you don't take it off, then you're going to be confined and boxed in, and you will die an unlived life. Again, to quote the title of the poem from Donna Markova. I think that realization, a lot of thinking and a lot of experimenting is what finally led me to take the leap and say, you know what, I'm having so much fun writing for mainstream audiences. I'm having so much fun Running my membership community, running this mastermind that my wife, Kathy, and I started, that I want to do all of that and doing popular speaking. I want to do all of that full-time without the demands of the academic world.

Tony Martignetti [00:15:06 - 00:15:53]

Ozan's story reminds us that one of the hardest identities to let go of is the one that has rewarded us: professor, expert, successful, secure. But there's another kind of box we can build. It happens when we become so certain about what we know, so specialized in what we do, that we stop exploring what exists beyond it. Our next guest has spent much of his life doing the opposite. Eric Weiner's curiosity has taken him across dozens of countries and through journalism, travel, philosophy, happiness, genius, spirituality, and wisdom. And perhaps that's the point. Eric has never been particularly interested in remaining inside one category. Here's Eric.

Eric Weiner [00:15:54 - 00:16:46]

I suspect there was something going on inside my 5-year-old mind, but at the time, all I knew is I wanted to go explore. And I set off to go for this walk and to run away from home. I was going to run away from home and go out like Marco Polo exploring. And I got pretty far for a 5-year-old. I got 1 or 2 miles from her house and would've made it to wherever I was trying to go if I, the Baltimore County Police had not put a sudden end to my expedition. You know, I'm thinking Marco Polo didn't have to put up with this crap, you know? I mean, so the cops brought me back and, you know, it's easy to say, oh, you're running away from something. And as I said, it was a family that was about to undergo a divorce. So clearly there was some unhappiness, but at the time walking, none of that was on my mind.

Eric Weiner [00:16:46 - 00:17:36]

I was just curious about what was around the next corner. And you could be both running from something and running to something. And that's what I was doing. And I've, ever since that moment, if not before, I've had this deep and persistent wanderlust, you know, of wanting to know what's around the next corner. And I wanted to see the world. I just wanted to get out there and experience the world. And to speed up by a couple decades, I graduated from college with a pretty much worthless degree in English literature, a somewhat stunted sense of morality being a, you know, 21-year-old and a desire to see the world, preferably in someone else's dime. So I became a journalist, you know, and I'm being a little flippant about it, but it's true that Particularly as a foreign correspondent, which I was for more than a decade.

Eric Weiner [00:17:36 - 00:18:32]

You're not just a tourist, you're experiencing the world, you're reporting on it. And I did that for 10, 11 years for NPR, which was sort of the peak of my journalism career. I lived in New Delhi and India and Tokyo and Jerusalem, traveled to many more countries. And there's a line, I don't think it's from the Bible, I'm not sure about letting go of things not meant for you. And the hardest thing I think is to let go of something that's good, that is almost the right thing for you, but not quite the right thing, right? I mean, letting go of that flaming hot torch that's burning your hand, that's easy to let go of. Letting go of the baseball bat with razor blades on it, that's easy. But you let it go of a bouquet of flowers, but it's not quite the right flowers for you, is what I'm saying is hard. So this job, was close to being what was right for me in terms of creative expression and everything else going on with me.

Eric Weiner [00:18:32 - 00:19:48]

But it wasn't quite right because of the negativity bias in journalism, to be honest, which is baked in. You know, there's a cynical expression journalists use, if it bleeds, it leads. The idea is that good news is not news generally. You know, you have the feel-good story at the end of the newscast or whatever. So I have always had a sort of background hum of melancholia or low-grade depression, whatever you want to call it. And I think being a foreign correspondent, once the initial thrill wore off, that this depression was probably getting worse because I was immersing myself in wars. You know, I went to Afghanistan and Iraq and other places and seeing in a way, humanity at its worst, doing its worst to

humans, doing their worst to other humans. And I had an epiphany one day that, you know, I thought, what if I spent a year instead of traveling around the world to the least happy places, miserable places, finding the most miserable people? What if I spent a year traveling to the happiest places, looking for the happiest people and what lessons they could teach us? And I presented the idea to NPR's foreign editor who said at the time something like, what have you been smoking? And this was before smoking such things was legal.

Eric Weiner [00:19:49 - 00:20:37]

And I couldn't get rid of the idea. You know, I, I just listened to an interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda who said for him, creativity is an idea that gets ahold of you and won't let go. And that's what it was for me. And this idea wouldn't let go. And so I wrote a book proposal, which led to the book, *The Geography of Bliss*. And I discovered a couple things. I discovered that I Really enjoy focusing on the positive elements of humanity, and I really enjoy diving into a topic in a deeper way than is possible in even in in-depth—I'm doing inverted quotation marks, but because it's a podcast, you know, even in-depth NPR reporting, you still might spend a few days, maybe a week working on the story, but here I could spend a year or more on it, and it was very gratifying.

Tony Martignetti [00:20:37 - 00:21:04]

There's something deceptively difficult about leaving something that's almost right. If something is painful, sometimes a choice becomes obvious. But what about a career that's respectable? The project that's successful? The opportunity that impresses everyone else? What if it simply isn't yours anymore? And perhaps answering that question requires another quality entirely. Curiosity.

Eric Weiner [00:21:04 - 00:21:54]

I've talked about my approach as a sort of, could we say cultural connoisseur, right? A sort of a connoisseur of foreign cultures in a positive way. You were talking about not cultural appropriation, but cultural appreciation. And there's a fine line sometimes. So I think there's definitely a difference and that's, I'm a cultural appreciator. So first off, the sort of underlying idea and thesis of my whole approach to all the books I've written is that place matters. And by place, I mean not just physical place, like, you know, yes, we're in Boston, I'm in Silver Spring, Maryland, and there are different topographies, the lay of the land. You've got bodies of water, we've got different bodies of water, but we have cultures. And even between Boston and Washington, DC, there are different cultures and you go to different countries and the culture is like goldfish is in a fishbowl.

Eric Weiner [00:21:54 - 00:22:30]

The water in the fishbowl is their culture. But they're not aware that there's a culture there. They just think this is the way things are. It's not until you take the fish out of the fishbowl and then you plop them in another fishbowl, they're like, oh, this is different. And then you put them back in their first fishbowl and they experience that as if for the first time. So my approach is that we're all swimming in this sea called culture, but we're not aware of it. So you, Tony, are affected by the culture of being an American, of being Bostonian, of being a

Tony, which probably has its own subculture, right? And the culture of Tony. And so that's my belief.

Eric Weiner [00:22:30 - 00:23:29]

And then when I go to these places, I treat people as both individuals because we're all individuals and yet also as manifestations of these cultural traits, which they may not even be aware of. And this is the tricky part is you don't think about what it is to be an American usually because you just are, unless there's a crisis. So to go to India and ask someone that simple question, it's a good question. What does it mean to be an Indian? What does it mean to be a French person? They'll usually go, huh, I don't normally think about that. What do we all have in common? What makes us French or makes us Indian? And also to get people to talk about the positive aspects of their life is actually trickier than getting them to talk about the negative. If you ask someone if they're happy and they say no, and you ask why, they'll have a long litany of problems. I don't have enough money and the kids are a pain in the neck or whatever it is. But if you ask them if they're happy and they say yes, and your follow-up question is why, they usually get a blank.

Eric Weiner [00:23:30 - 00:24:08]

You know, I just am. Because happy people, I discovered, don't spend a lot of time analyzing their happiness. They're just too busy being happy. So that's one thing I discovered. You asked about these people in these places is the countries that tend to analyze and happiness and dissect it are not necessarily the happiest. The US, you know, we have cottage industry of self-help books and books about happiness and the science of happiness, and we're not in the top 10 countries of the happiest in the world. Other countries like Thailand, the Thais have an expression, you think too much. Like they believe that excessive thinking is actually a sign of mental illness.

Eric Weiner [00:24:09 - 00:24:45]

So I had to I go in with a complete open mind. I really am open to the idea that everything I think is provisional. You know, everything I think about happiness must, or money. And I think people respond to my openness that I'm not coming there with an agenda. I'm not coming there to badmouth their country or to whitewash it. You know, I listen and I don't even You know, when I was a journalist, I talked about doing interviews. I'm going to go interview this person. An interview is very transactional.

Eric Weiner [00:24:45 - 00:25:09]

I'm looking for something from them. They're looking for something from me. And now I just say, I'm talking to people. You're not interviewing me right now. We're having a conversation, right? And it's a shift in attitude. So I developed my skills as a deep listener. And, you know, it's been said that listening is an act of love, and I think there's great truth to that. So, I learned how to love by listening.

Tony Martignetti [00:25:10 - 00:25:33]

Wow, that's so beautiful. I love what I'm hearing here because this is an element of how we need to approach the way we deal with life and the way we deal with the way we travel, the way we operate in the world with that lens of, you know, we're just bumping into other people and we're having conversations. We should be open to just hearing what they have to say and Not judge, not pre—

Eric Weiner [00:25:34 - 00:26:26]

Right. And not want anything from them per se. I mean, in the business world where I don't spend a lot of time, I imagine a lot of relationships become transactional and a transactional relationship, whatever is being transacted almost doesn't matter. It's that the dynamic is then just giving, receiving, not this open-ended nature of conversation. And At least I know that I don't know, right? That is the beginning of all discovery, is knowing that you don't know. And this kind of ignorance I'm speaking of is actually necessary for any creative endeavor, any discovery. Because if you think you know it all, that's just another way of saying you're shut down to new ideas and new ways of thinking. So the first step is what's been called a fully conscious ignorance.

Eric Weiner [00:26:27 - 00:26:57]

You know that you don't know, and you are receptive to new ways of seeing and new ways of being. My all-time favorite travel quote about travel is from the writer Henry Miller. He said that one's destination is never a place, but a new way of looking at things. And that's my approach to travel and to life, actually. I'm not trying to know more. I'm trying to see more. I don't want to be a know-it-all. I want to be a see-it-all.

Eric Weiner [00:26:57 - 00:27:15]

And it's a different, it's a subtle distinction, but it's a different orientation. Knowledge is something you possess. It becomes another possession. And wisdom, which I write about in my latest book, is something you see. It's something you do. And it has more to do with vision than the accumulation of facts and information.

Tony Martignetti [00:27:17 - 00:27:44]

We usually think expertise expands our possibilities, And often it does, but expertise can become another box if it makes us unwilling to say, I don't know. Eric turns that idea upside down. Not knowing isn't a weakness. It's space. Space for another perspective, another experience, another possibility, and perhaps another version of ourselves.

Eric Weiner [00:27:45 - 00:28:26]

Yeah. Well, it is an intersection of person and place that makes genius, and I really believe that. And that's not to take anything away from the person, but, you know, if Leonardo da Vinci was not around in 16th century Florence, but, you know, 21st century Boston, he would probably not be Leonardo da Vinci, right? He would go to one of, you've got a few colleges there if they're in Boston. He would go to one of the colleges there and say, I've done these drawings and, you know, I'd like to study here. Oh, Well, we have a wonderful

fine arts program. Oh, I've also done some aeronautical engineering. Oh, oh, okay. You know, I guess then maybe you consider engineering department.

Eric Weiner [00:28:27 - 00:28:47]

And I also, you know, a military strategy, like, oh, well, what about this department? No, I wouldn't do it at all. And they would be like, well, we have a counseling department. You could talk to them and sort things out. And then when you know what you wanna do, you come back to us. So the point is like being a Renaissance man or woman like Leonardo da Vinci was possible because it was during the Renaissance.

Ozan Varol [00:28:47 - 00:28:47]

Yeah.

Eric Weiner [00:28:47 - 00:29:33]

Now, and this is one of my big buckaboos, and sorry if I'm going off on this, specialization is really the enemy of genius. All the geniuses I looked at were, in some ways, they were interdisciplinary. I mean, yes, Einstein was a physicist, but he also played the violin, played it very well, and would, when he was stuck with his science and physics equation or whatever it was, he would go and play his violin. and then the ideas would come to him. Every genius I write about and every genius I know of is a person in full. They have other interests and they're not just diversions. Einstein's violin playing was, well, it was a diversion in the sense that allowed him to think in new ways. It got him out of the rut.

Eric Weiner [00:29:34 - 00:30:00]

It wasn't just a hobby and he was passionate about it. And all geniuses are interdisciplinary in that way and that they have other interests and That, whether it's playing the violin or Sigmund Freud's interest in ancient archaeology, gives them new lenses to look at their own chosen field. They still have their field, but they've got these other glasses they can put on and see things differently.

Tony Martignetti [00:30:01 - 00:31:13]

Ozan Baro reminds us that the boxes we inhabit aren't always uncomfortable. Sometimes they come with titles, security, respect, and success. But eventually, even a safety net can become a straitjacket if it prevents us from exploring what lies beyond it. Eric Weiner reminds us of something equally important: sometimes freedom begins by becoming willing to say, I don't know, because curiosity opens doors that certainty keeps closed. Both of their stories challenge us to look at the labels we've accumulated throughout our lives— the profession, the expertise, the accomplishments, the expectations— and ask, are these things helping me understand who I am, or have I started allowing them to determine who I'm allowed to become? There's nothing wrong with having an identity. There's nothing wrong with expertise. There's nothing wrong with success, but we should be careful whenever any of them begin drawing boundaries around our curiosity. Because maybe the goal isn't to find the perfect box.

Tony Martignetti [00:31:14 - 00:32:15]

Maybe it's to remain curious enough that we never need one. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Ozan Varol and Eric Weiner for sharing their stories, their wisdom, and their willingness to explore the paths that brought them to where they are today. And to all you listening, thank you for joining us around the virtual campfire. It's been a privilege to have you with us. If you'd like to learn more about today's guests, connect with their work, or explore their books and resources, you'll find links for each of them in the show notes. As you reflect on today's conversation, I'd like to leave you with one question: what identity in your life might be becoming too small for the person you're becoming? Before you go, make sure to subscribe to the Virtual Campfire Podcast. If this episode encouraged you, I'd love to hear from you. Please leave a review, share it with someone who could benefit from today's conversation, and continue the journey with us.

Tony Martignetti [00:32:16 - 00:32:44]

If you'd like to learn more or take the next step in your own leadership journey, visit [TonyMSpeaks.com](https://tonymspeaks.com). This special series inspired by the themes of Campfire Lessons for Leaders is proudly produced by It All Works. Until next time, keep leading, keep growing, and keep becoming more than any label could ever contain. You are allowed to become someone your current title cannot explain.