

[00:00:00] Bonni Stachowiak: Today on episode number 352 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, David Franklin joins me to talk about his new book, *Invisible Learning*.

[00:00:13] Production Credit: Produced by Innovate Learning, maximizing human potential.

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[00:00:22] Bonni: Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives, and be even more present for our students. Today's guest David Franklin is a British writer who's fascinated by how we learn and about statistics.

After taking Dan Levy's famous statistics class in the fall of 2018, he returned as part of the teaching team the following year and took notes on everything Dan did. Those notes became his new book, *Invisible Learning*. He has two master's degrees, one in mathematics from the University of Cambridge, the other in development economics from the Harvard Kennedy School. He also has eight years of experience in the private sector as a country risk manager and as a keen data scientist.

In his spare time, David is an avid reader, radio cricket commentator, and long-suffering fan of Newcastle United. He lives in London with his partner Catri. David, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

[00:01:44] David Franklin: Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

[00:01:47] Bonni: I want to begin with your grandparents. Would you tell me about Gan and Boompa, and a little bit about how they taught you to learn?

[00:01:54] David: Sure, of course. My grandparents were hugely influential on me both at an early stage in my life and later on. I think grandparents instill certain values in their children and then their children's children. There is no particular right or wrong in the values that they choose to instill but wisdom was very high up on their list. Wisdom, honesty, humility, those kinds of things more so than other values like bravery or courage. Wisdom was always very high up. I would spend hours debating with the pair of them, whether it'd be politics, or maths, or statistics.

My grandfather used to teach thermodynamics at the university. He passed away last year. The first time you have a grandparent pass away like that, it's a shock. You don't realize that when it's your own grandparents, how hard it's going to hit you. I think I started to think a lot about how can I be more like him? What is it about him that made him special? Their sense of real humility towards everyone. He always made you feel like you were the most important person in the conversation or the room. I think that sense of humility, was relevant to how he approached knowledge as well.

You never got the sense from him, but he felt like he knew everything, even though sometimes to you, it felt like he did. I think approaching the search for knowledge and the search for wisdom with his humility is something that I always try to do.

[00:03:36] Bonni: That reminds me so much of the research that Dunning Kruger did the Dunning Kruger effect, where the more we know about something, the less we realize that. I'm just being immersed these days in the news and also in books that I'm reading just the importance of that humility, but along with the wisdom, those

two things interplay. I love that, well. I want us to visit an entirely different context. Now, we're going a little bit away from family, and we are entering a classroom.

Instead of entering a classroom, when it began, we're entering a classroom, as it is ending as a class is ending. There are students there crying, which sometimes you might have the tears of the stress of the end of the semester finally been released but these are not these kinds of tears. Would you talk a little bit about some of the emotions and tell me what class it is I'm referring to? [laughs]

[00:04:30] David: Sure. I just found this completely mind-blowing. This context is Dan Levy's classroom. He's a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School. When students see that they have to take his class, it's called advanced quantitative methods or statistics. This is the class that everyone wants to avoid. You don't go to a place like Harvard Kennedy School, which is a place for leaders and government, students, et cetera to learn about policy. You don't go to that kind of place to learn about statistics really. My comment to it with all of these perceptions about what statistics is as a subject.

They leave in tears, as you said. I just found it completely crazy that by the end of class, you see people having this huge emotional reaction to the loss of that class, this environment that he's managed to build up over the course of a semester. Students feel so attached to it, that they have this response to its loss. I wanted to know why that was. It's fascinating to see people react in that way to what is traditionally a dry subject. Having observed that and having thought, "Well, I'm going to go back to his class next year as a teaching assistant, write down everything he does, see if I can understand what it is."

The next logical question is, "Okay, he gets all these students to cry, and they're all emotional, and all of this, but does that actually help when it comes to teaching?" What I try to argue in the book is that it does, but I think it's quite a fun launch point for the book. Why do these students react in this crazy way?

[00:06:16] Bonni: There's an author, Sarah Rose Canavagh who wrote a book, *The Spark of Learning* and the whole entire book is just about the role that emotions

play in our learning. He certainly doesn't only employ an emotion of loss and grief over the class being over but humor is used extensively in his teaching, and curiosity, another emotion gets used throughout. I'm excited to explore this class a little bit more with you. Let's begin with the overarching themes.

I want to quote here, Ken Bain, who wrote a book *What the Best College Teachers Do* and he's famous for having done a longitudinal study about just the greatest college teachers. What is it that they all have in common because they all are very different as well? He said, "Good teaching is about having students answer questions or solving problems that they find intriguing, interesting, or beautiful." I almost felt like there was just this thread of Ken Bain really setting that out there for us as educators throughout the book. Would you talk first about what is an airport idea?

[00:07:30] David: Sure. An airport idea is something that Dan really wants you to take away from his class. That's not a new concept. Most professors, most teachers, I think, wrap up lectures with some bullet points on what they hope will be the key takeaways from the class. Dan is trying to maximize the student's focus at that moment when he brings in an airport idea and he's trying to just make sure that you remember it. What he says to the students is, the ... idea is one that I want you to remember in five years' time when I bumped into you and an airport.

He's less interested in whether they can recite every formula that goes through the class. He wants to make sure that when they have forgotten everything else, they remember these key ideas. This idea of an airport as well, there's something high level about it and there's something aspirational about it, too. These are international students who are going to be going back to their home countries once they finish Harvard, and applying some of the lessons that Dan has taught them. I think it's quite a clever way of getting them to pay attention and memorize those key concepts, because it really puts the focus on them and their future lives down the line.

[00:08:45] Bonni: This is something that so many struggle with. You mentioned yes, so many of us have that list of bullets. I can always tell that there's going to be trouble,

troubles, comments. Whenever a conversation talks about, "We have to cover this. We have to cover the material." Whenever that phrase gets used, it is generally indicative of really a challenge of not having really wrestled through that airport conversation five years after a class is over. You quote him as saying, that yes, he wants them to be able to explain the ideas to him. I don't want it to trail off the last thing he says is, "Even if you've forgotten everything else."

Are there any concepts that come to mind that you can recall him wrestling with that most statistics classes at that level at an institution like that would try to jam in there that he-- Can you think of the wrestling around a topic that he decides not to cover or not to cover in the same way that someone else teaching a similar class might?

[00:09:55] David: Yes. I think it comes down to the background for the class. I think too often statistics is seen as a offshoot of mathematics. That's how it's often taught. You start with these mathematical ideas, you prove these theorems of things and then you work out what you can infer and what you can't about some data that you have. Dan's idea is that it may be mathematical in some sense, but that's not what's interesting or relevant or best for students to learn. Yes. Statistics for him is about teaching students to evaluate truth in the world, which at the moment is more important than ever.

When he puts those airport ideas forward, he's not saying, "Look, this is one mathematical theorem, but you've really got to learn." It's all about the takeaways. What fascinated me about the class was that it is as much about student's relationship with statistics as it is about statistics or math itself. One practical thing that he does, to take an example, there's a lot of behavioral science right at the start. It's about here, how do we react to numbers? How do our biases affect the way that we think?

Because you could be the best mathematician in the world and if your biases lead you astray when you're trying to use your conclusions and present to policymakers or people that can actually do something with the thing that you found, it'll be less helpful to them. I think Dan is interested in all of those things, in leading students to a

point where they can communicate ideas succinctly and correctly. That is less about the math and it's more about those kind of psychological aspects of their relationship with statistics.

[00:11:43] Bonni: He has done a lot of wrestling, and in my mind still continues to do a lot of wrestling around these airport ideas. Would you talk for a few minutes about the practicality? How does he make it known? You already said he tells them. I am going to be sure he tells them what airport ideas are and he doesn't just tell them once. That happens throughout the class, but what are the other ways in which he might transition into a new airport idea or away from one? What are those transitions and some of the techniques that he uses?

[00:12:18] David: I think, practically Dan has three screens at the front and this is in a real classroom, not a virtual one, but he will do similar things in a virtual way in terms of how he's focusing attention. What you'll find is that the left and the right screen will both be showing an evocative picture. One airport idea is this concept of cherry-picking, the idea that you can pretty much get statistics to tell you whatever you like if you pick the right ones. He will have a picture of a little girl picking bright red cherries on either side and it sounds something quite small, but then when you ask the students, "What do you most remember about dance class?"

Virtually everyone says, "Cherry-picking," because that picture of the little girl picking cherries is so evocative for such a long time. I think you have those kind of practical things that he does. I also think it comes back to something we talked about already, humility. This idea that Dan is accepting that no matter how great a teacher is, the students aren't really paying attention the whole time. He doesn't have enough-- We talk about attention as a currency, he doesn't have enough currency to keep their attention for 75 minutes twice a week.

He knows that if there's something that he really wants them to focus on, he's got to make that clear to them. He's got to pause, he's got to finish the section he was on, he's got to make sure he's got their attention, use all the practical aspects of the framing and the screens and things that he can, tell them that this is important, this is an airport idea, motivate the idea and only then does he come out with it. I think

if he hadn't done all of those things, it would be less obvious for the students that, "Yes, we really got to pay attention now."

[00:14:10] Bonni: Yes. I loved that example of the cherry-picking picture and could so vividly see it in my own mind. There's so much there, there's evidence around cognitive load and how when you have so many bullets up there I'm supposed to read, at the same time, I'm supposed to hear what you're saying. My brain cannot read and cannot listen in equal measure at the same time and all that that can produce versus now you've really given me something that I both can see. Then you're also sharing this vivid imagery and powerful notions of this.

You interviewed prior students and this was-- I got the impression they remembered all of the airport ideas. This idea of the cherry-picking picture really came up for a lot of them and really did get bought into their own sense of what they're taking away from the class.

[00:15:01] David: It does. If the students haven't remembered all the airport ideas, Dan then towards the end of the class says, "Which are the airport ideas that are most memorable?" The ones that they don't pick, he then says, "Right. I see you didn't talk about X, Y, Z. We're just going to go over that again," just to give himself a final shot at instilling it in the memory.

[00:15:20] Bonni: Yes. I do want to also just highlight what you said about humility and attention. So much of it, we can, unfortunately, get inside of ourselves, inside of our ego, and when people aren't paying attention, somehow that's about them and there we can-- [chuckles] Hopefully, we all have this. Early in my teaching, I did feel a sense of pride and insult that how could you do this to me? Now I just laugh at my younger self going, "That's actually not the way that attention works and not really the kind of humility that's really necessary in teaching."

He does strike me as so humble of just that continuous improvement. Another story that stands out so much in my mind is a student asking him a question, him using humor and looking at his watch, or maybe I'm planting that seed in my own mind and saying, "We'll get to that in 31 minutes," and he's not kidding. He actually has a

very rigorous sense of time in his class beyond really anything that I'm-- I was talking with my husband about this because I certainly do time out keynotes like that when I give talks.

I feel like you really have to have your timing down for that kind of public speaking and I do like to engage my audience. It just felt differently to me the way that he uses timing because he's-- There's some parallels, but there really is a difference. He is so disciplined about time.

[00:16:51] David: He is. I guess, yes, he's certainly showboating a little bit, when he says, "This will happen in 31 minutes time or 17 minutes time." He knows that the students will react to that in a particular way and he knows that part of this is a contract. His students realize that he's been so disciplined and so thoughtful about how he measures the time of class, then they're going to put their own effort in in a different way. I think it's important that he mentioned that kind of discipline.

There is a need for flexibility too and that we talk a little bit in the book about how he will be trying to gauge throughout the extent to which students are getting or not getting material and that they're mastering the material or not. If he feels like they're doing better than he's expected, he will go through that more quickly, and conversely, if he feels like they're not getting a particular thing, that will change his timings as well. He does both. He showboats a little bit, he makes it public, the fact that he has these very disciplined and rigorous lesson plans. He will then, by the way, he has cost assistance measuring exactly how long he took on each section.

If he went over or under, he will be asking himself, "Why did I do that? Do I need to budget more time for that bit next time or?" It's a very iterative process, but I think more on a broader note, it speaks to his discipline, his devotion in making the classes as well thought out as they can be.

[00:18:26] Bonni: You use the phrase 'if he feels like', but I'd love for you to expand on that because he's not using his feelings. He's using evidence. Talk about the evidence that he gathers all along the way to gauge student learning and attention.

[00:18:41] David: You're absolutely right to pick me up on that because this is entirely the wrong phrase. He doesn't do anything by feel when it comes to this but when you ask him about-

[00:18:49] Bonni: I just met you and already I'm correcting you. This is terrible. I'm so rude. [laughs]

[00:18:53] David: No, when you ask him about this stuff, he says immediately, "Now, I do not trust myself to feel how well students are learning a subject." He's got bad experiences in past lectures when he thought, "Guy, they're really understanding this." He did it all just to check and 17% of the class got the question right. He thought, "Guy, from this moment on, I'm not going to trust my intuition at all when it comes to mastery of a subject." Instead, he uses tools like PollEverywhere, which is polling software.

He will ask a lot of questions throughout the class to understand where the class is at. He will often, and you see this quite a lot, he will ask a question if he finds that the class isn't perhaps getting to where he'd want them to be. He will get the class to talk to each other in groups of two or three and try to find someone with a different answer to them and try to persuade each other of what they think the right answer is. It has this really brilliant impact of solving lots of pedagogic problems at once.

These strongest students so then the position of teaching to other students, which is always a very good way of reinforcing your own understanding of the subject. You have that differentiation automatically in that. You're also creating tension around the material. That's one of Dan's aims in the class, is to not just be saying the material asking your question and having students come back to it, but creating real heat in the room real tension, where students are maybe partly getting to the answer, but only partially and requiring other students to help them get the rest of the way because it's in that process that the learning happens.

You don't learn something from being told it, usually. You learn through having to engage with that material and this iterative process that he's trying to spark when he uses those kinds of polling software or other ways of gauging the room.

[00:21:13] Bonni: Your book is called *Invisible Learning*. Before we get to *Invisible Learning*, would you start with visible learning? What would it look like if learning were visible?

[00:21:25] David: We talk in the book about if learning were visible, you would see, for example, a big number flash above a student's head as soon as they learned the concept. Let's say that that number was the future value of the concept that you'd learned. You become a successful engineer in later life. You learn Pythagoras theorem for the first time when you were 11 and this big \$10,000 comes up in green with a ka-ching noise above your head. Now, if that were the world that we were living in, teachers would be earning more than anyone in the world.

It would make complete sense to pay insane amounts of money to the best teachers because you would be going to their classroom and making these instant profits from the learning that you were doing. In a way, it's a sobering thought to realize that the only difference between that world and this one is that you don't see the number. That learning is still happening. That value is still being created but the teaching process is far removed from the value. What fascinated me in the study of Dan's class and trying to think about what he does, was this unexpected venture into the field of leadership.

In leadership or at least the way that it's taught at the Kennedy School, they talk about any task that you might want to accomplish as one of two things. It's either an adaptive challenge or is a technical challenge. Technical challenges are things like say building a rocket. It may be really difficult, but at every stage of the building process, if you're an engineer at NASA, you know that it's happened. You knew exactly when it was going to happen, and you can just tick it off in the logbook and everything about that process will be visible. The contrast with that is an adaptive challenge, where progress is invisible and the mind goes to something like a difficult breakup.

It's something that a lot of people have had to get through at some point in their lives. You're not going to know once you're there. It's probably going to go in waves. You have good days and bad days and then once you think that you're over it, everything might change again. Progress is largely invisible for adaptive challenges like that. One of the central ideas of the book is that learning is an adaptive challenge. Progress is invisible and so we can apply a lot of the leadership ideas to how to facilitate learning.

[00:24:07] Bonni: We treat it so much like a technical challenge in so many of our educational contexts when-- This makes much sense. It really does.

[00:24:17] David: Part of the reason for that is that you have to examine it somehow. At the end of the day, it's all very well us saying that this is about understanding and adaptive challenges and invisible progress and all of that. At some point, at the end of it, the students are going to get a mark. Whether it is out of 100 or a letter grade or whatever. It's very difficult to reconcile those two activities because, on the surface, it looks like an exam should be able to measure learning. I think you go a little bit deeper than that, and they're almost polar opposites in the things that they can be measuring.

[00:24:55] Bonni: My husband has a podcast called Coaching for Leaders and every one of his episodes starts the same way with him saying "Leaders aren't born, they're made." I'd love to hear you talk a little bit about your thoughts after going through this process of really examining an exemplar teacher of the extent to which great teachers started out that way and had some real strengths to build upon, or that-- Again, I'm not trying to give you a binary choice for something that is definitely I know, not binary. Just thoughts about the natural things that great teachers may have, versus the discipline, the rigor that they might use to continually get better.

[00:25:40] David: Yes. I think that that growth mindset is hugely important. Dan, the first time he taught this class, in his own words, it was a disaster. Now, I'm convinced that it's not quite as bad as he makes it out to be but in his mind, this was just the first step in an iterative process. That humility, it's a word we keep coming back to, was

hugely important in him not having the stubbornness to say, "Well, I know this stuff back to front. This is how I'm going to teach it," but to keep gathering data. Dan gathers more data than anyone I've ever seen in my life, not just in class, but from the course assistance afterwards.

Every single problem set mark every question, every point of feedback that he gets from the students, he goes back, and his reflections, his self-evaluations on classes, just last year run to I think, 32,000 words, and 94 pages. When people talk about Dan, and they do at Kennedy School, sometimes as this magic, teacher, we can't all be like Dan. There's something crazy about it. They're avoiding the work a little bit. This is a guy that's more devoted than anyone you could imagine. I think the other thing about that, quote, this idea that leaders aren't born, they're made.

There's a underlying premise there that one can be a leader, that leadership is something that is inherent to a person, and not something that you exercise. One of the interesting things about the study of leadership is that by some views about leadership is an activity. It's not inherent in one person and just not there in another. It's something that we exercise. He looked at that way. It's not about who you are, what character you have. People associate charisma with leadership, which can be very dangerous.

Charisma can be very helpful in building bonds between you and the people that you're trying to lead but it can also create these mutual dependencies and cause you to veer off course from the subject matter. I think this idea of leadership is an activity, the humility to accept that you're not going to get it right every time, that you're going to have to gather data, be very iterative about it are all things that Dan is very intentional about. Whenever you talk about this stuff with him, you can feel it. There's a real passion for self-improvement which I think is quite an impressive thing about Dan.

[00:28:27] Bonni: I'd love to hear a little bit more about how he gathers data. If we can just pile on top of that because that's an easy quote-- Okay, I am kidding. What's going on in my mind right now is I want to hear more about how he goes about. I know he does what might be described as journaling. I'd also like to hear

about, I think what you're not saying is that his revisions to his course always lead toward smoothing out a perfectly level path. In my own teaching, I've made the error sometime of thinking that when they stumble, when they have challenges when they get things wrong, that I did something wrong, so I should "fix that."

Those challenges in the learning process are actually the most important part. As we're reflecting back on our teaching to be effective, the goal isn't to reduce all that friction. You've talked about it as heat or, challenging students. That's not the goal. Talk a little bit about his journaling versus what his teaching philosophy would tell him you should be aiming for.

[00:29:35] David: There's a great bit in the class where he gets to. I think it's classified that he's trying to teach them about some concept like sampling distributions or something which he knows is difficult. He really struggles to teach it. This is a great teacher admitting that this is something that he never gets right. No matter how many times he goes over it every year. Part of the way that he gets the students on board with this difficult topic is, in class, he goes through his evaluations that he's made every year and they're all terrible. He's going through saying "2012, this class went awfully. 2013, I thought this class was going better this year but it turned out, it was rubbish."

He brings students into his way of thinking. I think that's the first thing here. The students are part of that teaching process. I think the other thing is that he is not just journaling, and self-reflecting. He's seeking feedback on a constant basis from not just students, but also guests in his classroom, and his teaching assistants. Those are the sorts of meetings that that as a teaching assistant you would have with that are full of, in the best possible way, conflict and debate. He encourages an atmosphere in which he can be questioned, and his ideas can be questioned.

I think the result is a class that is never ever going to be perfect. It's not what he seeks to strive for but he makes do with the class that improves every year. If it doesn't do that, then he'll make sure that he's able to tweak it for the year after. Again, that humility to understand that it is an iterative process, and you will go up and down, I think is something that sets us apart.

[00:31:35] Bonni: Before David and I share our recommendations and the recommendations segment, I wanted to just take a moment to thank today's sponsor, and that is TextExpander. If you've been listening for a while you already know that TextExpander is the longest-running sponsor and it is also one of the first things I ever install on a new computer or device. What TextExpander lets us do is save time. We get to save time by coming up with what they call snippets. A few characters that we set up and it's super easy to set a new one up.

Then as soon as we press the spacebar, it automatically extends into whatever it is we've decided that that means. I've got it set up to be able to have different signatures for the different roles that I play in my life. I've got it set up to have my work phone number than ever remember. I have it set up to do show notes. When I have a new set of show notes for the episode, it'll ask me what's the episode number? Who's the guest? What is the recommendation I want to make on that particular episode, just like I'll be doing in a moment?

I recently set up some TextExpander snippets related to my revised weekly update from Teaching in Higher Ed. As I mentioned, it's super easy to set them up. Everything is simple as a phone number or an email address, all the way up to what are fillable snippets where again, it asks questions, and then it'll respond or it'll grab today's date if you need that information included. It really is a flexible tool, easy to get started with, and easy to continue learning more about.

In fact, they have a whole database a whole set of other people's snippets that they have created, and are willing to share with us to continue to improve our TextExpander usage. Thanks so much, TextExpander for sponsoring today's episode. If you'd like to learn more, and subscribe and get a trial, go to textexpander.com/podcast and please let them know that you heard about TextExpander from Teaching in Higher Ed. Again, that was textexpander.com/podcast, and thanks once again for sponsoring today's episode.

This is the time in the show where we each get to share our recommendations. For my first recommendation, I would like to recommend this book *Invisible Learning*.

From start to finish, it resonated with me 100%. There was nothing more I thought, "Oh, I couldn't use this in my teaching." I don't teach statistics. I don't teach at Harvard. I teach an entirely different context and I just found so many beneficial things to draw from. I think you're a very humble writer. Yourself you're a humble researcher, an observer of what you learned. It's a delightful read so I'd like to start just by recommending your book.

Then the second thing is that speaking of wanting students to really have a deeper sense of learning. One of the things that we didn't talk about in the main interview is that he asks students to communicate things if they were talking to a policymaker and trying to put their communication outside of writing an essay question on a test and into a more realistic context. What are the things I got such joy out of doing? I'm teaching a business ethics class and early on in the semester, we learn about some different philosophers and some different ethical thinkers.

One of the things that comes up in the class is called the trolley problem and some of you have heard about The trolley problem or variations of it.

It's like a trains going down the track and you can just let it go and it'll kill X number of people or you could actually put your own self into it and move a lever and all of a sudden, fewer people die but you had to do something to have fewer people die. I don't enjoy these by the way. [laughs] They're not things I enjoy. To get us into business ethics, we have to start there on the trolley before we can get off of the trolley and more to applied business ethics.

I've started to ask my students for some very small stakes assignments to submit memes or video clips that they have found. Oh, what a joy that is because not only did they get to learn it a little bit deeper, and we talked about the connection between emotions and learning earlier in our conversation. They're able to laugh, and then they can make me laugh and we have all these conversations. I'm going to suggest just in general, that you ask your students for some memes or video clips around the topics that you are teaching, and be prepared for absolute delight.

[laughs] I'm going to share in the show notes a couple of videos. There's actually one that the student shared, and then one that played after the video they shared. There are around the trolley problem and the trolley problem from a two-year-olds perspective and how their dad sets up this little toy train track and how the two-year-old resolves it and then how his younger sister resolves the trolley problem. I don't want to give the endings away and I don't do videos via audio as well, because they're very much things that would be fun for you to watch.

I'm going to suggest that you go to the show notes, and check out trolley problem number one and then trolley problem as approached by the sibling. They're absolute delight. David, I'll pass it over to you for your recommendations.

[00:36:49] David: Well, that sounds wonderful. I guess I'd say first of all, that that devotion to bringing new things into the classroom is it shows the value of not treating it as a search for perfection because how could you possibly search for perfection when the outside context is changing so much around you? That desire to bring things like memes, which are new inventions over the last few years into the classroom to stimulate learning, I think it's fantastic.

I'm going to a slightly different tack from my recommendation. It's a book called, *Thanks for the Feedback*. It's by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen from the Harvard negotiation project. The subtitle is science and art of receiving feedback well, even when it's off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and frankly, you're not in the mood. I think it really chime with me this book because I feel like I've been on my own journey with feedback. I think like a lot of people who, especially people who did well in school, and they're used to getting good evaluations on things, you come into the professional world and you get your first pieces of bad feedback, you immediately feel really defensive.

You say, "What do you mean, I haven't done enough work. I've been working so hard. It's not about me, this is about you, and all the things that you could have done to make this whole process better." I think what most people, including me, have to do in reaction to that is to develop a way of still feeling those things but to say the right things in response. To say, "Oh God, that's really useful feedback.

Thanks so much for that. I'll definitely work on that," whereas inside your thinking, "... talking about. How can they think these things when I've done X, Y, Z?"

This book was really helpful to me in helping me not just to say those things, but to think in a positive way, too. I think, for those of us that have trouble with fixed mindsets instead of growth mindsets, a part of that is because we've gone through life seeing everything as an evaluation. They distinguish in the book between different types of feedback. Is this appreciation? Is it coaching? Is it evaluation of what are you looking for in advance? Often, we see an evaluation in feedback that was intended as coaching.

What we often do is a defensive mechanism in response to that is to deauthorize the person giving it. We say, "How can you give me this feedback when you're equally bad at X, Y, Z?" I just found the way that the book laid out some of these ideas is super helpful in saying, "When you're receiving feedback, keep the conversation about you. Don't push it to anyone else or any other ideas. If you need to talk about those things, you can talk about those things later." It was something that I didn't realize that I needed and that I genuinely felt that had a big impact on me.

[00:39:52] Bonni: I really need to pick that one up. In fact, I know we already own that one because my husband interviewed them for his podcast.

[00:40:00] David: No kidding. [laughs]

[00:40:00] Bonni: Yes. I really know I need to read it because part of what I took away from their conversation is just that the more you do it, the more helpful it can be, and then also, the more used to it you get where you can desensitize yourself to it feeling every time it's evaluative and- [crosstalk]

[00:40:19] David: Absolutely. Yes, you can keep track of yourself, you can opt to any. By the way, feedback is much more common than we think of it. It's not just that formal session where you're at work and someone sat down with you across the table. It's everything that anyone ever says to you almost in your personal life or your professional life is some form of feedback on something. Yes, I found the way

that they broke all of those things down and gave you a framework to think about it. Just so, so helpful.

[00:40:49] Bonni: Yes, I've been thinking so much. I think this comes from the work of Brené Brown, but just not only about yes, let's seek out feedback is so important, but let's really be strategic about who it is we're seeking it out from. The more that you're in a public space, where you're writing books, or you're doing podcasts or that kind of stuff you do, occasionally, you're going to run across some pretty darn harsh feedback, but then you have to ask yourself but-- I'm better at doing it now and I don't actually get a lot of negative feedback about the podcast, but there was recently iTunes or Apple podcast review that was really, really harsher than it was. It's-

[00:41:26] David: [laughs]

[00:41:28] Bonni: -clear from what this person wrote, they've never actually listened. They just have strong feelings about that formal education isn't valuable, and that what you really should do is one of those like MBA kind of things. [laughs] I was like-

[00:41:40] David: [laughs]

[00:41:41] Bonni: -"Yes, I don't think he's talking to you and I don't think he's giving you good, helpful feedback to make your show better." Yes, thinking about strategically, where can you source out feedback from people whose perspectives would be valuable to you. That's something I've been thinking about as well.

[00:41:57] David: To come full circle, it's exactly what Dan does is selecting his course assistants. He won't pick the people that were necessarily best at statistics. He picks people for their honesty and ability to give him the bad news when something didn't go right.

[00:42:11] Bonni: Yes. I love that we came full circle. I am so glad to have met you, and been connected with you, and absolutely love your book. I don't even know if it's fair to ask you this, I think you're a brilliant writer. Is there's something that's next on the horizon for you, or is it too soon to be thinking about that?

[00:42:27] David: [laughs] It's too soon for that. I would love to write another book at some point, I really enjoyed the experience. It's a tough thing to do. It's a crazy thing to do as well when you do, as you will have found for the first time. The idea of writing a book when you haven't done it before is almost insane. You get to the end of it and you get that sense of pride. I really loved doing it. I loved talking to Dan, talking to the students, going on that adventure to find out what it was that makes his class so special. I would love to do something in the future, but as to what it is, I don't know yet.

[00:43:03] Bonni: It's still open. Well, I just love today's conversation. Thank you for contributing to the community, and I can't wait for more people to get their hands on your book.

[00:43:11] David: Thank you so much. It was really lovely to talk to you.

[background music]

[00:43:17] Bonni: Thanks once again to David Franklin for joining me for today's episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed* 352 on Invisible Learning. I hope you all have a chance to pick up his book. I think there are so many tremendous insights for us as educators and if any of you listening have yet to subscribe to my weekly updates, I recently redid them at the start of the year and encourage you to head over to teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. Thanks once again for listening and I'll see you next time on *Teaching in Higher Ed*.

[music]

[00:44:17] [END OF AUDIO]

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