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Blindsided: Leading your small business through unforeseen adversity

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Andy Choi

Hi, I'm Andy Choi with Verizon. I want to welcome you to our Small Business Webinar Series. These are webinars focused on what's happening right now. We have experts weighing in on how you can be ready for whatever comes next.

Joining us today we have a very special guest joining Ramon Ray, who's our host. Ramon, as you know, is the Founder of Smart Hustle Media, and he brings years of small business experience with him. Joining Mr. Ray, our guest is Dr. Fergus Connolly. Now, Dr. Connolly has kind of an unusual job. He is a human performance expert. He's worked with pro sports figures, corporate executives, even Special Forces, so people who are experts in facing the unknown. Today we're going to see how these insights can work for small businesses even in these challenging times.

So, without further ado, I'm going to hand it over to Ramon Ray and Dr. Fergus Connolly.

Ramon Ray

Andy, thank you so much. I'm excited to be here again for another amazing Verizon Small Business Webinar Series. I know this is going to be good, maybe the best one ever. We shall see. We're here with Dr. Fergus Connolly, who really is all about mindset leadership, works with high performing teams and more, and I'm excited to learn from you, Fergus. Thanks for joining me, and I hope you're feeling well today.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Oh, thank you for having me. I'm excited.

Ramon Ray

Good, good. Good. Welcome. So, listen, I mean, I'm doing this webinar. We've had a lot of experts on here, but you deal with sports people that we may see on TV and otherwise high performing warriors in our U.S. military. What in the world does that have to do with Betty down the block in Austin somewhere, or a baker somewhere or my little small business? What's the connection here, Fergus?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Well, you'd be surprised, Ramon, but I use all of those small businesses as examples with elite athletes because I tell them they need to think of themselves as a small business. I often use the line from Jay Z. I'm not a businessman. I'm a business, man. For them to think of themselves as a business that they need to invest in and look after themselves.
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Ramon Ray

Well, so that means we should like hold our head high, and while we look up to these warriors and experts in their field, they may be looking up to us, thanks to you.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Oh, absolutely, because some sports don’t have guaranteed contracts. The athletes themselves really have to look after themselves. They’re faced with lots of unforeseen events and circumstances as well, so they have to look after themselves. They’re used to dealing with this kind of crisis, so they learn from small business as well.

Ramon Ray

Yes, that’s powerful. Listen, a few key pillars we’re going to dive into today, so everybody get your notepads, your pens out to write notes, and I encourage you, use the power of Twitter, tag Verizon Business. Tell everybody that you’re watching us today, that you’re learning tag me, @RamonRay, definitely tag Dr. Fergus Connolly, so let’s jump into it, and remember, ask your questions in the tab, questions for Dr. Fergus, that you want help in your business. We’re here to help and serve you.

I know one thing, Fergus, that’s important to you is the aspect of control. Some people when they hear that word control, I think I can feel people already getting a bit tizzy, but why is control one of the core fundamentals to talk about as we’re learning from you what you’ve learned from some of the most elite people in the world?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Well, it’s paradox, really. We’re not in control of events. We’re not in control of things that happen outside of us, but we are in control of how we respond to them, and that’s the most powerful thing. You never give that away, so how you actually respond to these things and how you control yourself, that’s the critical thing, and that’s what separates some people from others. Some people they get focused on the negatives or the things that they can’t control, and they forget about the things they can control, how they respond, how they react to the events that happened to them, and that’s the most powerful thing and one of the things I constantly remind performers is you are in control of how you respond. One of the things that we… when we see all of these successful people, sometimes we think they’re amazing. No, they’re just in control of themselves, and that’s what we have. We have that amazing control over ourselves, how we respond to events.

Ramon Ray

But let me push you back on that, Fergus, a bit. Let’s get real. I own a local hardware store, and forget the incidents happening today, that’s a given, but I own a local hardware store, Fergus, I get in there and the whole basement is flooded, man. It’s flooded, and my employees came in late. I have a big order that’s supposed to go out today. What are you saying we’re supposed to do? I mean, I have no control. Everything’s… that’s it, so what do you say?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Exactly. It’s the very same thing as a quarterback throwing a pass that gets intercepted. You can control how you respond. Some people, what they do is they get annoyed, they get annoyed with the opposition. They get annoyed with the umpire rather than going OK, I’m in control of how I respond and how I deal with this, and that’s the real power. Not getting distracted by all of these other things that we’re not in control of. We’re in control of how we deal with it, and the most powerful thing about this is you’re not
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losing time worrying, complaining, moaning about something that you can't affect. You've got this really powerful, powerful source of power that you have, what you control, what you can actually do now, and it saves so much time, so much energy.

The other really important thing as well, for small businesses, there are other people looking at you, so how you respond to that is going to impact them, and they're going to see you and that's what leadership is.

Ramon Ray

Yes, that is powerful, and I want to... I know you have a few... I'm looking here, you have four or five key points, part of control, let's just take a few minutes because I do want to dive into this as much as we can, as people are asking questions, putting their questions in for their business. You have assess, decide, be direct, confident, [don't stand still]. Can you do 10 seconds on those maybe and let's break that down. Assess, what does that mean? Why it's so important, Fergus?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Look at actually what's happening, figure out what you can control, adapt to the scenario and act on it, because one of the most important things that happens is, with people, sometimes they'll get either distracted by the negative, which can fire a lot of control, or they freeze, and they don't know what to do. It's assess what's happening, act on it and start to move, start to do something rather than sitting back, because if we allow that vacuum to exist, then lots of negative thoughts come in, and that can be so detrimental because now we're fitting our thought process that come about on what I can't control, what happened, on what other people are thinking. No, look at it, figure out what's happening, let's go, let's start moving and let's start moving forward. Never, never stand still or certainly never take a step back.

Ramon Ray

Wow, that's powerful, and then there's aspects of decide and be direct. Was that part of that advice you just gave, or is that anything separate you wanted to add?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Yes, decide, be direct, let's go. Let's start moving, start moving forward, because one of the things as well, people think, oh, I've got to have the best plan, but in chaotic situations and chaos, you've got to do it the best that you... the best information you have, start acting, because that plan executed now is better than waiting to try and get the best. Things change so quickly, so you can't afford to sit back. You have to act and move forward.

Ramon Ray

Yes, powerful. One more thing I want to ask and then I'll move to the second major pillar here. This is such good nuggets already, Fergus. Listen, can you talk a bit to the perfectionists out there? I'm sure you've come across them. You deal with high performing teams. I deal with small business owners. They're building their website, Fergus, it's not quite ready yet, and they've been saying that for the past six months. It's not launched. Any advice? Because I do want to have compassion. I get it. You want your stuff to look right, your business card to look right. You want to hire the perfect employee, but you haven't moved yet, so any advice to them just... because I'm sure we don't want to be sloppy as well. Any advice on that navigation?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD
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That is such an important point, because that's something that I struggled with early on. I was always trying to get it tweaked perfect, and my standards haven't dropped, you don't drop your standards, you keep moving forward, but you don't wait for perfection because life will overtake you. You've got to move forward, and it's better to execute that plan now, and keep refining it and getting better, because one of the really important things about life, about chaos, about sport is that you can keep refining it, because it's going to adjust ever so slightly every time, so do it as well as possible and keep getting it better bit by bit.

Ramon Ray

Yes, that's powerful. Let's move to the second pillar, I think, of this great advice, and I hope everybody goes and researches all the stuff you've done, TED Talks and so much more. OK, the other key element of these things we're talking about with Dr. Fergus Connolly is the ability to always have adaptability, to be able to adapt. Why is that so important? And more importantly, maybe, what does it mean and how do we do that? Help us understand that?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

one of the most mistaken quotes is Charles Darwin's the strongest will survive. Charles Darwin didn't say that. He said, "Those who can adapt to change quickest will survive." That's the key. People get that quote... they misuse that quote, it's not about strength. It's about how well you can adapt to change over time, and that's what we have to do, and all great people, good athletes, even businesses, they're constantly adopting, nothing's ever fixed in stone. It's about refining, and refining is about getting better and better and better, and knowing that. The best coaches I've been around are the ones who are not complacent, they don't get a win and they think they've made it. They've always got that little edge, and that's about adaptability. It's about improving all of the time, and so people say, OK, but what exactly is that? Well, that's about getting the basics, never ever losing sight of the basics. So, if it's a small business, it's about looking after my customers. It's about providing key service. Sometimes we get distracted. It's about the basics, doing the basics well, and keep getting better at those bit by bit.

Ramon Ray

Yes, this is powerful, and then why is the aspect of speed and frequency, what are these two key words? Again, I was looking at some of the things you've done or notes and all this, what are these two things that we need to know? Why is speed important, and why is frequency? What does this mean in this role of us, as we're getting our mind-set, in adaptability?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

So, many of these things I stole from business and the speed one is so important, because if something goes wrong with a customer or something goes wrong with a training program, you've got to fix it quick, because we're dealing with people. This is a people business, and so you want to make those changes quick, you want to adopt, you can't let things fester or leave them. They're not going to fix themselves, so making those changes fast and frequent means that I can see what needs to improve, and I keep getting better and better and better. I don't wait. I don't let it... don't let it faster. Don't let it get worse. Keep making those changes fast and getting better faster.

Ramon Ray

Yes, I'm going to ask a complicated question and I hope you understand it, and you can make me... you can make me sound smart, but take a look at them. I'm not a sports person, but let's take a look at the Super Bowls of any sport, any high performing sports, whatever it is, but I watch football once a year, Fergus, so I'm just trying to imagine it. What I'm hearing you say is that, let's say,
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something happens on the team [inaudible] goes wrong, you have to throw that ball, like, now, so it's a split second decision. That's where fast goes, I guess speed you have to do it, but what I'm trying to ask, Fergus, also, I guess those are the years of experience, which make it that even though you're moving fast, it was probably one of the best decisions. Do you understand what I'm trying to ask? Does that make sense?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Absolutely, so let's say you run a play and it doesn't work. You don't run it two more times to wait and see is it going to work. If you ran it, it didn't work, let's tweak it slightly, let's get better. We tried that, did that work, did it not? OK, let's tweak it again. Boom, it worked, but you can't sit down and wait for life to come and tell us what the solution is. We've got to keep making those small tweaks, and you've got two choices in life. You can wait and make big ones, and there's no guarantee they're going to work out, or you keep refining and getting better, and that's where that adaptability keeps coming in, and it's being adaptable and fast, frequent, making... and in one way, it's about making minor mistakes and keep getting, getting, getting better. Nothing's ever going to be truly perfect. You want to keep improving it.

Ramon Ray

Yes. As you've worked with an athlete or a soldier, as it were, in the military or in sports, Fergus, what are some things that you've seen have hindered their chance? I'm curious what are some things that you may have said— you know, Ramon, I was working with this person, that person, and I had to help them with this, or I learned from them, however you want to put it, that we can learn, because I'm sure you're talking to a lot of people. This is good stuff, but I can hear that... See, I can hear it. I can hear that one person say no, Fergus, for me, this won't work, so what is that thing that you may have come across and you say, Ramon, here's the stumbling block that everybody says and what they can do to learn this? Because I think it is... it's important.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

I've got a surprise for you, Ramon. This is going to come as a shock, but all great athletes, all great military people, they are human too, and they all have the same doubts and fears, and they all have these little voices that we have. The only difference is that they have learned these few little things that have allowed them to take just a slightly different perspective. Like I'm in control of what I do, I'm not in control of all these things. I start moving forward and I don't let those negative voices get in. I keep adapting. If I don't get it right, I get right back up on my feet and I go again, and those are the little things but they're human. They still have those voices, they still have those doubts, and you'd be amazed, like some of the greatest athletes after games, they have doubts, or they played particularly well and you come and congratulate them, and they're a little bit down because they're going, man, I made that mistake in the second quarter. I'm going what mistake? I didn't see it. But they improve. They keep getting better, and that's the secret. It's one of the most important things, is not to sit still and let those voices take root. You've got to move forward. You've got to keep moving forward and getting better and tweaking every single time.

Ramon Ray

This is powerful, and I hope the questions keep coming in the chat because all the hard questions, I'm going to send them to Fergus, trust me, so ask questions, ask questions, send them in our chat, and keep tweeting, keep tweeting, and thank Verizon Business, tag me @RamonRay and Dr. Fergus Connolly.

So, it sounds like what you're saying, and then we'll move onto our third point, though, it seems to me, Fergus, what I'm hearing is that taking the case of the business that had a flooded basement, or as we're talking here, we're in some pretty challenging times.
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Everybody has fears, I'm hearing you say, and correct me if I'm wrong. Everybody may be crying, have to hug their wife or their husband. They're scared. What do we do? But you're saying it is that small tweak, as we've talked, it's that control. It's that adaptability to move forward, but it's OK to be afraid. Yes. OK to be scared, OK to maybe not fully know what to do. Is that a fair statement?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Oh yes, we are all scared. I mean things happen and we get... for a moment we go, we see the threats, the fears, and that's good. You need that because that keeps you alive, and it keeps you alert. I would be worried if somebody didn't feel a little bit threatened and a little bit worried. Really. It keeps you going. It keeps you alive. You need it, and I've worked with some military guys, some special forces guys, and they'll tell you, if they don't have that little bit of fear or that edge, now that's when they know it's time to hang it up, because you lose that excitement, you lose that ability to see what's coming on. That means your senses are sparking, but there's a thin line between that and sitting back and letting those get on top of you. That's why you are in control of how you choose to use that energy, and it's OK to feel scared, it's OK to feel down, but you dust yourself off and move on and play.

Let me show you one little secret

[Technical difficulty]

— sports... sometimes [a new athlete] and they'll brush their shorts, or they'll... and you want to... you might not notice it, it's such a small thing, or they might just brush their hands off. What that sometimes is a cue – I see that from time to time, and that's a mental cue that they're brushing off a mistake or a negative thought. They've actually built that into, it's a little trick that some athletes use. They brush it off and they go, I've made that mistake I've learned from it, I've brushed it off, I'm going again, and I'm going to get better every time.

Ramon Ray

I love that man. That is like ninja, ninja, powerful, powerful. I love that, and I think it gives us hope, because sometimes we can think the aspect of crying, the aspect of putting our head down is bad, but I like what you said. No, that's healthy, but the key is, as we're talking about, it's what you do with it.

This one here, this third point, Dr. Fergus Connolly, and again, so glad you're spending time with us today on the Verizon Small Business Webinar Series. Be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Ooh, help us walk that through. What does that mean and how can we apply it to our businesses?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

This is one of the most important lessons I ever learned. I learned this very early on coaching. A coach said to me one time, he said, Fergus, you've got to get comfortable being uncomfortable, and that is one of the most important lessons I've ever learned working in sport, working with athletes. Life isn't comfortable. There are ups and downs, and another line that I've used with athletes, from time to time, I use this with athletes who are actually struggling and they're going through a difficult moment, what I say to them is, after this storm, there's going to be another storm, so it's not that you're going to get through something and everything's going to be perfect. Life is full of ups and downs, so you've got to get comfortable being uncomfortable and know that there are going to be ups and downs, and I'm like... I'm a boat on a sea, there's going to be a storm, I'm going to get through it, I'm in control of my boat, I'm in control of how I react. I'm not in control of the sea. This storm will pass and there'll be another storm to come again, but I'm going to be ready for it because I'm in control of my little boat and those people with me.
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Ramon Ray

Yes, this is powerful. Now, something came into my mind as you were saying this, this is a bit tangential, so feel free to put me back on the path here, but what are your thoughts to people who – I am saying they do it, but are making excuses for so many things, and again, I'm not saying the car had a tire, that's a reason to be late, but I find that some of the businesses I work with and I speak to, I speak around the world, I hear it's a lot of excuses, excuses, excuses. Do you find there's any differentiation, or what do you say to people who you're sensing, this lady, this guy, it's just a lot of excuses? Have you come across that? Does that make sense what I'm asking? Am I on the track?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Yes, people will make excuses, and you've got a choice. You can either own it, learn from it, move on, and those are the really powerful people, like the people... it's really interesting. Athletes or people who I have worked with who are successful, sometimes you see some people come forward and try to make an excuse for a mistake they made, and those guys and girls that go no, no, no, that was my mistake, don't be trying to take it away from me. They own it, they want to own it, they want to, and they know I screwed up or I made a mistake, or something happened, but I own it, and I'm going to get better from it. That's powerful because nobody is perfect. Everybody makes mistakes, things are going to happen, and sometimes you get something wrong, but the most important thing is run to it, learn from it, and then move on, but life is full of ups and downs.

Ramon Ray

Yes, no, and I do think that's important, and even my own experience a little bit, I've seen, is that I don't mind the mistake, but I'm comfortable when I hear somebody say I know what happened and how we can fix it. I think that gives me relief; as long as somebody can come back and say, because when somebody says I don't know why or whatever, then I don't know what to do with that, but I think when somebody comes back, here's the mistake and maybe here's why, I think we can move forward. Does that make sense, Fergus?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Yes. One other thing, Ramon, is this will surprise some people. Some of the best coaches, they get more worried when they win and win by a lot, because now they get scared because we see some of their coaches, maybe some of their athletes relax, that's when they get more scared because you don't know when the shock is going to come. So, we're... always a little bit like when you scrape over the line, coaches like that, because obviously they won, but there's lots of things to improve. If they go on a run of a series of wins, that's hard because the most dangerous thing is complacency. So, you'd be surprised. There are a lot of coaches, when they go on a run of a few wins, they actually get a little bit nervous because they don't want to see complacency, so on the other end, yes, lots of things go wrong, that's a lot of work, but you want to be somewhere in the middle.

Ramon Ray

Love it. What does this concept mean, Fergus, about there is always opportunity? What does that mean?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

No matter what the situation, there is always something you can improve on, so even when everything's falling down around you or it seems like that, there's always something that you can hold on to, there's always something, and there's always an opportunity to get better. If it's your business, if something's happening to your business and you have to adapt, you have to change it, but you
have to find that opportunity, and it might be a small glimmer, there's something that you can latch on to, there's something you can do, there's someone out there who needs your service, you've got to maybe shift, adapt, find it, and then move forward, and that's what it is. It's about being alert, not getting on top of yourself, and hustling to make things happen, and sometimes, of course, a friend of mine said one time that the only way to kill time is work it to death. Sometimes you've got to hustle a little bit, find it, and then go for it, but there's always an opportunity out there, but sometimes we just sit down, and we think too much in our own mind. We don't see that opportunity that's passing by us, and it's right in front of our nose sometimes.

Ramon Ray

Yes, I think you're so true, and I mean, sometimes I do that too much, annoying my family, like, oh, this happened. Great. We have an opportunity to get another car, or this happened. Great. Let me find new clients, so I think that's special though, and I guess we'd say also turning... taking lemons and turning them into lemonade could be a similar way of –

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

There's always an opportunity, and sometimes those lessons are painful. They're difficult, but those sometimes are the most important ones we have to learn, and so when something happens, we can choose to make an excuse, we can choose to blame someone else, or we can go this is a learning opportunity, I'm going to learn from it. I'm going to move forward. I'm going to adapt and I'm going to move forward fast, direct, and keep moving forward.

Ramon Ray

Yes, I think... listen, all these points are great, but I think this one coming up may be my favorite. It's hard to pick them all, but this aspect of lean on your sheepdogs. Why is that so important? Even when I say it, I get chills of goodness. Why is that so important? What is it?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

We all have bad days, we all have difficult moments. I have bad days. I'm not always an optimist. I'm a realist, I think difficult things are going to happen, and there are days where I have to pick up the phone, like now when I can't be around my friends or my family, and I would pick up the phone, I will talk to them. I would say, you know what, buddy, I'm struggling. I'm having a tough day. I just need to talk. Those are my sheepdogs. I've got seven or eight sheepdogs, men or women, I will pick up the phone, I will call, and what I also do is I pick up the phone and call some of them when I haven't heard from them in a few days. Just check in, how you doing? And actually, that's the last question I ask. I usually ask them a question about something else, and then I ask them, how are you doing later on? I use my best Joey Tribbiani voice to do it. We get the laugh. They know what I'm doing. They know what I'm asking. But it's important, you've got to check in. How are you doing? We all need sheepdogs, Ramon, at some stage, we all need sheepdogs. Everybody has a bad day and you've got to reach out, you've got to lean on your sheepdogs.

Ramon Ray

That is powerful. In my phone, I have a little – I call it KIT (Keep in Touch). I didn't know it was called sheepdog, maybe I will call it sheepdog list of guys who I call and keep in touch and just check in, because I think at the end of the, Fergus, and these have been such great top tips. I'm going backwards, lean on your sheepdog. Get your questions, I thank you for those who have submitted your questions, keep your questions. We're going to open to Q&A in a second. There's always opportunity. Be comfortable with the uncomfortable. Be adaptable, you're in control, but I think you're so right, and I think sometimes, Fergus, we get so caught up and
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that we’re in business, which is good, we’re in business. Jay Z said it, but I think the human element. Fergus, my brother, how are you? That’s what life is about.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Ramon, I shared that amazing secret with you. I’ve known some of the most successful athletes ever and some of the toughest Special Forces guys ever, I will tell you, they all have sheepdogs, and they will all lean on their sheepdogs from time to time. That’s important. We all need our sheepdogs and sometimes that sheepdog is there to put an arm around us, sometimes that sheepdog is there to tap you on the backside and go, ‘hey, you’ve got to move forward, you’ve got to snap out of this, stop letting those negative voices get in’, that’s why we have sheepdogs.

Ramon Ray

I love it. Let’s dive into questions from the audience. I can’t wait to hear your answers. Let’s do that right now.

We have so many great questions coming in, Fergus. Again, here we go. Wow, and so many words of accolade, I guess I will call that. One person, by the way asks, “Where is Ferguson from? I detect an accent”. Don’t answer that Fergus, don’t answer that. Audience member you can investigate that and figure that out. But I can tell you he’s not from Brooklyn, New York. That’s a hint I will give you.

People are asking, Fergus, as well, can you repeat the last statement of things like that. Just to let everybody know, Verizon Business is going to have a replay of this. This will be on their platform. Definitely, this is available for all of you all to go back to digest. I’m seeing, like I’m sure you’re seeing, Fergus, so many questions and comments about, can you repeat that again, what did he say, we want to hear more. All that is in the replay, so let’s dive into, Fergus. So, many great things, it’s hard to know where to start.

But I’m going to give you a tough question here, we’re getting a lot of personal, as it were, questions, which is good. One company, Fergus, and I’m going to summarize it, and you may not have an exact answer, but I’m sure you will say something good. They have been accompany three years, the founder, the president, the top dog of that company, Fergus, is gone, but Fergus they come in and out, they will come in from whatever they’re doing. You know what, lets change this. But the management team is ploughing team. So, any advice in that kind of situation where the management, it’s their company, by the way, they own it, goes out six months, three months skiing or whatever to another venture and then comes back in and tells Fergus, ‘you know, Fergus, I don’t like how you put that sign or why did you hire these people’. If you understand the question, Fergus, what do you suggest, any thoughts?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

It’s funny, Ramon, you get that in sport too, believe it or not. Sometimes I’ve seen coordinators, a defense or an offensive coordinator or a unit and the head coach comes in and goes, why are you doing it like this, or asking questions. It happens, it’s quite common. That really comes down to—we call that “backroom bandwidth”, because sometimes you’re sandwiched between the head coach and the players. A lot of it comes down to communication. I’m not knowing the exact details, but a lot of it is a communication issue. How well can you communicate and how well are you informing the people above you.

Again, that’s one of those things that you don’t control. You don’t control the people above you, you have to help manage them. A lot of that is about informing and asking questions and understanding their perspective as well. Sometimes I welcome those
questions, because that outside perspective, from time to time, can be helpful. But it really comes down to communication, teaching or managing upwards and saying, ‘coach, this is what we’ve been doing and keeping them in the loop’.

It’s not always smooth, it can be challenging, but that’s the only way you can get around it is by keeping those lines of communication open, frequently communicating. Sometimes you might think that it’s falling on deaf ears, you have to keep those lines of communication open so that it’s not such a big change or shock for the person coming in.

Ramon Ray

Sure, it’s not a tough thing, but what I’m hearing you say also if communication is happening and people are at least listening, there’s hope.

Fergus, this is one of those questions that are simple, but I think so profound and people are asking, how do you get motivated and keep being motivated? We’ve answered some of that already in our talk, you’ve covered it all, but I think it’s good to underline it, Fergus. Life gets tough, man, you’re beat down, so either you want to underline what you said or just briefly talk a little more about it to everyone listening. How do you self-pull yourself up? One, have a sheepdog. Anything else? Maybe somebody doesn’t have one, somebody is alone. What are your thoughts on that, Fergus?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Everybody needs sheepdogs. I’ve spoken about it, everybody needs them. At times, I thought I could do things on my own, we all need them. They’re important, and they’re important as well to be able to not just motivate you, but sometimes, you know, some of the questions we’re asking, sometimes you can be doing too much, and I’ll just tap you on the shoulder and say, ‘hey, listen, you and I we’re going to go for a walk, we’re going to get some fresh at two meters apart’, or six feet apart, whatever it is, there’s that.

But the other thing is, I like to use the phrase sometimes, ‘stay out of the middle’, or don’t get too caught up in the middle. You’ve got a vision of what it is you want to achieve and then you’ve got the basic blocks. Those are the things that you always resort to. Sometimes when we’re in that middle phase of getting work done, we lose sight of the vision or we forget about the basics. It’s important to remind yourself of that vision, of that goal, because that’s what you’re leaning towards, that’s what you’re working towards. When you remind yourself of the vision, that reaffirms why you’re doing things, and that gives you that direction and that goal to work towards and then you’ve got your sheepdogs to keep you on track.

Ramon Ray

For sure. Somebody challenges us, I use the word “challenge”, it’s not that big a deal, but it sounds exciting, about the aspect of speed, Fergus. Is there a part – because I think we mentioned the importance of speed and other things, so everybody has to listen to the whole statement? Well, let’s talk about that, is there some part, Fergus, where speed is harmful. You’ve kind of hinted on those already, but just now, in fact, your comment, but maybe where you should slow down, because also going too slow can be detrimental. Thoughts on that.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

It’s important because you’ve got to keep that balance and when something hits you, particularly like adversity and something that’s unforeseen, you have to get a little bit of momentum and move and start doing something quickly so that you don’t get caught and blindsided again, twice, and get moving and doing things. That doesn’t mean that you rush blindly, but it means you don’t stand still.
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Because there are two things, one is if we don’t start getting something done, we start to then sometimes beat ourselves up, particularly at times like this. Secondly, if we stand still sometimes, we let too many negative thoughts come into our mind and then we look back and we go, ‘I’m not getting anything done’. It’s a balance, but it’s not rushing blindly in one direction, it’s about making something happen and not standing still so that some negative thoughts creep in, because it’s very likely at times, when things are difficult, that can happen.

Ramon Ray

For sure. Again, thank you for the questions. Keep the questions coming, we have plenty of time to ask questions and get great answers. Remember, check out Fergus Connolly online, on Twitter, he’s an active Twitter user, so I’m sure he will look at these afterwards, his website. Me, you can find me at www.ramonray.com and definitely think and tag Verizon Business, so @VerizonBusiness on Twitter, let them know you’re seeing this and that you’re enjoying it. If you’re not, just quietly tell us.

Moving on here real quick. This is a great question about – and again it goes back to motivation, Fergus, but asked a different and, again, questions that are similar I try to move on, but this is particular. You’re the leader Fergus, and your team is feeling low and miserable, they’re feeling terrible, so you, as the leader, you want to keep that positivity and if it’s the same answer, I apologize, but I think it’s a different spin on it. How does the leader, when everybody is feeling miserable, do we join the team and more empathize and ‘I know we’re all down’, or do you pull them up? Any thoughts on, as a leader, how you navigate the reality of how your team is feeling.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Yes, it’s a great point. It’s very, very important right now, because the most important thing for your team is they want to know that you hear them, so you certainly can’t ignore them and even have them have that impression, so you need to have empathy, you need to understand where they are, but you want to help them pull themselves out of that situation, so you want to encourage them and help them, and it’s difficult. Things get difficult. I learned this, actually, from a coach who, in his first job, lost a whole series of games in a row, and I asked him, ‘what did you do in that situation?’ He said, ‘I listened to the players’, and the second thing he said was, ‘we found small wins and we celebrated them’.

When things get difficult, when you have unforeseen adversity and you’re struggling, you’ve got to find those small wins. They’re usually the basics, get the basics in place, celebrate them and keep building on top of those, and that’s how you keep that motivation and keep encouraging people, and find things to praise, because we all want to feel necessary, we all want to feel important, we all want to feel like we’re adding value if I’m working for you, and that’s the important thing.

So, find – have empathy, listen, and understand, and help the person, and then help them get up and then celebrate those small basic blocks, those small basic wins and keep building on them as you go forward.

Ramon Ray

Somebody asked, Fergus, about diversity and goods and markets and things like that, but I would like to pivot this question a bit, because the word “diversity” kind of triggered something. When you’ve talked with these high performing teams and athletes and others, how do they handle – what is their perspective on diversity. Many people think it’s a black/white thing, especially the U.S. historical context, but diversity, I think, Fergus, means so much more. For you, what have you found when you’re dealing with teams, diversity in the greater sense, but you can take this wherever you want to go, but the aspect of diversity? What does that mean for special warriors, Special Forces, what does that mean for a football team or a badminton team. What does that mean for them?
Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Ramon, again, many of these lessons I learned through mistakes, and one of the mistakes is if you don’t have different ideas, if you don’t have different perspectives, if you don’t have diversity, you’re just going to create an echo chamber, and [inaudible] you will have more and more unforeseen events, because you don’t have people who see the world differently and don’t come to you with different ideas. It’s particularly important, actually, with younger sometimes more inexperienced people for two reasons. Sometimes they see things that you don’t see, and they’ve got really good ideas. But more importantly, that’s encouraging them, it develops leadership, and so that’s why it’s so important.

People sometimes focus so much on diversity – I often turn the question the other way and go, ‘well, if you don’t, you’re just going to have a whole lot of people who are clones and who just think like you’, and that’s not creating an adaptable team, an adaptable organization, or a business that comes with new ideas to you. That’s why it’s so important.

Ramon Ray

This is why, I think, Fergus, these kinds of discussions are my favorite. Again, I think, learning how to use Twitter and marketing and finance and run your profit and loss statement are so important, and we cover things like this on the Verizon Small Business Webinar Series, but I also think, Fergus, this overall aspect of leadership, which you’re an expert in, maybe for me it’s important, because it’s a weak area, but I think this is why leaders are important. You can often hire somebody to do certain tactical things, but what we’re talking about, that’s where it gets harder to execute.

Let me go on here, Fergus, before you and I use all the Q&A time. Go ahead, please.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Just briefly on that, Ramon. It’s more important now than ever, because everybody’s business has contracted, so you’ve got to come up with solutions, so you need... if you’re going to bring experts in to help you, that’s fine, but it needs to be done in a way that’s going to help keep that domain knowledge there and develop that leadership, so that you become critical thinkers, better problem solvers, as a group, and that’s how you continue to develop.

Ramon Ray

This is powerful. Somebody asked here, Fergus, which I think is a fair question, we were talking about control. Basically, they’re saying, ‘hey, Fergus, we didn’t ask for corona, we didn’t ask for COVID, we didn’t do anything wrong, this is not about us’, so what are your thoughts on that, Fergus, with how talking about the immediate time, as we’re discussing this today that we should think about things that are not our fault, and/or if you want to address as best you can, the time we’re in right now.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

There are things that we don’t control, and something like this, you know what I mean, whatever the reason for it, but we have to deal with it. You’ve got a choice, you can argue about where it came from and all of those things and figure it out, but the immediate priority – to use a phrase, the gator closest to the boat – is the one that we have to solve now, so you have to control your response to it and what you’re going to do.

The other way to look at this is to say, ‘well, we don’t control anything’. I like to turn that into a more positive frame of mind. I control my response. I control what I do. We can choose to be negative about it or we can choose to have a proactive positive approach, because at the end of the day, that’s the only approach that’s going to help us solve the problems going forward. That’s why I
always use the phrase, you’re in control of your response, and take that ownership on. Understandably, yes, there are lots of things that are outside of our control, but let’s focus on what we can and back to the basics. Let’s build on those basics and make those positive changes bit by bit.

Ramon Ray

By the way, thank you all so much for sharing the comments, [inaudible] hearing the kudos. “How true what Dr. Connolly is saying, a thumbs up.” Somebody said Ireland in the chat, I hear that, I won’t comment. That’s up to you to find out.

What qualities, Fergus, do I look for in a good sheepdog. This is a great question. For someone who is looking for it, what is your guidance on it, how to find it, what we look for, who to run away from. What’s a good sheepdog look like to you?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

For me, it’s authenticity, it’s honesty, because there are times when I feel sorry for myself, when I feel – I’m looking for pity or whatever and I need somebody to come along and who will listen to me for a bit and go, ‘OK, that’s enough, you’re not getting sympathy from me, you need to look at yourself in the mirror, you need to change things up’, you need that honesty. You need people who – they know you and they’re going to be honest with you – help you, support you when you need it. That’s the most important thing. But at their core, they love you, they care for you, and you want to find those people who love and care for you and are going to be honest and you know that you’re going to get an honest answer from them. That’s the most important thing.

Ramon Ray

That’s powerful. I have a special place in my heart, Dr. Fergus, and I’m sure you do too for non-profits. I know Verizon Business works with them quite a bit, so we have a question here and thank you for asking. The person is basically asking, in normal times, we’re in different places of work, we can see people face to face, those who are in an office building, but this non-profit is saying, now my team is remote, so as we’re being better leaders, Dr. Fergus, can you help us evaluate how to be monitor, watch employees, hold people accountable, but yet not to be Big Brother, not to be monitoring them too much. How do we have that balance with especially remote workers, which many of us will probably be for the foreseeable future as the world changes? How do we address remote workers, especially leading them in this context?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

It’s fascinating. This is something that I’ve been helping teams with even over the last few weeks, because this has been a surprise to so many teams, NBA teams, NFL teams, they’ve got both coaches and players who they can’t get around, so you’ve got all... imagine Tom Brady has just gone to Tampa Bay, he has to communicate with his coaches and figure out. The key there is that if you have had a good responsible relationship, this transition will be relatively easy, but the most important thing is to give a certain amount of responsibility and build on it. Don’t overwhelm somebody, build on it and really before – very often before you pick up the phone or hop on the Zoom call, just take a moment to consider that person’s perspective.

How many kids have they? What’s the best working hours? Do they have a nanny? Do they have somebody helping? Just take a moment to understand their perspective and help understand where they’re coming from so that you can facilitate them doing the best work possible for you. It’s a working facilitation. And I like to use the term, management and leadership is important, but if you think of it in terms of facilitation, how can I help that person do the best job possible for me, for the company, it just pauses you, it gives you a different perspective, and then you know every single person needs to be treated a little bit differently, particularly now because you’re not in that structured uniform 9-5 environment in an office.
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It's going to take a lot of change, a lot of understanding, but that's what good leaders do, they understand the other person.

Ramon Ray

For sure, again, keep the questions coming. If we don't get to your question, don't worry, we're going to do our best, we may not be able to reply to every single one, but Dr. Connolly said he will do his best to answer questions in some form or format, so we will work with you all after that. Thank you for asking. There's a lot of needs and I'm glad we're able to help.

Fergus, you've touched on this in an earlier question, but I'm going to ask it again because I think it's important. Thanks for asking it. Many people here are not the direct leaders of their organizations, Fergus, so the questioner asked, 'what you're saying is good, Dr. Connolly, this is great, how do I share with my leader who doesn't want to listen, he's a great guy/gal', but if you understand what I'm asking, there's people here who are like, I wish my leader was on this webinar and I can't just forward him email and say, 'dude/gal, you need to hear what Fergus said'. Thoughts on that where the management level or the junior, as it were, people can get their bosses to hear this.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

It happens in every walk of life and every business and sport, and it's really, again, you have to reverse it, in one sense, and go, OK, they're not supporting me or they're not here or I can't get them onboard. Really, you have to take a moment and go, 'OK, let me try and look at it from their perspective and consider, perhaps, a lot of the pressure, the stress, some of the other things that they have to deal with', and then think, 'OK, how can I communicate best to them?' not how do I communicate but what way would they prefer to get this information. That's something that – is something I had to learn, something I had to take a lot of time to sit back and think because you're dealing with lots of different people in sporting organizations or whatever, and one of the things I've done quite a bit is I've looked back on how do they communicate with me. Do they use diagrams, do they use words? How do they communicate, and that's the method then that I use to try and communicate with them? So, I try to understand.

Some people like short emails, some people like long ones, some people like bullet points, some people like a phone call, some people don't. It's just taking a moment to think how does that person communicate with me. Maybe that's their preferred style. Maybe that's what they're more comfortable with and that's how I can develop that relationship best with them.

The other way to do it is also take a moment and go, 'OK, does one of the other departments, do they have a better way of communicating or do they seem to have a better relationship, let me take some ideas from there and see if I can use those'.

Ramon Ray

It's amazing, Dr. Connolly how so many of the questions we're being asked are so similar, people have questions, 'how do I tell my boss? How do I develop better leaders? How do I find sheepdogs?' things like that, it's amazing.

You have a member of the team that is negative and bossy – not you, Fergus, I'm asking the question – that is negative and bossy and who is most of the time verbally contrary. It's a group of volunteers, what's the best way to bring them around?

That's interesting, we're all in a group, we're all at the same level here, but that one person is making things tough for everybody in the team. How do we deal with that?

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

In many cases when somebody is disruptive it's because they feel as though their perspective isn't being heard. Oftentimes, not in all cases, but again I always go back to two thing if I've got somebody like that or I'm in a situation like that, and I ask the question,
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‘OK, forget about the message just for a moment, what are the fears and the needs of that person, perhaps, that are at another level and how can I help address those and maybe do it offline or do it separate’, but in many cases, if somebody is being openly contrary or disruptive, it’s very often because they don’t feel as though their message is getting out there, and that’s particularly important. Sometimes people simply want to be heard. Now, there’s that or it’s a deeper underlying issue, which you would have to take the time to sit down and have a conversation, find out. Think of it like a fuse board, sometimes it’s just one small thing, if you can flick that fuse and fix that issue, everything else, all of the other lights come on. So, it’s worth taking the time to sit down, listen, and find out, really, what the source is.

Ramon Ray

I love it. Dr. Connolly, can you give us again your website, Twitter address, just different contact information, if you want your full email, but how can people contact you after this. I know we have a lot of information and Dr. Connolly has been kind enough to say he will do his best, over time, to respond to people reaching out to him and who want to work with him. Dr. Connolly, take 10 seconds and share what’s the best way to be in contact with you.

Dr. Fergus Connolly, PhD

Sure, my website www.fergusconnolly.com, that’s the easiest way to get in touch with me, you can drop me an email and I’ll try and help as best I can, and share any of the lessons or examples that may be able to help people, particularly at this time because as many of the questions have said, this is completely unforeseen, this is a shock, it’s throwing everything out, but the other thing... like I said as well earlier, there’s always opportunity, and one of the skillsets that you are developing now is this ability to adapt and change and develop, and this will stand us in good stead as we move forward.

Ramon Ray

This was powerful. Dr. Connolly, thank you so much. Again, I hope you go to his website. If you want to find out information about me, www.ramonray.com, but hold on one second, just a quick message we have from Verizon, which is going to help you navigate future amazing talks like this.

Andy Choi

That’s it for today’s webinar, a big thanks to Ramon and Fergus for all of their insights. You can check out the other webinars in this series on our BrightTALK channel page. You can register for our next webinar, that’s next Tuesday May 12, and we are excited to bring back Ramon Ray and the author of Fix This Next, Mr. Mike Michalowicz. I hope you will join us then next week for our Small Business Webinar Series.

Thanks for joining us, we will see you soon. Have a good one.

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