

# 1 INSIGHT

with RICH LITVIN



## Episode 6: Stop trying to solve your clients' problems...

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Rich: Welcome to 1 Insight. My name is Rich Litvin. I grew up in London, and I now live in LA. This is a podcast for extraordinary top performers. You see, I've coached some of the most successful and talented people on the planet. I see what most people cannot see, and I dare to say what most people wouldn't dare to say. What I know about success is that; on the other side of it; it can actually be lonely. You can feel like more of an impostor the more successful you become. And when you're the most interesting person in the room, you're actually in the wrong room. I coach around insight. Life looks one way, something happens, the world looks different, and your entire world changes. It can happen in an instant. This podcast is called 1 Insight, because a single insight can change everything.

George was running late for his graduate level statistics class. When he arrived at the class, everyone had left, but there were two statistical problems written on the chalkboard. And so he assumed they were part of a homework assignment, jotted them down and then solved them. A few days later, he handed in his assignment and apologized to his professor for taking so long to do the homework. "These problems seem to be a little harder than usual," he said.

About six weeks later, George was woken up on a Sunday morning by someone banging on his front door. It was the professor. He rushed in with the papers in his hand, extremely excited. You see, the problems on the chalkboard that George had solved for

his homework were actually two famous unsolved problems in statistics. I'll tell you what happened to George in a moment, but first, let's travel back in time. Two and a half thousand years ago, the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, authored the Republic. It's proven to be one of the world's most influential works of philosophy and political theory. Plato wrote, "A problem encourages the creative efforts to solve that problem." 600 years later, the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius noted, "The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way."

In 1939, the Nazis began their conquest of Europe. Back then, soldiers were still riding into battle on horseback. Biplanes were still in use. The French hoped that the static trench lines they dug would prevent the Germans from invading, like they'd done in World War I. In fact, in World War II, the Germans just marched far enough north that they could go around them. By the end of the devastation of World War II, incredible innovations had been created. These included the widespread use of penicillin to prevent infection, the development of submarines, synthetic oil and rubber, amphibious vehicles, tanks, nuclear energy, digital computers, rockets, and radar, also the pressurized cabins in aircraft and jet engines that after the war made commercial flights possible. Even M&Ms were created exclusively for the military as an easy way to help the troops with chocolate on the battlefield without it melting so easily.

Steve Blank is a Silicon Valley entrepreneur and a professor of entrepreneurship at Stanford University. The methodology he developed, customer development methodology, is a cornerstone of the lean startup movement. What he created he called the Lean LaunchPad, and it changed the way that entrepreneurship is taught. Instead of relying on the traditional business school method of teaching students how to write a corporate business plan or build a product, his students get hands-on experience in what it takes to start a company. When the pandemic struck, Steve created Hacking 4 Recovery, a series of online classes at Stanford where teams learn how to develop new business models for a recovering economy. The first 20 teams to go through that program just shared their new business concept. They include a telemedicine service, bringing healthcare to middle income people in Peru, a remote onboarding service to help organizations establish a sense of belonging for new staff, a mobile app for testing COVID-19, and a company that helps people grieve for lost loved ones.

In normal times, a friend of mine travels across the country on a weekly basis. During the pandemic, he doesn't want to spend much time on commercial flights, so he's investing in a small private jet. But he's not buying a single plane, he's gathered a group of friends together to invest in purchasing several. That way not only will they always have a plane available when needed, they can also rent them out and create a business that helps other travelers at the same time. A great way to create a business is to solve a problem that you are facing. By the way, that jet that my friend has bought has an incredible feature. If your pilot has a heart attack, gets incapacitated somehow, there's a button on the ceiling, a red button that you press and an AI system lands the plane in an emergency. It automatically figures out the best airport and runway, plots a flight path, communicates with air traffic control and other planes, and then navigates and lands the plane.

In Ireland, there's a budget supermarket called Lidl, and they created an app to help their customers find a quieter time to shop during COVID times. Customers simply send a message to Lidl through WhatsApp and a chat bot recommends the best time to visit. There's a company called Selecta that's created a COVID-19 innovation called safety stations. They're vending machines, but they supply PPE essentials like face masks and hand sanitizer, and just launched in Zurich Airport in Brussels train station. Lots of companies are developing risk mitigation technologies. In China, there are robots that have been designed to deliver medicines, meals, and to collect bedsheets and trash in hospitals. And there's an e-commerce giant called JD, a Chinese competitor to Amazon. It's developed a drone program to drop parcels and spray disinfectant. It's even testing robotic delivery services and building drone delivery airports.

You know, my old high school motto in Latin is *Aut viam inveniam aut faciam*. It means find a way or make a way. Find a way or make a way, that phrase has been attributed to Hannibal. He's widely considered one of the greatest military commanders in world history. When his generals told him it was impossible to cross the Alps by elephant, he said, "Find a way or make away." And he went on to pull off one of the most astonishing military feats ever by waging war on the Romans after crossing the treacherous Alps. He crossed the highest and most extensive mountain range in Europe with 30,000 troops, 9,000 horsemen and 37 African war elephants in just 16 days. A few minutes ago when I started talking to you, I shared the story about George, who accidentally solved two famous unsolved problems in statistics. Well, later in life, George Bernard Dantzig became known for his development of an algorithm for solving linear programming problems. Eventually he became the professor of operations research and computer science at Stanford University.

Whatever problem you are facing right now has the seeds of its solution within it. To be a great coach, do not try and solve your client's problems. Instead, help them live into bigger challenges. So in this moment, I'm curious, what's the biggest challenge you're facing right now? And then ask yourself, what's the tiniest seed of a solution that you can see?

For most of human history it wasn't called coaching, it was called leadership. And it's what I love to do, to coach people, to lead people, and to mess with people's thinking. If you'd like more of this, or if you'd like to learn more about our community of extraordinary top performers, go to [richlitvin.com/1insight](http://richlitvin.com/1insight).