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Chris Voss:

You're 31% smarter in a positive frame of mind. That's no small edge. 31% is huge. And there's all sort of data all over the place that continues to back up positive frame of mind, which is also why it's not emotions that are bad for business. It's negative emotions.

Speaker 2:

The EOS life is...

Speaker 3:

Doing what you love.

Speaker 4:

With people you love.

Speaker 5:

Making a difference.

Speaker 6:

Being compensated appropriately.

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With time for other passions.

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The EOS life.

Mark O'Donnell:

Hi, I'm Mark O'Donnell, visionary at EOS worldwide. And I'd like to welcome you to another addition of the EOS Life podcast, where we explore the why and the how of entrepreneurs actively living their ideal life. Now, not later and not in retirement. The world of entrepreneurial freedom and the impact on those around you depends on it. Today I have the pleasure of speaking with Chris Voss. Chris is the CEO and founder of the Black Swan group and author of Never Split the Difference, Negotiating as if Your Life Depends on it. He has used his many years of experience in international crisis and high stakes negotiations to develop a unique program and team that applies these globally proven techniques to the business world. So welcome to the show, Chris.

Chris Voss:

Thanks, Mark. Happy to be on. I'm looking forward to the conversation.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah, So if you could tell our audience a little bit about yourself. What do you do? What is your role within the organization? What are you responsible for on a daily and weekly basis?

Chris Voss:

Yeah well, I'm six feet tall. I'm a romantic, I like walks in the moonlight and my favorite color's salsa red pearl.

Mark O'Donnell:

Perfect.

Chris Voss:

All right. Thank you very much. Thanks for having me on everybody. Have a good night. Try the veal. All right. So I am retired FBI lieutenant. Was the FBI's lead international kidnapping negotiator. Couple of years before I left the bureau, I gained a really strong sense that the FBI negotiations skills were just emotional intelligence. And then I had really solid indicators that they worked not because there were bad guys on the other side, but because they were human beings on the other side.

So my son and I, and Tahl Raz wrote a book after I'd been teaching in business schools for a couple years, took the ideas out of hostage negotiation, started teaching them right straight into business school students who had problems in the real world they were dealing with at that time and they did well with it. So we wrote a book which has done really well since it was published five years ago as a business and personal negotiation book.

Mark O'Donnell:

And so since then you took that book, you started the Black Swan group. So can you tell us a little bit about what Black Swan does for your clients? Who is your ideal client?

Chris Voss:

Yeah, the Black Swan group, we coach and train negotiations and literally coach. And what does a coach do for you? A coach gets you ready to go in the game and then you go in the game. And a coach is on the sidelines and a coach is if you don't do well, it's the coach's fault. Well, it could be your fault for not listening, but that's a whole separate issue. But I think a lot of people talk about coaching these days and they don't really, I don't know that they really are there with you sending you into the game.

Also there's a lot, very few people that teach negotiations will coach it also. Kind of negotiation coaching thing really gets started. One of my mentors, Jim Camp wrote a book called Start With No back in 2002. And he had gone to the Caris negotiation training, which was kind like last century. Caris used to be in every airline magazine. You couldn't open up an airline magazine without seeing an ad for Caris. And Jim went to Caris and was studying their stuff and then went to the teachers and said, "Hey man, coach me through a deal." And they were like, "No, we don't do that."

And Jim thought it was insane that anybody that taught it wouldn't coach it. And the crazy thing about that is that's the case like our competitors for the Black Swan group, principally are the academic institutions, the Harvard, which, and I taught at Harvard. Michigan, Michigan State, the business schools, Ross School of Business, Kellogg. And I remember talking to one of those teachers a couple years ago when before our book came out. And I said, "What's it like coaching the people that you teach? I mean, how many people you coaching?"

And I'll never forget the reaction I got from this business school professor. And the answer was, "Oh, I'm not qualified to coach." And I remember thinking the people in your class that were trying to learn from you heard you say you weren't qualified to coach, they get up and walk out of your classroom.

I was shocked by that. And coaching is really turned into really big piece of our business, the Black Swan business. Now who's a client? Top performers. I do a client top people that are committed to learning and getting better. We like to say the 1%, although it sounds elitist. It's not intended to be, because you could be an average blue collar human being from the Midwest, which is what I am. I grew up in a Midwest middle class, blue collar environment working class. All you got to do is want to get better and you are our ideal client. But get better by learning.

Some people believe that the only way to learn is through experience. That's probably the most inefficient way to learn. You got to have experience. You got to play in the game. But my favorite analogy is Tiger Woods. Tiger Woods probably spent more time on the driving range than he did in tournaments. But that's why he won the tournaments.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah, for sure. So with Black Swan, you have the coaching program and you do a lot of speaking engagements. So that kind of rounds out the offering is that right?

Chris Voss:

And we teach a lot. We teach pretty much at all levels. I mean almost everything right now like everybody else is online. And as we've come to realize where the gaps in the instruction for people then we've designed something for you at whatever level you are. We were training our sessions a lot before we realized we didn't have a quick down and dirty 90 minute on just the pure definition of the skills because people would get into our training and they wouldn't know a label from a mirror, or crystal clear clarity on which is which. And so we put together 90 minute block of instruction on that. So wherever you are beginning, a fundamental, intermediate, advanced, we'll bring you along. So we've developed something for wherever you are.

Mark O'Donnell:

Very good, very good. So this, as you know, the focus of this show is to help other people discover their ideal life. And the ideal life we have synonymous with the EOS life. So doing what you love with people you love, making a huge difference, being compensated appropriately and having time to pursue other passions. And those are the five points that we use to describe the ideal life. And in a lot of ways, Black Swan helps people get what they want from their life as well.

But digging into your business at Black Swan, oftentimes it really means that at one point you weren't living your ideal life. So can you tell me about the moment, I'm just going to dive in. What's the moment in time that made you decide as you're building Black Swan that you needed to have a change? What was your moment? When did you realize that something needed to change in your business?

Chris Voss:

And that's why I really wanted you to ask me about this because we didn't. Our EOS coach is Jonathan Smith. And Jonathan is a superstar. Now I'd become acquainted with Jonathan professionally and he knew that we needed it. And I knew we knew him professionally for a couple years until finally he kept saying, "Look, you guys, you got to think about this." And I thought, I don't know. I don't see it anywhere else. And I think that's one of the biggest problems with the people that we do business with now, because now I'm reluctant to do business with people that are not running EOS. And I try to turn a lot of these people onto it and they're doing okay. In their world, they don't see other people running EOS and they're better than many of the people that are in their world.

So their comparison is not to what they could be doing. They don't know what they don't know. And I realize that's a stupid cliché, but we didn't know there was a better way. Now we knew Jonathan for a couple years and he was a fan. He was helping us out. And he'd earned our trust as a business colleague. And finally I said to Brandon, Brandon really runs a company, my son. This guy keeps bugging us. Maybe we should give this a shot. Maybe there's something here. And then we sat down and if he hadn't earned our trust, I mean, if he hadn't really shown us what a solid human being he was, especially the first meeting. He's like, "All right, look, we're going to spend some time on core values." And I'm like, "Core values, work hard, be honest over deliver, get up in the morning, show up on time. How hard is that? Why do we need to lay that out?"

I remember thinking that was a stupid idea. And he was like, "No man," he says, "You're going to find out, first of all, it's going to take you two or three tries to define them properly. And they're going to be the key to all your business and personal relationships." And I use the comparison a lot of times to Phil Jackson's triangle offense in the NBA. And every team that Phil went to and forgave, those of you that don't like sports analogies, or you don't know the NBA, Phil Jackson is most successful coach, really in the history of the NBA. And he'd come to a team and he'd give them the triangle offense, and they'd be confused by it and they'd have to run it for several months.

And then after they run it, some suddenly everything was falling into place and he turned good teams into champions. And I really think that's what a lot of what he us is about. And I really have trouble getting across to people because I watch them struggling with their problems. And I think you needed an operating system like EOS. They're like I don't know. And okay, okay. So we ran it for a couple months and then stuff just started falling into place. And when the pandemic came, we pivoted easily because we had this great system and we were prepped to pivot. And so sometimes I wonder how to get it across to people that just don't know any better that they really need it. We actually think it's now the core values of EOS. We're going to integrate that as a concept into our next book because I've come across recently a book called Antifragile by Nassim Nicholas Taleb. And he, and forgive me for a really long wandering answer.

Mark O'Donnell:

That's okay.

Chris Voss:

But he inspired the name of our company, the Black Swan group, and how to be a Black Swan and how could you make tiny of changes and make all the difference in the world. And we love that as a metaphor. So Taleb's got a book out, actually it's been out for a couple years called Antifragile. And a person or an organization can be in one of three states, and people probably toggle back and forth between fragile, robust and antifragile. Taleb coined the term antifragile. Fragile is you hit a speed bump in a road and you fall apart. You have traumatic stress and you got PTSD and you can't recover. Robust, you expect to hit bumps. You expect to get waked, you expect get jolted and you absorb. It antifragile instead of posttraumatic stress disorder, it's posttraumatic stress growth and you get hit by a shock wave. If you're antifragile, you're better. You learn, it's an awesome experience. And I think running EOS makes an organization antifragile. And you just don't know what that looks like until you've really gotten into it.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. And I think I love that the book and I'm definitely a fan myself. And it reminds me of, there's a Greek philosopher. I think it's [00:12:28] who essentially said that under pressure people don't rise to

the occasion. They sink to the lowest level of their training and preparation. And I think that what we teach certainly does that. And it's a really interesting thing. And it also goes along with Stockdale's paradox with Admiral Jim Stockdale, having the undying faith that in the end, you will prevail. Accepting the current condition and having, and undying faith that in the end you will prevail. And it's just a great way to do that. And so when I think about your business and what you do for people in a lot of ways, you're teaching them to be much, raise their game on emotional intelligence in a big way. And do you think that in some respects that helps every person that you work with become a little bit more antifragile as well?

Chris Voss:

Yeah, without question. Without question. And another one of the reasons why I resonated with that book so much because we've already been telling people to be curious. People say, "Well, how do you not get mad in the moment?" Well, it's impossible to be angry and curious simultaneously. So one of the mantras within the Black Swan team, Derek Gone, who's a superstar coach. He's constantly pushing people to be curious because that mindset, it's a superior, it's an evolved mindset. You're smarter. You can see patterns quickly. You don't get knocked off your game. And then low and behold after we've been preaching this for a while, in Taleb's book, he says, "Curiosity makes you anti fragile." I'm like oh wow, awesome. One more thing when we resonate. So I hope I haven't veered too far off of your question.

Mark O'Donnell:

No, that's perfect. My next question is as you've creating this antifragile organization, how has that gone into your life? How are you living differently personally, having known all these things through the pandemic? How has your life improved?

Chris Voss:

Yeah. Well the team is a great reinforcer. If my amygdala kicks into gear on me or I'm tired or there's any one of a number of reasons why you'll fall out of the antifragile mindset or the Black Swan's method, mindset. And a lot of it has to do with our natural tendency, we're you, you as a human being, you are wired to be negative. So that's the first problem. Second problem is then it's even more of a struggle depending upon your diet, your exercise, how are you maintaining yourself. So as we get into this operating system, both in our communication and in the US system, we reinforce each other as a team. And it's really helpful for me if I'm down in the dumps. My team would probably, I can rely on my team to come up with an answer or we're going to communicate and find an answer. I mean, the reinforcement among the team is extremely important.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. And I think having a team absolutely frees you up to be your best self, to live your ideal life, to be operating in your highest and best use, which creates a lot of leverage. Right? I mean, if you can go do a talk and generate revenue and that's your unique ability or God-given to talent and the team takes care of the rest. They both hold you accountable and they push you in that unique ability at the same time, which is kind of an interesting thing. At least for me, I know that I feel accountable to my team to stay in my unique ability to continuously live my ideal life because I'm not. If I'm not, I'm not at my best.

Chris Voss:

But frees you up and hold you up.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah.

Chris Voss:

And holding you accountable is a really good thing. So agreed.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. You're talking about like health and kind of the personal disciplines. It's going to be a totally random question. What does your daily routine look like? What are your disciplines that you ascribe to?

Chris Voss:

Well, some of the cliché things, but you got to do them. I mean, I definitely believe in the gratitude exercise first thing in the morning. Since you're naturally wired to be negative, mental hygiene, attitude hygiene is very much like dental hygiene. You stop skipping when you should be brushing your teeth there are immediate negative consequences because your default oral hygiene is not self-sustaining. And every bit is you need gratitude probably a couple times a day, just like you need to brush your teeth a couple of times a day. So gratitude exercise in the morning. As a human being, you got a natural circadian low in the middle of the afternoon. Depending upon diet sleep, exercise, how hard that low hits you and end of the day. So you got to take the time out. So I'll do gratitude exercise in the morning. I'm trying to get some physical exercise during the day. I'm particularly cautious of the circadian low in the middle of the afternoon. And I learned about the circadian low before I ever got into business because circadian low also in law enforcement where I came from, when's the best time to arrest somebody? When they're at their circadian low.

Mark O'Donnell:

2:30 in the afternoon.

Chris Voss:

2:30 in the afternoon. Surely there's a low at same time real early in the morning. So we're not going to lock people up at 2:30 in the afternoon. We're probably going to come and get you before 6:00 AM. And one of my favorite stories, I mean, you'd be shocked that we can lock up at 6:00 AM. We're on a big Roundup of motorcycle gang guys. I can't remember who they were. They're on Long Island, New York a number of years ago. But I mean, these motorcycle gang guys, every one of these was a neanderthal gorilla. I mean, big knuckle dragging boys. And we had SWAT teams out. We had hostage negotiators all over the place. But we locked all these gorillas up first thing in the morning. And I went by. We had arrested so many of them that we had to get a high school gymnasium to process all of them.

And I was the head of the New York hostage negotiation team at the time. So, and I stuck my head into this gymnasium filled with these, I mean, neanderthals. I mean, knuckle dragging gorillas. Every one of these big boys, a good 350 pounds. And sitting there docile as lamb. And each one of them, if we'd have gotten into a fight with them, it would probably taken four or five agents to subdue one of these dudes. And every one of them were so docile. They were sitting there with only one or two guys. And I remember looking in his room and there were easily 30 of them. And I almost laughed out loud. And, but I figured if I did suddenly they'd wake up and realize that they were docile little lambs.

Mark O'Donnell:

You'd have a problem.

Chris Voss:

And then we'd have a problem. But do not underestimate what a circadian low can do to you. And as a business person you got to take that into account. You want to get stuff done.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. I mean, that is so fascinating. What are the times? So before six, and then what's the next time I just threw out 2:30, but that seems like when I want coffee.

Chris Voss:

Yeah, no, I think it's 2:30, 3 o'clock in the afternoon, but and we didn't know what a circadian low was back then. So we just know, go out and lock this dude up before the sun rises. And it's a pretty good chance that they're going to walk away like little lambs, no matter who they are.

Mark O'Donnell:

Wow. That's totally fascinating because when we talk about EOS is we say that as a system for managing human energy. And that's for you for your company, get all the people pointed in one singular direction and amazing things can happen. But what you're bringing up is a really interesting point in that your own personal human energy has highs and lows and lefts and rights and being hardwired for the negative and starting with that gratitude really canceling out. because I'm pretty sure it's hard to be negative and grateful at the same time.

Chris Voss:

It's impossible.

Mark O'Donnell:

It's impossible. Right?

Chris Voss:

Yeah.

Mark O'Donnell:

That's super interesting.

Chris Voss:

Let me throw out another reason why this is important. I talk about this guys, Ted talk all the time. Shawn Achor, Harvard psychologist. Think the Ted talks a happiness advantage, but this is the source of my stat. And Shawn says you're 31% smarter in a positive frame of mind. That's no small edge. 31% is huge. And there's all sort of data all over the place that continues to back up positive frame of mind, which is also why it's not emotions that are bad for business. It's negative emotions. Because if you're 31% smarter in a positive frame of mind, one of the Black Swan laws of gravity is in a negative frame of mind, you're dumber. Period. So if you allow yourself to fall into the gap or the negative frame of mind, Dan Sullivan's book, The Gap in the Game. If you're in the, a gap you're dumber.

And the other problem with negative emotions is when you're in the gap, the negativity, there's also something quirky about the negativity which convinces you even more that you're right. You fall in that hole and you get self righteous and you fire off an email that you shouldn't send off or a text. You snap at somebody and you're even more justified. There's a self-righteousness with negativity that is just ridiculous. So that's a double downward spiral, which is another reason why to be smart about how you manage yourself as that million dollar race horse.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah, for sure. And it's impossible to live your ideal life and you can't get there unless you're grateful in the first place, right? I mean, you'd have a very difficult time living your ideal life, being in a negative space. You're not going to achieve it because one, you said you're dumber. And I believe that. I mean, I know when I'm in a negative place for whatever reason and my prefrontal cortex starts to shut down and I got all those negative chemicals going through my veins and just not thinking clearly at all in gratitude. I agree with you. That is sort of the one thing that just can't can't be missed.

So Chris, how would you describe your ideal life? How would you describe the people that you're working with that you absolutely love doing what you love? People you love, what's the impact that you want to make. Start with those three.

Chris Voss:

Yeah. I got to tell you something, I'm darn close to it now. The team is aligned on core values. We love what we're doing. We love it. We breathe it. We think it. And so one of our problems is we're not taking time off to recharge as much as we should because we love this so much. I've always loved what I've been doing so much that I didn't feel like I needed to take vacations. A lot of people take vacations because they need to go have fun. I mean I've been having fun. So we have fun with this. Now I realize simultaneously we still need to take time off, get the recharges. And I don't do that enough, but the ideal life for me is working with people that you have a lot of fun working with.

And our team is fun on a regular basis. People that we've coached up in a Black Swan method will say to us, we regularly hear people say this deal will change my life. And there's two really important things about that. Number one, people are cutting life-changing deals regularly. Most people cut a life-changing deal once every six, seven, eight years. Our clients are cutting them four, five, six times a year constantly. It's not that big of a deal for them to do a life-changing deal regularly.

Secondly, the other thing about that that's cool is it's never at anybody else's expense. What you hear what you don't hear. If somebody tells me, "I'm a great negotiator. Let me tell you about the last deal. I cut. Boy, I had them over a barrel." That's not a great deal because they're leaving resentful people behind them who will pay them back.

Nobody that we coach ever brags about how they had somebody over a barrel. One of my favorite times was a private charter jet company. They're holding a reception in Phoenix. I happen to be in town. I'm among the people that get invited to the hangar. Both the owner of the company and his top salesman talked openly in front of me about how the top salesman used never split the difference to negotiate his compensation package with his employer. And his employer was standing right there. They were both happy with the deal. You're not hiding anything from anybody. And so that's one of the cool things about the ideal life is for me, nobody's creating enemies. Everybody's literally making everybody else better off.

Mark O'Donnell:



Yeah. I mean that, that kind of gives me the chills just thinking about it because what that does is it sends abundance out into the world versus scarcity, right?

Chris Voss:

Amen. Well said.

Mark O'Donnell:

It's just, Hey, it's not a I win you lose situation. There's more than enough to go around. We just need to be on the same page with what that deal looks like. And it actually will spawn more opportunities for both of us into the future. So I'm grateful for what you are doing. Yeah, it's making a dent in the universe for sure. Yeah. Just, just absolutely great.

So next question is you said you weren't taking as much time off. You're nailing the doing what you love with people you love and making a huge difference. And we're going to skip over being compensated well because I'm going to assume that's a foregone conclusion, but the idea of time to pursue other passions you have, this comes up a lot where your passion is what you do because you love it and you want to recharge. But what are those things that you do that give you energy that are not work?

Chris Voss:

Well? I like spontaneous travel. I used to have a Harley. I'm probably going to get one back. Although, the woman who's playing a very important role in my life right now, her mother and a number of years ago made her promise never to ride a motorcycle. So, I haven't broached that subject with her mother yet.

Mark O'Donnell:

Sounds like you have a negotiation. Maybe you can get a coach.

Chris Voss:

Yeah, I may need some coaching through that negotiation. But when I had the bike, I loved to get on the bike and just have no idea where I was going. Just let the motorcycle tell you where I'm going to be and wind up in places I never imagined, even if it was only five minutes away. Or if I take a trip, I love unplanned travel where I just go and just completely discover what it's out there. I mean, to me, that's really cool. That's a lot of fun. And a young lady that I dated, probably now about 10 years ago, she loved a plan every step of the way. And we went on a trip and I'm like let's ditch the plan. Let's go in this direction. And it just didn't work for us. So it was just a difference in core values. I love spontaneity and adventure. Completely unplanned. So that's one of the things that I really enjoy.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah. That's super cool. That sounds a lot of fun. Just buy a ticket, go somewhere, wherever you end up, you end up. Meet a lot of interesting people that way. Right? See different things. Maybe get yourself in a little trouble that you have to get out of. That's fun too.

Chris Voss:

You're taking hostage someplace, right?

Mark O'Donnell:

That's right.

Chris Voss:

Walk into the wrong bar in the south of Philippines and end up being a guest with somebody's providing you free room and board.

Mark O'Donnell:

Maybe that's not the room and board you want though.

Chris Voss:

I mean, we had a guy who was held 18 months in Venezuela a number of years ago. And he spent 18 months hiking in mountains of South America, eating rice. And when he got out, his doctor told him you need to get kidnapped every three years.

Mark O'Donnell:

That's funny. Cool. So as we kind of wrap up here, Chris, is there anything that you would love our listener to know? Any books you would love them to read? What are the tools and tips and tricks that you would want to leave them with?

Chris Voss:

Well, look, if you run an EOS, you're already aligned with the kind of teaching that we're doing. Buy the book and go to our website, BlackSwanLtd.com. And we get a lot of free stuff. We get a free weekly newsletter, which the value isn't because it's free. But the value is because it's actionable. If you subscribe to the newsletter, you will begin to tap into the gold mine that we can bring to you. And wherever you are we got a ton of stuff that's free. So go there. now depending upon what you want to add to your reading to support what you're doing with the US, what you might be doing with us.

Obviously Dan Sullivan's book, The Gap and the Gain, and Who, Not How. Good operating principles, Daniel Coyle's book, The Talent Code For You as a Person to Get Better, and The Culture Code to supplement your thinking around your business. Steven Collier's book, The Rise of Superman and his following book, Stealing Fire. You start tapping into that library of reading, you're going to be inspired. And it's all easily digestible, easily implementable and kind of entertaining to read.

Mark O'Donnell:

Very nice. Very nice. Well, thank you for your time today, Chris. I really appreciate it. I'm grateful for that. Where's the best place for our listener to learn more about you? You gave the Black Swan, the website. If they wanted to contact you, is that the best place or is there LinkedIn? How would you prefer people contact you?

Chris Voss:

Yeah. If you got very specific training/coaching needs you want to explore, find out what we have. Send an email to information, I-N-F-O, at BlackSwanLtd.com, B-L-A-C-K-S-W-A-N-L-T-D, like loving til daylight.com. And whatever you request is it'll get funneled to the right person. If you want training, we got people that specialize in tailoring the training. If you want coaching, we got team members that are

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specialized in tailoring the coaching that you need. Send that answer that inbox and it will go to the right person. We will follow up with you.

Mark O'Donnell:

Yeah, that's perfect. All right, Chris. Thanks again. Thanks for your time.

Chris Voss:

Thanks man. Same to you. I enjoyed being on with you.

Mark O'Donnell:

All right, Chris. We'll see you.

Thank you for listening to the podcast. I hope you got value from today's episode. Remember to ask yourself, how long will you wait until you demand the best for yourself? How long will you wait until you live your ideal life, the EOS life?