



ED TALKS: EPISODE 5

HOW TO TALK POLITICS WITHOUT LOSING YOUR FRIENDS

ED TALKS

TRANSCRIPT

| | |
|---|-----------|
| How to Have a Political Conversation with Friends and Relatives without Losing Your Head (or Your Friends) | 2 |
| How a Homeless Guy Became a Successful Businessman | 3 |
| Why We Genuinely Want to Help Each Other, but Cannot Agree on How to Do It | 8 |
| Does Google = Evil? (aka... Corporations and Politics Today) | 17 |
| The Solution to America's Impending Education Trainwreck | 20 |
| Final Thoughts | 29 |

Powerful Moments in Ed Talks Episode 5: How To Talk Politics Without Losing Your Friends

00:15 - How to Have a Political Conversation with Friends and Relatives without Losing Your Head (or Your Friends) - Seriously... It's Possible

03:10 - Homeless Guy to Successful Businessman (True Story!)

10:30 - Agreeing on Disagreeing: Why We Genuinely Want to Help Each Other, but Cannot Agree How to Do It

24:30 - Does Google = Evil? (aka... Corporations, Conspiracies, and Politics)

29:05 - The Solution to America's Impending Education Trainwreck

41:45 - Final Thoughts

How to Have a Political Conversation with Friends and Relatives without Losing Your Head (or Your Friends)

Do you remember the great presidential battle of 1992? Now you may think I'm talking about George Bush against then governor Bill Clinton, but I'm not.

I'm talking about Kathy Rush versus Aunt Georgie over the dinner table. I saw it right in front of my face. I was 20 years old at the time, and I watched one person advocate for the Republican Party and another person advocate for the Democratic Party. There wasn't a whole lot of consensus in between the two.

And it was the first time I realized... Not everybody agrees, not even in our family. And it was the first time I saw inside my family circle disagreements when it came to politics. Well, maybe in your family it's different, but in most families it's gotten worse.

In fact, every Thanksgiving and every Christmas there are articles all over the internet talking about how you can get along with your family members that you disagree with politically, and the last election didn't make it any better.

But wouldn't you know it?

There's actually a way to have a political conversation with friends and relatives so that by the end of the conversation you're not angry or discouraged, but you actually understand each other better. And I know that because I've lived that.

On today's episode of Ed Talks, I'm going to interview one of my best friends, a good man, and a person who I disagree with on quite a few political issues.

Jabez Lebret and I first met each other about 10, 12 years ago when he came to me as a coaching member. I was actually helping him in his business.

He was so good at what he did online that I actually hired him to start helping me with some of my consulting clients. And he was so good at that, that we actually started a business together, which we grew and then sold.

And now we're just lifelong friends. We get together for breakfast, have a cup of coffee, talk through the issues, maybe have a beer later on that night and talk through the issues. And through it all, even though we didn't always understand each other, and even though we'd

get a little frustrated sometimes, we never got angry. We never called each other dirty words. We never hung up the phone on each other, and we remain lifelong friends.

In today's episode, we're going to talk about how you can have a political conversation but be awesome about it. And I got to tell you about my buddy Jabez, ever since we sold that company he's gone on to do what I called ready, fire, aim. He's a person who sees issues in the world and instead of like most people, when people see issues in the world, they talk about it and whine about it, complain about it, but they never do anything about it.

Jabez is the kind of guy that does something about it and he's got a passion for changing the world of education, and he doesn't just have a passion for doing it, but he's actually doing it. He and his wife right now are starting a new breed of school, and the first one is right here in San Diego. We're going to get to that towards the end of the episode.

We're going to cover a lot of issues very fast, and we're going to have a lot of fun.

How a Homeless Guy Became a Successful Businessman

Ed Rush:

All right, I'm sitting next to my man Jabez, who we've got a fun history. I said in the introduction that we've disagreed on a lot of things politically, but we've never argued and we've always been good friends. And I'm always interested in someone's story, their political formation. Our beliefs are formed a lot of times by the stories of our life. So take me back to when Jabez was like a newborn.

Jabez Le Bret:

I had a pretty tumultuous childhood. My mom's mentally ill and I grew up with her in and out of hospital and it had a pretty dramatic impact on the long run. I look at high school, I ended up homeless when I was 16 and that obviously had a pretty negative impact on my ability to participate in school and ultimately didn't graduate from high school. And I'd say a lot of growing up poor and in that scenario of life definitely shaped a lot of the way that I view things.

Ed Rush:

So you were homeless in high school, but somehow you managed to get into Gonzaga University. Tell me that story. You twisted the arm of the admissions director or something.

Jabez Lebre:

I actually went in twice. The first time that I went in, I had no diploma, I had no SATs, I had no money and I sat down and said, "Hi, I've got nothing. I'd like to go to your university."

They laughed a little bit. I don't blame them. They were being very nice about it. They said, "Hey, you should try the community college down the street." Which is great. I'm a big proponent of community colleges, but it just wasn't the answer for me, not at that time.

I had set an appointment with the dean of admissions the following week, got my GED that weekend, went back in and said, "Hey, I'm going to this school. Period.

You tell me how to get in here because I am going to Gonzaga University for all four years and this is where I want to get my degree and you either let me in or I will find another way." And he said, "All right."

Ed Rush:

He said all right?

Jabez Lebre:

He said, go take your proctor SAT exams this weekend.

Ed Rush:

But you didn't even have the S when you walked into his office.

Jabez Lebre:

No, I just had my GED. Like I had just taken the test.

Ed Rush:

Do you know how many kids had applied to Gonzaga and gotten those little tin letters of rejection because their community service wasn't up. And then you just walked in the office and just said, "I'm going to this school."

Jabez Le Bret:

Years later, I actually asked that very question. I was like, why? I had no money, I had literally nothing and I didn't seem to fit the profile of their traditional student.

And they said one of the reasons that they were excited about having a student like me in the system as a nontraditional student is that I brought to the institution some of that kind of determination that they believe is valuable. Their belief is to help those that are in need and I was in that position.

Ed Rush:

Well, we're going to get to your school in a little bit, but that's kind of your belief, isn't it? That was formed off of that. So you grew up with some difficulties at home and I know more of the stories.

You witnessed some violence in terms of firearm violence.

You also were homeless, and then you talked your way into a great school.

How did your story inform your political beliefs? Because when we first came together like I mentioned in the introduction, we came from polar opposite views.

Jabez Le Bret:

Yes.

Ed Rush:

And yet we still hang out with each other and still like each other. And actually we've come to see each other eye to eye on some things in the last 10 years too, which is interesting, right?

Jabez Le Bret:

We have. Well, it was always professional at the beginning when we first met, and then became friends and still were able to navigate the pathways of conversations and dinners and breakfasts and everything else.

For me politically, I always looked to the institutions that I felt were there to support and help the people like me. And in my family if you will, we're pretty conservative and so they were Pentecostal when I was a kid and I grew up rather conservative.

Ed Rush:

And that wasn't the environment you wanted growing up.

Jabez Le Bret:

Then when I got older I chose my own path. And I would say almost all of them were Republican and I went full board Democrat. Right before I'd even started college and certainly afterwards, and I continued to develop my political beliefs. I leaned in on the Democrat Party.

Ed Rush:

Yeah, and to define full board Democrat, this isn't somebody who just believes You're very active in terms of voter recruitment and getting people out.

When Jabez Le Bret does something, this is something you need to know, when he does something he doesn't write about it and then go, "I feel like I've accomplished something." Like dude goes all in.

Jabez Le Bret:

Yeah. I mean I marched in Boston when we were going into Iraq the first time. I've been to many marches, planned many rallies. I've been as politically active as I can afford the time to be.

Ed Rush:

So let's take this Iraq march. It'd be an interesting place to just pause for a moment...

Part of my story, part of my political story, I grew up in a conservative family. My mom was growing and running businesses and my mom's issue, she didn't like paying excessive taxes. Well again though who does?

I was raised by an entrepreneurial mom, a woman who had this chip on her shoulder because of what she felt was oppressive. And you grow up learning things like that, and you start forming your opinion.

I'm going into the military and I want to take you back to two snapshots. You're in Boston and you're protesting. When was that? 2002? 2003?

Jabez Lebre:

2003.

Ed Rush:

And I'm in the military about to go participate in that. So in that precise moment, if I was walking through Boston that day and I saw your protest, I would have been offended, I would've been angry.

I would have been like, "These freaking non-American (inaudible)." I would have said those things. But now looking back, about 16 years later, I see that you had a point there.

You were seeing things that I wasn't seeing because of some cognitive dissonance.

Jabez Lebre:

And the same too though. I think that I would have looked outside of the march and let's say that you were in your military attire, and I would've said, "There's somebody serving their country and following orders.

They have a job to do and for them, in their minds, they're doing their job to the best of their ability to protect us so that we can do this march." But I just don't think we should be going to this place.

Ed Rush:

And I think that's the interesting thing about this discussion.

I'm not a republican anymore. I think it was probably five years ago, I was sitting right in this recliner right in my office here and **I decided I wasn't going to agree with everything anymore.**

Like take the Iraq war for example, whatever your opinion is on that by the way. We went to war using some faulty intelligence. Let's just say it that way.

Jabez Lebre:

Correct. I think we can agree on that.

Why We Genuinely Want to Help Each Other, but Cannot Agree on How to Do It

Ed Rush:

That's what it was, say it that way. Whether it was intentional, whether it was designed by Halliburton or Dick Cheney, look, we can leave those topics off, but we went to war based on some faulty, either faulty or outdated intelligence. We went to war potentially for the wrong reason. Take that as an example.

So five years ago, I'm sitting there and I realized I can't let my thoughts be formed anymore by what someone else tells me I ought to think about things. And so I took a moment. I took more than a moment. I took several years actually and I went through every single issue and I spent several hours actually pretending I was the other person on the other side who I always thought was evil or dumb.

But if you actually spend enough time in someone's shoes, you start to change your opinions about maybe not the issue by the way, but you do change your opinions about them. Because you realize very few people in the world do things because they're awful and evil. People have a reason for things, you know?

Jabez Lebre:

I feel the same way as my kind of growth in my political views over the years. I look at myself at 22, 23 in very different perspective and certainly over time have developed an

appreciation and empathy that you don't want bad things to happen to people, and I don't either.

And you want people who have needs to be helped, and so do I. I think maybe we just kind of disagree on how to go about it. But that most, all of us feel the same way. We genuinely want to help each other out.

Ed Rush:

If you take an uber left liberal, I mean statistically speaking, we're sort of 45% and 45%. Really it's about 10% and 10% of the extreme right, extreme left. It's actually six and 8%.

But let's just say 10 and 10 and then everyone else kind of floats around the middle on some things.

So let's take poverty for example. You were homeless when you were in high school.

There's not a person, a well meaning person... Look, there's some crazy people, don't get me wrong. There's not a well-meaning person who looks at homelessness and says, "Well that's somebody else's problem."

I mean everyone realizes it's a problem, we just disagree on how to fix the problem. And so do you think part of the solution in our country is coming back to the start, like we all agree it's a problem, now let's talk about some issues. I mean where did we lose the dialogue?

Jabez Lebre:

That's an important first step, is that if we can find some common ground, we can then open up a dialogue. Instead of coming at it as you're wrong, if I step into the conversation right at the gate saying, "Whatever you say it's going to be wrong, no matter what." And our politicians certainly are good at this.

Ed Rush:

Yeah, they are great at that.

Jabez Le Bret:

And the media makes a lot of money talking this way. But I think in reality, if we sit down and talk about like, "Okay, do we agree this is a problem?"

Great, we have now found a common place to start. And then we can say, "Well, how are we going to fix it?"

Ed Rush:

I think actually the second question.

The first question is huge, right? What do we agree on? Because we can start there. And by the way, you can do this with every issue. Even the most divisive ones, I'm telling you, I've done this and you can start with something you agree with.

The next question becomes the harder question because the next question is one of two things. It's either, "Who should be responsible for fixing this?" Or "Who's going to pay for it?" And that's where I think we actually can agree more on the second question than we do now because a lot of times the next question, I don't care if you're Republican or Democrat, the next answer goes, "Well, the government should."

And almost always that leads to a faulty solution. We're going to talk about education a little bit and how we spend a lot of money on education for zero results. We've spent a lot of money in our government on a lot of things with zero results?

We're both entrepreneurs and we've seen entrepreneurial solutions. So you've got one we're going to talk about in the education world but do you see that as a solution to a lot more of our problems than just the ones like education?

Jabez Le Bret:

Yeah, I think that we are kind of entering into that, I'd say an entrepreneurial social age where we're seeing entrepreneurship begin to find its way into social issues. And we're seeing some great solutions solving all sorts of problems from hunger, homelessness, water, fresh drinking water globally to domestic issues, to solving climate issues.

I mean those are all important, big, huge issues. We generally maybe lean into the government a little too much, and even being a Democrat I would be the first to say that

certainly regulations aren't always the answer and the government isn't always the one who's going to solve the problem.

Ed Rush:

Yeah. Well, I mean the track record isn't all that good.

Jabez Lebre:

No.

Ed Rush:

And by the way, just getting them to agree to do something is difficult, without shoving money into a whole bunch of other places in the meantime.

Jabez Lebre:

It's virtually impossible. Nothing gets done clean. It's all got a ton of peripheral stuff that has nothing to do with the actual problem you're trying to solve.

Ed Rush:

A friend of mine is a lobbyist in Louisiana and he wrote a book called *Laws and Sausages*. You wouldn't want to know how either one is made. So anyway, let's talk about the Democratic Party for a second.

Three videos ago, I described this fictional but real probably man in Boston. He's 67 years old. He's followed the Red Sox for his entire life, not the Cubs. He's voted Democrat. He was a Labor Democrat. He was eight when John F. Kennedy said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

And over the last 10 years, really probably more like over the last three or four years, he's seen the party really shift off of the beliefs that he has. I mean, this is a traditional guy who goes to Catholic mass every week. Do you think the party has left him? Do you think your party has departed from the traditional core Democrat or do you think it's heading in the direction that needs to go, or both?

Jabez Le Bret:

It's gone.

Ed Rush:

Really?

Jabez Le Bret:

From what it was originally standing for. I think that we've seen... The Democrat party used to support what I would say was the working people. The individual trying to do their best to better themselves and keep things moving forward with an eye on making sure that those who are less fortunate or less capable, get a hand to reach down to help pull them back up.

And somehow now it seems that there's, I don't know if it's social media, I don't know if it's 24/7 news cycle. I mean it's probably a combination of a lot of things that has pushed the Democratic Party to start talking about things like \$1,000 a month for every single person, or completely eradicating the healthcare system altogether.

It is so complicated, you can't just do that. That's not realistic. And the solutions that we're coming up with now seem pandering to maybe that tiny far side that's maybe the loudest, but not necessarily where we all probably sit.

Ed Rush:

Yeah. I'm with you. I'll tell you, I'll go to the side that I came from. I watched Reagan say, "Tear down this wall." And I watched Reagan say government wasn't the solution to the problem, government was the problem. I think I was in high school and cheering along with this great communicator.

Then the Iraq war, I watched George Bush, the second George Bush spend like twice as much money as Bill Clinton did in eight years.

And I was upset about that spending. You have to look at the numbers. It wasn't twice as much. It was a lot more. It was more. And I thought that's not the Republican Party I was interested in. I wasn't interested in the one that took the money and spent it wildly.

Ed Rush:

I thought that was the other one. That's the way I had been trained. And so we look interestingly at the party that you came out of, the party that I came out of, and neither one represents the place where we came from.

Jabez Lebre:

And that makes talking about problems challenging.

Ed Rush:

Yeah, because you're like which one? Which one are we talking about?

Jabez Lebre:

And it becomes almost trench warfare at that point. Where it's no longer sitting and having a conversation, it's now I'm on one side of the fence and you are on the other side. And there is no middle ground to be had. And that's a dangerous place to be in.

Ed Rush:

Basically every two years you have the Republican and Democratic Party split into two factions and fight each other for six to 12 months, and then they get together and fight the other group for six months and then there's an election and then they repeat the process again.

Jabez Lebre:

Well now it's almost 24 months.

Ed Rush:

We're recording this after the first round of democratic debates and we're a year and a half out.

By the way, I want to get back into the parties real quick, but before I do that, I want to go back to the original point.

How do two guys like us disagree on some issues? How do we get together and have a beer or we can have a cup of coffee over breakfast and still like each other when we're done talking about something that we still disagree with? How do we do that? How's that possible?

Jabez Le Bret:

I think that we both have always thought maybe there's something I could learn from the other person's perspective. Because what you talked about earlier about when you were sitting back and putting yourself in somebody else's shoes for a while, you can do that face to face, and we've never let the conversation...

We've gotten frustrated, I think, at points in conversations and we've had some long conversations about politics and some of the problems that we're trying to solve in making this country a better place for everybody. And sometimes I've shaken my head and been like, "I just don't see how that could possibly work."

And I have to ask a follow-up question. Like, "Help me understand how that would even be possible." And sometimes we're left with, "Well, I don't know that I have the full answer. Let me figure that out."

Ed Rush:

That's an okay answer.

Jabez Le Bret:

That is okay.

Ed Rush:

I'll tell you, this is one of the things, as you know, I'm putting together the third party and planning on running for president and everything. So one of the things that cracks me up is as a presidential candidate, I don't think you need to have the answer to every question.

How do we solve the healthcare crisis? You know what? I'm not sure the exact answer, but I know if I get the right people together, we can find it. That should be an amazing answer.

Like in business, we never hire someone because they have the answer to every single question until they run for office and then what you end up with, so right now the political

candidates who are running for president on PolitiFact, which is hysterical to watch, are literally anywhere between 40 to 60% truthful.

Jabez Le Bret:

Because it's impossible to be anywhere near 100% if you're being expected to be so knowledgeable on so many things. And that's not what a leader is.

A leader isn't someone who knows all of the answers to everything.

A leader is someone who is able to bring people together to find solutions to problems.

Ed Rush:

That's right.

Jabez Le Bret:

So we should start looking for leaders and stop looking for people who can just solve it. Because it doesn't work.

Ed Rush:

Hey man, that's good. Start looking for leaders. I talked about that in the first episode. By the way, if you haven't watched Horse Manure Leadership, episode one of Ed Talks.

Jabez Le Bret:

Best title.

Ed Rush:

Jabez sent me a text that day and he's like, "Horse Manure Leadership." That's it. That's all he could say. I have a great production team. I had a different name for it. It was worse. And she's like, "I think Horse Manure Leadership." I'm like, "Yes, that's the one."

All right, so I want to jump onto the political side, but I want to talk about corporations.

I'll take you back two years ago, the day after Donald Trump was elected, I was at a big event on the east coast. 90% of the people in the event were liberal progressive leaning. So there's a very small majority.

Jabez Le Bret:

It was like a funeral.

Ed Rush:

It was, dude. I'm not kidding. There were people crying out loud, like you know when you go to a funeral and people are wailing, like literally there's people crying.

Jabez Le Bret:

We didn't take that loss very well.

Ed Rush:

And I'm like, "Wow, they're like really upset about this."

Jabez Le Bret:

I think in sports we learned you're supposed to lose gracefully, like you're supposed to keep your head a little bit, and we didn't. We lost it.

Ed Rush:

It was like, it's strange. I was there for two and a half days and in two days it went from disbelief, to weeping and wailing, to anger.

Jabez Le Bret:

Oh, we went through the five stages of grief.

Ed Rush:

Like really quickly, and then by the second half day they were making plans. I'm like, "Wow, that happened quickly. They're like working on this."

Anyway, I was talking to somebody who is a very high executive at Google. And I was just talking with her, we weren't having a political conversation. But she wasn't doing well, and I said, "Are you okay?" Because I just cared about her as a person. And she goes, "I think I need to go home." And I said, "Why?"

And she goes, "Well, my whole community at Google is in mourning right now."

And I felt for her by the way, because I understand what it feels like to have everyone around you in such agony, even though I didn't share that particular thing.

But later on and reflecting on the conversation I thought there's one of the largest corporations in the world that now believes we just elected Hitler and they're all in mourning, and that has to affect how the corporation operates. And we've seen that.

By the way, I'm mixed on this, and I'll share with you my opinion. I wonder what your opinion is regarding corporations and their wielding of influence and power in the political sphere.

Does Google = Evil? (aka... Corporations and Politics Today)

Jabez Lebet:

I don't think we're going to get away from it. Corporations are powerful, they have a lot of money, they employ a lot of people, they have a large economic impact on communities and so they're interwoven into the system.

An expectation that they wouldn't be a part of the political side as well is unrealistic. Whether that's out in the open or behind closed doors. I'd rather it's out in the open. I prefer that approach.

Ed Rush:

I'm with you on that.

Jabez Le Bret:

If it's going to be, if it's going to happen, I'd rather we have some visibility into it instead of it happening behind closed doors. With that said, I think that corporations should not forget that they have a lot of stakeholders.

Ed Rush:

You got that right man.

Jabez Le Bret:

And they sometimes do. And I'm all about political activism obviously. I'm an active person doing that as an individual. Unlike some other people, I don't believe that corporations are individuals. They might be on a tax form, but I don't think that they're actually people.

I think that they have a responsibility to all of the stakeholders of the organization.

That's not just their employees, that's their shareholders, that's their leadership, they're consumers of their products and they should be a little bit more cautious.

Ed Rush:

I asked a hard question and in full transparency, I don't have a great answer. I don't have a solid answer to that. Again, it comes back to this whole, you have to have the answer to everything when you're running for president.

Jabez Le Bret:

Free market repercussions are pretty swift these days.

Ed Rush:

That's exactly where I lean on. Because ultimately you have a business, I have a business. We at one point had a business together. Google is a business. It's a company. And I don't like the idea of the government getting involved in businesses. It tends to create problems. Go back to 2008 and you can see how that creates problems.

Jabez Le Bret:

Look at the Nike situation with the tennis shoe, where Colin Kaepernick said, you shouldn't have that tennis shoe be released because of racial tension, this, that or the other because of the symbolism of the flag.

The problem is Colin Kaepernick, although I may personally tend to agree with some of the stuff that he does, he is not an expert nor a studied historian in these things, and maybe shouldn't be the one that is consulting the organization, as the Anti-Defamation League who does retain databases of all of this information came out and said, "Actually, that's not really correct."

I think, are we really to a point now where that's how we're getting our information and our choosing how corporations are choosing to interject themselves in the political setup.

Ed Rush:

Take Nike as an example, I have Nike clothes, but I didn't like the move with the flag. I thought, "Man, it's like the 4th of July and it's a flag." You know what I'm saying?

And when they did that, I thought, I have a lot of choices in golf gear man, and I don't need to get Nike. And it's not like I'm going to lose out, I'm just gonna wear something different.

In one sense, the corporation has a freedom to be able to do what they want as long as it's writing more ethical and not horrible. At the same time, you have the right as a consumer to go buy from someone else or go use a different search engine.

The greatest thing about our world right now, not the greatest, but one of the greatest things is when you go to a restaurant, you walk into the restaurant and on the wall, as you walk into the restaurant, there's this sign and it almost always says A, and it's the health grade, right?

So every year somebody comes with a clipboard and you know the restaurants on their best behavior when they get that thing.

But 365 days out of the year, people walk in with Yelp, and they give it a grade too. And I don't make my restaurant decision based on the grade on the wall. I've never done that. I've never been like, "Well, maybe we should go to Ray's Delicatessen. They've got an A."

I've never made the decision, but I have, because of what someone says in Yelp. And so because of the fast moving democracy, and that's a great word by the way in business, democracy, we can make decisions as consumers really fast.

And because of that, we can vote with our money, with who we agree with, which is the reason why sometimes I think the government should just stay out of it because by the time they make a decision on Google it's going to be too late.

The market will have decided a hundred times over.

Jabez Le Bret:

And they've already been outdated. By the time a decision comes out that technology has already moved on, whatever it is. I did see a restaurant once, take the B and then write the word breakfast.

Ed Rush:

Best?

Jabez Le Bret:

So they just added extra letters to the bottom, so smart.

The Solution to America's Impending Education Trainwreck

Ed Rush:

Let's move to the topic that I want to wrap with, which is education. I'm going to give you a statistic and then I want to ask you what you're doing about it. According to recent congressional testimony, math and reading scores in the national assessment of education progress test "had been almost stagnant for 17-year-olds for final product of our elementary and secondary system."

Almost stagnant by the way, means the number I looked at was 30 years ago, the average grade was at 355 out of whatever the number was and now it's at 357.

During that time, in 1979, Jimmy Carter created and launched the Department of Education. Department of Education typically spent about 105 billion, with a B, dollars a year, and for 30 years test scores have remained the same. What's up with that?

Jabez Le Bret:

We are not doing our job very well.

Ed Rush:

Like using our money wisely.

Jabez Le Bret:

When you look at the current education model that we have, it is incredibly outdated. And I was reminded, I used to be a financial analyst after I got out of college.

I remember running into departments that would spend their entire budget for the whole year. And I would look at the department and I was like, "What exactly do you do? Where is this money going?" And they're like, "Well, it's just for our budget. If we don't spend it we don't get it next year."

How many offices still exist in public education that are simply spending their budget every year because they don't want to lose their jobs? I mean, I understand and I can relate to that. And sometimes you get kind of lost in your own shuffle.

Maybe you've not realized that what you're doing isn't as necessary or isn't really where we should be with education today. And so the Department of Education I don't think has done an incredible job of helping reshape how we teach and what we measure.

Ed Rush:

Yeah, and things are moving faster. So I mentioned in the beginning of the show that Jabez is not the kind of guy that just talk about things. We were joking one day via text and I said something like, "Yeah, we should just complain about this for a while and never do anything about it." And the joke was he always does something about it.

So you saw, man, there's an issue with education. You also recognized that those issues almost always affect lower income or disadvantaged kids the most.

Jabez Le Bret:

Yeah. It's disproportionate.

Ed Rush:

Because if you have plenty of resources you can find a great school to go to, you can get great supplementation at home or whatever.

Jabez Le Bret:

Not every student that has money does, but it is more likely that you will have-

Ed Rush:

So what's your assertion man? What are you doing?

Jabez Le Bret:

We are just completely reshaping the whole model.

I wish that it was as easy as an afterschool program or a little something that you can interject into the current system. I wish it was as easy as charter schools.

I wish it was easy as, "Oh, we just need public schools to just change a couple of little knobs and everything's going to work out great." The problem is that, that's like a train with set tracks.

And those tracks are going this way period. And yet you can change the cars on the train, but you're still ending up at the same place. And that's not where we need to be. We have to redefine and adjust how we'd go about delivering the education, how we go about measuring.

I remember when I was in school taking math in grade school, and the teacher was like, "What? Are you going to carry around a calculator with you everywhere you go?" Well, surprisingly, yes.

Ed Rush:

As a matter of fact I am right now. You're going to have the internet in your pocket? Something like that you can pick up words whenever you want to?

Jabez Le Bret:

Pretty much. And it's not that we do away with literacy in math and history and all of those education subjects, we change how we teach them and why, and what are we trying to teach.

We need to start moving towards a competency-based model where you don't just understand how to regurgitate an answer, you understand the reasoning behind the answer.

Ed Rush:

So you're launching a school?

Jabez Le Bret:

We are.

Ed Rush:

And you're just two months away from opening actually with your first class of 20 students.

What does Sisu Academy look like compared to could be the local public school or the local private school.

How is it different?

Jabez Le Bret:

This first program is targeting specifically underserved students. So we've added an interesting component which is boarding for underserved youth for free, so that they have a place to stay in a safe environment.

Not every school we open is going to be boarding. I think that fundamentally what separates us is a focus on competencies for one, a focus on skills outside of the textbook traditional core skills, so public speaking, financial literacy.

Ed Rush:

Really?

Jabez Le Bret:

Yeah.

Ed Rush:

Wow.

Jabez Le Bret:

Heaven forbid.

Ed Rush:

The things you need.

Jabez Le Bret:

The things you might need that actually out in the real world. And grit and determination and teaching students how to fail. Like if you ever notice we go ABCD and we skip E and we go to F.

Ed Rush:

Yes.

Jabez Le Bret:

It's the only letter grade that stands for a word, failure.

Ed Rush:

Is that why you skip the F?

Jabez Le Bret:

Well it must. I have never been able to find another answer for it. That doesn't make any sense. Like why would you do that unless it was on purpose?

Ed Rush:

You got some Fs.

Jabez Le Bret:

Yeah. I got tons of Fs. And any entrepreneur would know that failure is a part of growth. It is a part of a very important...

Anybody, literally you go to any adult talk about how did you get to where you're at today? They're going to talk about some of their failures and that's because that's part of life.

Well, we need to teach them how do you fail appropriately? How do you fail the right way, intelligently. And then entrepreneurship is a huge underpinning of our program because our students need to learn what it means to be an entrepreneur.

That doesn't mean they're all going to start their own businesses, but those same skill sets are applicable to any job.

Ed Rush:

Absolutely.

Jabez Le Bret:

If you want to be a stay at home mom or a stay at home dad, entrepreneurship is a set of skills that you will take with you and will crush whatever you do.

Ed Rush:

Yeah. And as a business owner, we hire innovators. You hire people who think independently. I'm on the road for the next 10 days. I don't want to spend any of that 10 days managing processes that should have already been managed. And you want to have people that be able to do that on their own, which is great.

Jabez Le Bret:

We kicked that can down the line, right? So we say K-12.

Well, their job is to get you to college and when they get to college they'll figure it out there and then they get into college and they're like, "Well, okay, we're going to give you the framework to then go into life and then go learn it and then maybe go get your masters or whatever."

Everybody keeps saying the next phase is when you're going to learn this, and I don't understand why we're not stepping back and saying, "Well, maybe we should be starting way earlier." And then that's just the way that it is.

And if you choose to go to college, great. If you don't, okay, but let's start making good citizens that are well informed and capable of tackling problems. Like we graduate game changers that are problem-solving people. That's our goal.

Ed Rush:

Tell me a story.

Jabez Lebre:

You've got some new students coming in to do-

Ed Rush:

Just give me an example of maybe one or two and tell me their story.

Jabez Lebre:

For all intents and purposes, if you ran into them on the street, they're just a normal... You know, we're all girls. Our first school's all girls. They're just a normal 13-year-old girl, right? Walking down the street. One of them, her mom's in prison, her dad's a mechanic. She's got two older sisters who are in and out of the juvie system.

And her dad, we do home visits and family visits with every family. And he just said, "She can't go along the same path. I can't let that happen." And I see that because she's not getting any support at school and he's doing his best, but he's really struggling. We have another student, it's really funny she calls herself a little extra.

Jabez Lebre:

She's got a big personality. Like this student has a big personality and because of that she was getting bullied constantly at school. And it got so bad. Her mom's a single mom, dad's out of the picture, they live with their grandma and she just couldn't handle it anymore at school, so her mom pulled her out.

And her mom's like, "I don't know what to do." Her mom makes \$35,000 a year. And in California, that's not a livable wage here and it's really tough for them to have options and to know where to go.

And they need a program that embraces the student for who they are and give that student an outlet to express themselves.

Ed Rush:

So school's free. You're dependent on raising money, I think right now, to be able to get this thing launched. And I think it's been interesting.

My wife and I have been donors to the school, I know several of your other donors, the folks that we used to run businesses with and stuff. And I get a great big smile on my face because the political spectrum of your donor base is literally completely all over the map.

I mean, you've got some uber rights and a whole bunch of lefts and a lot in the middle, and apparently that didn't stop people from supporting a cause that was worthwhile, right?

Jabez Le Bret:

Not at all. It's been interesting. There's people that we've been in conversations with, some foundations, we're in conversation with. If you'd asked me 10 years ago if I would be talking to them about-

Ed Rush:

But apparently they're interested in helping educating.

Jabez Le Bret:

Yeah. And the more I've gotten to know these foundations, the more I've understood that some of the things I thought maybe weren't 100% accurate about what they're actually all about.

And I'm learning that about a lot of our donors where I just didn't know that they really were into this thing for this reason.

And that they want to help students find their way in life. They want to help families who are in need and struggling. And it's been humbling to get to have that sort of interaction.

Ed Rush:

Go back to our original premise. So you've got a dad who's got three kids. Two of them are in and out of juvie and the other one he really wants to help.

He's looking at you and he's like, "If there's anything that you can do, it would be great because I really want her life to be different." And if you take a person on the far right of the political spectrum and the far left of the political spectrum and you put them as an observer in that scenario, there's not a person who would say that's not a problem.

They would all identify the problem and we'd start to diverge a little bit on what to do about it. But the thing that I really want to hammer home, especially as we wrap up this interview, and I've been joking about this, but Jabez is the guy who saw that situation.

Like most people, and I'm going to count myself sometimes in this, most people see that and then go off to Starbucks by \$4 cup of coffee and then whine about it and complain about it and then you go home and feel like you did something about it.

I heard a guy from India and he called America the land where once someone has learned something, they feel that they have done something.

You know what, I'm like, that's actually really interesting, right? But you're the guy that did something about it and I think that's really important as we kind of wrap this up is, yeah, we don't agree on everything, but we do agree about doing things about things. Because ultimately your solution, you're going to find through trial and error, trial and error, and finally you're going to hit it and go, "That's the one."

And you're going to see the success that you want and then you're going to multiply it about a thousand or 100,000 times or I don't know how many times you want to multiply across the world, right? That is the vision, right?

Jabez Lebre:

Absolutely. We're in this to help that part of our world. There are lots of places where people can be passionate about what they're passionate about. And I encourage everybody I run into now is to take some time to put in some thought, not just go pack a bag of groceries or school supplies, and those are important needs too, those volunteerings are important.

But use the skills that you have, whatever those skills are. Whether that's a trade skill, whether you're a good mechanic, whether you're good at wood building, whether you're an entrepreneur or a doctor or whatever skills and give those skills. And so I sold my company and my wife quit her job and we went full time on this two years ago to start a nonprofit where we're not making any money specifically to put our skills at work.

Ed Rush:

Yeah, man, that's amazing. I want you to think about this. The company that we started that you recently sold, that was a seven figure company when you left it. It wasn't like small potatoes, but you did it for a reason and you did it for a purpose and a passion and I love it.

I want you to tell the listeners and viewers how they can find out more about your school and if they want to get involved on a donor level, this wasn't part of our agreement coming into the interview, but I do want people to know because I'm going to get questions about it anyway. Tell them a little bit about where they can get involved and then we'll put a link on the lower third.

Jabez Lebet:

Definitely, www.SisuAcademy.org. And Sisu is Finnish. There's no direct English translation, but it stands for the concepts of grit, determination, perseverance, and stick-to-it-ness.

Ed Rush:

That's cool.

Jabez Lebet:

Which I think is a skill that we want all of our kids to have.

Final Thoughts

Ed Rush:

So that's www.SisuAcademy.org. At the very least, look, it may not be right for you to donate financially now, but at least hit the website and learn a little bit more about the initiative because the first three episodes of this show were called "What's Wrong with America and How to Fix It".

And part of it is identifying what's wrong, but the next part is fixing it. And you've done a really good job of identifying what's wrong, interestingly, like I said, in a very nonpartisan way, and he's got a way to fix it. All right, so we're going to wrap up, but before I do that, any last minute thoughts on anything that we've talked about today?

Jabez Le Bret:

I would say I encourage people to find people who have opposing political views, pick one issue that you can at least agree is a problem and then have a cup of coffee or a beer. It's a great exercise.

Ed Rush:

I have a friend of mine who lives in a bubble. And we were talking about something and the way that her eyes went back and forth, I'm like... And I go, "Let me ask you a question. How many of your friends or the people you follow online approve of the president?" And she goes, "None."

And I go, "Statistically like anywhere between 40 and 43 people on any given week say they approve. So if you're not following and of these 43% people, you're not getting an accurate slice." And by the way, it's true for both sides.

Ed Rush:

And I love what you just said. Find someone you disagree with, get a cup of coffee and seek like... I think it's Covey who says, seek to understand, not to be understood. Seek first to understand, not to be understood. All right.

That's my man Jabez Lebet, checkout Sisu Academy. My Man, I love you and I like you both of those things together, and I'm so proud of what you've done, man. It is just and honor to be a part of this movement. I am looking forward to the day, 5-10 years from now where you are Man of the Year. I appreciate you.

That's Ed Talks. We'll see you next week.

This is what I believe, and I'll talk to you soon.