

Episode No. 1

Attentive, Responsive, and Kind feat. Dean Peter Rodriguez

[00:00] **Intro:** Today on Owl Have You Know:

[00:44] **Christine:** In his six years as dean, there have been no shortage of challenges—from Hurricane Harvey to a pandemic and a deep freeze. Rice Business Dean Peter Rodriguez not only led the school through them, but has even managed to foster some major growth milestones along the way. Today, he talks about the future of the business school, who are his mentors, and a new appointment that will give him a front-row seat to what's happening in the economy.

We are so pleased to have Dean Peter Rodriguez from Rice Business with us today on Owl Have You Know. Thank you so much for joining us.

[01:18] **Peter:** It is my pleasure, Christine. Thank you for having me. I feel so special.

[01:21] **Christine:** Well, we're so glad to have you. We know that the past couple of years have been just unprecedented at Rice Business. As you're wrapping up the second year, we've seen COVID, the ups and downs. Just how are things going as you're wrapping up this year and getting ready for another graduation?

[01:37] **Peter:** They're going really well. I think, in many ways, we're seeing a return to normalcy. And that means both trying to prevent COVID from being a problem, but also trying to live with it. And that's got our optimism in a place where it hasn't been for a couple of years. I think two years of being in a short-term thinking mindset has been difficult—for many people, taxing. We've tried, adapted, learned, tried, adapted, learned. And now, I think what we'd like

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

to do is to be able to take some of that mind share and put it back on the longer-term strategies and the relationships that we'd like to work harder on. So, I think everybody's feeling quite good.

The other side is the job market is looking good for most of our graduates. And that makes them feel really comforted, too, that all of this work and all the struggle will pay off in a way that they hoped when they first joined the program. So, it's a good time. And we're in a good position.

[02:32] **Christine:** I was finishing up the executive program at the end of 2020. And so, I think, for me, one of the things that really impressed me was how quickly the school was able to pivot to online learning. And I forget what the number was of how many courses were moved remotely. And that just amazed me. It had to be something that the school obviously had never done before. But at the same time, it proved to me just the readiness of Rice Business to take on whatever may come their way.

[03:00] **Peter:** Thank you for saying that. It was an extraordinarily difficult time two years ago. You may recall that, in February of '20, we had one of the first COVID cases in Houston on the Rice campus. We had a person in one of our buildings, and they'd been exposed and diagnosed. And so, within about two weeks, it became clear that we would have to change very quickly. And the president sent out a message. And I think, within 48 hours in early March, late February, maybe, we had our first online courses up. It was essential to do. It was strange. I think everybody thought, is this going to last? Is this an overreaction? We immediately begin to think about the end of the year. And if you can remember all the challenges and thinking, well, gee, are we going to graduate in person? Are we going to get to take those final global field experience trips? And from the professor's side, do I really have to teach this way? It was strange, but we worked together. We pulled a lot of late nights and long weekends and got it done.

And so, interestingly, I think, as soon as we had a handle on the problem and had clarity about how long we'd be in that space, people rallied, resources were put to the test quickly, but we

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

got there. By the end of the semester, I think we had a reasonably smooth end. Then, we had an online graduation type that was a nice bridge, I think, to the future when we could do it in person. But it was a tough time. I'm glad it's in the past.

[04:24] **Christine:** You've been dean since 2016. And I want to talk about some of the highlights at the business school in the time that you've been there—doubling enrollment, increasing faculty by 30%, introducing the first online degree at Rice, renovating McNair Hall, which I think some of that still may be going on, along with getting through Harvey and COVID. That's a lot in six years. Is there one thing in particular that really sticks out in your mind, maybe, that you're the most proud of?

[04:54] **Peter:** That's a good question and a hard one to answer. You listed a lot of those. I'm most proud of the resilience of the organization to have managed all those adaptations in that period of time. I think, when you look at it, Harvey was a great test. And when I thought we passed really well, it evidenced how tight-knit the community was.

Then, when we started to think about our possibilities, I've always said Rice had these great strategic foundations for our business school. We thought we could grow. We could grow the faculty, grow national significance. But it meant, of course, really stressing the organization, asking people to do a lot, launch new programs, address new markets, manage it all while delivering excellence, trying to do lots of things, build a bigger class, a more diverse class, a more successful class, and then growing the faculty, which is the foundation upon which most everything is built. That resilience and the ability to keep coming back and keep doing more was really a result of a great teamwork, a lot of good leadership, support at the university, support from the alums. That's what I'm proudest of.

And then the freeze was an interesting little twist. We had little events like that that were big events. But in this grand scheme of things, it felt like, oh, that's not so bad. It was just one minor catastrophe. COVID was longer and has been more exhausting. But that's what gives me confidence. The ability of our teams to be resilient and continue to grow means our future is bright. I'm happy about that.

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

[06:21] **Christine:** Definitely another one that everyone endured. And I think one of the interesting things about leading through these, the students are actually getting some real-time learning because that's what you're teaching in business school, is the ability to react to unplanned unanticipated events and pivot. And how do you pass that on to students, like, this is how we handle it, and this is how you can learn from it?

[06:43] **Peter:** That's a good question. I think, sometimes, when looking at education or thinking about business school, people think, "Well, I'm going to get the formula to solve every problem," or there's a script, and somewhere I can go and find out, well, this is what you do in the event X, Y or Z happens. It doesn't work that way. In large part, what you're training to do is to be prepared for things that you weren't prepared for, to be ready for things that were unforeseeable, and to have that ability to think clearly, mobilize a team, stick true to a mission or some objectives, and hold to some values while you do the very best. And it's a challenge to do.

I like to say you have to learn to be comfortable when you're uncomfortable. And what that means is, in the midst of a crisis like that,

And so, in those moments, you're exactly right. We usually tell students, "We're working through this. We're making some decisions now. And we're in the process of trying to make the best decisions going forward, given the time we have, given the urgency of the situation." And that's a challenge. So, in COVID, there was a good example. We had COVID, which was really, let's say, disequilibrating, some nicer word than a source of panic or tough or exhausting. But by the summer, we also had George Floyd being buried in Houston. And we had this great need to get together to talk about the meaning and the significance of this, what was happening in the country. But we were all remote.

Well, it felt like a bit of a gut punch. You're like, well, geez, here we are, almost crippled from our ability to do what we normally do well, which is to get together and talk about things. And now, we can't quite do that. But you pivot again. And everybody was in that situation. And in many ways, every organization in the world had to figure out what we did. And that was a great

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

moment for students to recognize, too, "That's what I'm training for. That's what I'm being prepared for." And that's what this education is about.

[09:04] **Christine:** In talking about leadership, I know you've talked about, maybe, your style, your personality trait being more of an introvert. Can you talk a little bit about, maybe, the challenges of that? Maybe, how you found it to be a benefit? And I know Professor Brent Smith would be particularly interested in this as we covered this in his coursework.

[09:23] **Peter:** Sure. Well, I'll give it a shot. I've taken all the same Myers-Briggs test and the OCEAN test like everyone else. And they usually come out INTJ or on the border between I and E. I think that the misunderstanding about introversion is that it's about—they think it's about, well, you don't like being around people or you don't like being in crowds or you're shy. I've never had that fear. I never worried about speaking in front of large audiences or talking about what I like. And I enjoy all of our social gatherings a lot.

My introversion is really just that I recharge when I'm by myself and studying or thinking about issues. That's when I feel the most reawakened and alive. And that's how I get myself ready for things. I like to say, when I speak, I do my very best to not use any notes, which is terrifying. But I've found that, if I'm prepared enough in advance, I feel better about what I do in that moment. But I have to go away by myself a little bit and think, well, what do I really think about that subject? What do I really want to say?

And that's rejuvenating for me. I like that part of what I do. And I like reading. And it doesn't take a lot of time, but I have to have a little time to get back my sense of understanding of the world and the process. It doesn't take that long, but I like that part. And I think being a student, if you've ever been a student long enough, you have to spend a lot of time studying in the library by yourself and poring over subjects. And that suited me really well. It's still part of who I am.

[10:52] **Christine:** I want to talk about the words "attentive," "responsive" and "kind," and how these core values come about to you and how they're really central to Rice Business.

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

[11:05] **Peter:** Sure. I remember coming up with that around the time of Harvey. And it was a part of this contemplation about, what's distinctive about us? Who are we? What do we really hold to? And when I got here, I had lots of discussions with people in the school as alums, on the staff, on the faculty. And they love the place. And they would frequently describe the benefits of Rice as "We're really small. The classes are small. People get to know each other." And I like that. It's certainly true. And people do recall that. They'll say, "I felt known. I felt seen, etc." But I didn't think that it quite captured all the ways that we want it to. How do we treat each other? What does it mean?

There are downsides to small, too, which we hear from some prospective students. They'd say, "Well, maybe, our network is small," or, "Maybe, we just haven't been as successful. After all, Harvard is huge in the MBA space, etc." So, really spending more time in the organization, I could tell what the benefits of small were, or what the benefits of the attitudes were. And it was that we had the luxury of being able to understand the student experience better than anyone else. We could really focus on them. We could work in groups that would speak to each other often enough, that work together enough, that they can understand the process, well, this is what's happening in real time.

And then we could respond to it. We understood what was happening better than anyone else. And we could respond to that quickly and say, "Here's why," or "Here's what. And here's what we're going to do about this." It doesn't always mean you say yes, but it does mean you're responsive, because that's how you demonstrate value to someone, that they're respected, that they matter to you.

And then there was the kindness. And that, really, is what came out during Harvey, which was that people just cared so deeply about each other, in part because of the attentiveness and responsiveness, that they could be really empathetic and generous with the resources we have. And Rice is fortunate to have great resources.

So, those came together. There was no pun intended about ark being something you float upon in a flood. But ARK was a way to say we have this in our community. Let's talk about it.

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

Let's hold it as these three cherished values and way that we treat each other. And we're going to be attentive, responsive and kind at everything we do with every stakeholder that we have. And so, it wasn't an invention of something we had to aspire to necessarily. It was an encapsulation of who we were in a way to focus that. So, I was—I can't remember when exactly it came to me, but when it finally came out, I thought those are the ones, ARK. And three is easy. Everybody can remember three.

[13:45] **Christine:** And you've had the opportunity to actually be in the classroom, teaching a few courses on leadership. I know Brené Brown has actually been one of your guest speakers. How important is it to bring those outside thought leaders, experts in their field, into the classroom and let students meet them firsthand? And also, your experience in that classroom as well?

[14:08] **Peter:** It was fantastic and critically important. And we need to do it again. One of the biggest advantages I noticed about Rice was, in the middle of this large city, a hugely commercial city, but city with lots of talent around it. I remember I came early in 2016. And I met so many business leaders running around the Rice external track or coming through the campus. That never happened to me before. I was at a great school at the University of Virginia. And I've been to lots of schools around the country. And they're not in the middle of a city that way. And so, they don't have the level of talent around, the level of leadership. So, bringing them from the city into Rice is a huge advantage.

And there's nothing quite like it. I think, oftentimes, we think, well, this is just a leader talking about war stories and how valuable is that. That sometimes happens. But almost never when it's set up in the right way. Those leaders come in, and they make an impression upon you. They get your attention. They get your focus. And they can tell you about the lived experiences of doing what it is we're trained to do. And that's the compliment to what happens academically in the classroom. Professors, and being one, I'm really fond of them, and I like what we do. But there's a limit to how much we can contribute. Those leaders can contribute something essential that almost no one else can. And I think the students get enormous value about it.

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

Brené coming in, a local star, someone who thought critically about leadership, who had a voice or had a vision, made a huge impact on our students. But we also had Jim Hackett and Jason Few and civic leaders around the city come in and talk about how they managed and how they dealt with large organizations, whether they were not-for-profits or publicly traded. And that's extremely valuable. And I know students loved it. And likely so, I do too.

[15:58] **Christine:** I can speak for myself. I loved the guest speakers. And just getting some insight from different industries and getting into the mind of that leader and seeing where they're coming from. And that brings me to my next question, in looking over your bio, you've described yourself as having a tinkerer's mindset. Maybe, you would have been an engineer if you wouldn't have chosen economics. What is it, a tinkerer's mindset? Can you tell us about that?

[16:24] **Peter:** I think it's someone who wants to solve problems, who feels like, "I think that I can do something about that." And so, a tinkerer is also someone willing to experiment at the margin and try things. I like that. My dad was a chemist, much more rooted in science than I am, but always brought that to me. And so, he was always working on projects, building things, whether they were electronics or things from his lab. He had a lab. It was really cool. So, I just developed that idea that you see a problem and then you experiment around it and you try things. And it's okay to fail. And then you just tweak it a little bit.

In academics, that's how I think about what we do, too. We see some challenges and opportunities. And I love exploring what to do about them. That's my favorite part of the strategy of the school, is thinking, how can we deal with that? How can we improve? Or, what could we try that we haven't yet tried? Or, how could we put a variation on something out there that's working but could work better? And that's a lot of fun. So, I like doing little things like that. It's just—I don't know. It's just motivating. It's part of who I am.

[17:34] **Christine:** If you're a student at Rice Business, I think it's safe to say you better like to read. And I know you're an avid reader. You're known for a lot of literary references in your

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

speaking engagements, even poetry. Can you talk about maybe some of your favorite writers or current books that you're reading right now? Maybe, some recommendations?

[17:55] **Peter:** Oh, sure. So, I'd like to have two types of books. For the most part, I have fun, sort of year-long summaries, if you will. So, something that's going to take me away and be immersive. And then, I like a lot of non-fiction, particularly, around history or science or something like that. And fictional literature as well. I've liked that. I've read a lot of those in the past. But for my plane reads or when I need to just chill out, Erik Larson. Everybody reads Erik Larson, *Splendid and the Vile* or *Devil in the White City*, Isaac's *Storm*. *Thunderstruck* is the one I have now, which is in my backpack. I used to do that a lot. I'd fly on planes, and I always had a book like that in my backpack, but not so much anymore. It's coming back. Stephen King, I've always read a lot of Stephen King, pretty much everything. And he writes about as fast as you can read. So, there's always one of his around.

On the non-fiction side, I like a lot of people who think about big issues and write about them. So, the book *Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari, which is a great one. And now I have *Homo Deus*, which I think came out a year and a half ago. It's great historical works. Steven Pinker always seems to have good things to read and things that I enjoy and have fun reading when they come out. So, he's got a book on rationality, but he did *The Blank Slate*.

And when I was younger, my dad would go. And he used to read a lot, too. And he would buy, pretty much, a box of books. You could go to the bookstore and you just get a box. And he'd bring it home. And he's like, "You don't have to love it, but read it. And if you don't like it, move to the next one." And that's the way I look at it. He read a lot of John D. MacDonald, which is a great of the day '60s, '70s mystery thriller writer.

And then I like economists. So, there's a book over there on my table by Ken Rogoff, who is a former professor of mine called, I think, *The Crisis of Cash* or *The Death of Cash*, may be talking about, in some ways, the trend towards digital or cryptocurrencies, and what's good and what's not good about that. And I just read this past week and I finished a book by Al Roth, *Who Gets What—and Why*. And Al Roth is a Nobel Prize-winning economist who

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

developed things like markets for kidneys. So, how do you allocate a resource that you can't pay for and do it in a good way or create intern matches or med school matches or even admit students into an MBA program?

[20:19] **Christine:** That's a good summary list that will keep readers busy if they haven't read all of those yet.

[20:24] **Peter:** I hope I have more time to read that, too. But it is nice to always have something. I do what probably too many people do, which is I see a book, I buy it, and then I don't have a chance to read it right away. But I guess there's always that hope. You think, oh, I'll have some free time, which you don't. When I get the free time, I read and enjoy it and look forward to reading my next books, too.

[20:46] **Christine:** I usually have two to three going at once. Like you mentioned, different genres and depending on my mood.

[20:51] **Peter:** I learned to quit reading more when I don't like a book. I used to worry about that or feel like, oh, what a waste. But you think, well, the next one is going to be good. And I'll enjoy that. And it's usually true. So, it's a lot of fun. I wish I had more time for it, but I don't.

[21:05] **Christine:** You were recently appointed to the Houston Fed Board. Can you tell us first a little bit about what that is, what role you will play, and why that's good for Rice Business and the university?

[21:16] **Peter:** Sure. Well, the Federal Reserve System has 12 regional banks. And as the nation's central bank, this is how they manage monetary policy and a host of regulations that go along with that for financial institutions. The region we are in is headquartered in Dallas. That's the Dallas Fed. And the Dallas Fed has regional boards that help inform the Dallas Fed leaders, and ultimately, the Board of Governors at the Fed, about the conduct of monetary policy or business conditions alike. So, we're a small group. And we're really there to give feedback about how things are going in Houston and the Gulf region to the Federal Reserve

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

Board System. And that means presenting a view of the economy, presenting a view of how it's impacting livelihoods, wellbeing, how it's challenged and how it matters with respect to the goals the Fed has.

And the Fed has two broad goals—price stability, which means inflation at about 2% over the long run, and maximum employment—two goals that don't always go together. But they'd have to be balanced. And so, that's my role. As an economist and someone who taught macroeconomics for 20 years, it's a nerd paradise for me. I get to talk about what I really love and ask questions and dive in more deeply. That's a blast. But it also helps me because I am at the table with lots of business leaders, hearing what they're seeing, what they're feeling about where our environment is going, what's happening, not just nationally but in Houston, how they're dealing with problems. And so, from my perspective, which I can use to inform the strategy of the school, it's hugely valuable.

Conversely, I also get the chance to tell them a little bit about what's happening in higher education, at a school like Rice, and how we think about our mission and how it's relating to the opportunities out there. So, that's been a ton of fun. In fact, later this week, I'm going to go up to Dallas for a Fed meeting. And I'm sure it will be an exciting one. There's a lot happening in the economy right now, trying to wrestle with inflation and worry about what's happening in the world with supply chains and the war in Ukraine. It's fascinating. But it feels great to be able to play a small part in national policy that way.

[23:27] **Christine:** And always a critical topic, but I feel like right now, in particular, like you just mentioned, very delicate time, I guess.

[23:34] **Peter:** It is. You always think things are going to be normal, and then the unforeseen happens. And so, COVID was in no one's script. We can point back to the pandemic of 1918. But the lessons there are far different. It's a very different world in which that took place. And so, trying to glean what you should do with respect to monetary policy based on something that happened over 100 years ago, really, at the dawn of central banking, isn't as useful. So, in many ways, this is the first time this has happened. And it's changed the way people spend

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

money, the way you produce, shortages, what's in demand. We also have extraordinary energy transition to combat global climate change. This war has disrupted supply chains. And the globalized world is showing its fragility. It's super tough. It's really difficult to do all that. But it is something that's also really gratifying to be involved with. And you can also feel that it's important to do your best to contribute to the solutions people put forth.

[24:07] **Christine:** Obviously, a lot of people look to you for leadership, mentorship within the school and beyond, and particularly, some of your external roles. Who do you look to as a mentor? Or, who have you looked to in the past, maybe?

[24:37] **Peter:** I've had good bosses, good colleagues. I think all those have been my chief mentors. And now, I can say that I also work with a number of folks on external boards, leaders of corporations or not-for-profits that have been great for me. But in the university setting, whether it's a provost or a president, I've always had people that I could look to and who could understand where I was and what I needed to do to progress. It's difficult to self-assess always. It's important to have someone who can be a sounding board or a colleague who can give you the nudge here or there. And usually, people have done it with a couple of good questions. It's useful. It's funny how simple the best advice can be. But I remember having our president of the university say, "Well, what are you really trying to achieve? Could you break it down to one, two, three? And if you can really order those things, tie those back to what you're doing and how you're spending your time." And a lot of that effort, which is obvious, you think, of course, that's what I should do. It's about understanding, why am I having this challenge I'm having now? What is my emotional state relative to what I want to do? So, if you're frustrated or if you feel like I don't know exactly which path to take. Is it left? Is it left and then right? Is it some variation? It usually goes back to reflecting what you really intend, what is most important, and having the courage to make some choices that may be uncomfortable. But that's always been the case. And it's important to have relationships, because without a relationship, it's hard to have a mentor. It's not just someone who is an expert giving you advice. It's someone you trust and someone who has an interest in you, and vice versa. So, spending time with people, getting to know them, offering it back. I think the whole idea of great mentorship is that you don't just have a one-way conversation. They're two-way. And

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

that's been my experience. So, usually, it's very close to me in the workplace. But increasingly, it's outside, too.

[26:48] **Christine:** As a leader, you have followers. And you actually have literal followers on social media. You're very active on social media. Can you talk a little bit about the importance and where you see your role and how you use that tool in your role?

[27:03] **Peter:** Well, it's evolved, I guess, like all of us. But certainly, not all of us, but like all the people my age. When social media came about, I don't think anyone quite knew what to do or what it would mean. And that meaning has changed. The first thing I liked about it is probably still my favorite thing. And that was that I could extend relationships with my students for a long time, because, back in the day, you might graduate and there was no LinkedIn or there was no Facebook or Instagram. And so, you waited for reunions or you'd hear second-hand, "Oh, well, that's what Christine is doing now. She's gone on to—great. Well, maybe, we'll see her again. And maybe I'll run into her at an alumni event." But social media was instant. And so, with the world happening around you, you could stay connected.

And I remember precisely that it was during the great recession of 2008 and '09 that was wonderful for me as a professor to be able to write about what was happening in the economy. And having former students, lots of them, write back in the moment, "Well, what about this?" Or, "I saw that." "Well, here's a great lesson I learned in our classes that seems to be happening today. That was thrilling." And then I morphed that a little bit into this, well, it's great to give people a view, not just of what I think, but of the institution itself, because people like to be connected. And there's always a dose or a dash of your personal life, just, who am I? What do I do?

So, that balance comes back into play, but it's meant maintaining relationships that have been valuable for me, but also connecting students and alums back to the school. I think people like that. I think there's a sense now that some first-person view of what's happening in the moment. It's fun. It's gratifying. If you had a positive experience at the school, people retain an interest. That's a special thing about universities, is that you finish your degree, but it's not a

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

transaction that really finishes. You still feel connected. You still have an interest. And you still care about what happens. I think that's how valuable those experiences are, that it carries over. And social media is a way to maintain that.

I do less than I did. I think there was always this, okay, where is the boundary? I don't want people to—I don't like people shooting what they're having for dessert. But do they want to see this change in the building or the business plan competition? Or do they want to know there's some moment that is a nice moment that they might recall or remember as something similar to what they had? Sure. I think that's a blast. And so, it's fun. And I like it. And there's also the case that there are alums that I haven't seen in a decade, but we have regular conversations on social media. And that's really cool.

[29:21] **Christine:** Yes. And I think keeping cohorts connected, it's been critical. And I think of just the information that's been passed on and shared and references, networking that's happened that would not have happened if it weren't for social media, even among the different programs.

[29:53] **Peter:** Oh, yeah. I think that's right. And I think that's the other thing, is that people are curious, well, what is happening? And how did that happen? Who's doing what? That's meant a great deal for us. It's made the goodbyes a little less difficult because you think, well, I'll be able to see you, and I'll be able to know what's happening. And that's great when you make strong relationships. That's what you want. I tell people, and it's true for your program and all the others, as adults, you don't get many opportunities to really form relationships like this, like you do in an MBA program, with people from a wide variety of backgrounds whom you would never have met before. But you get close. It's wonderful.

[30:19] **Christine:** It is. It is. A once in a lifetime experience that I wouldn't trade for anything, yeah.

[30:53] **Peter:** I'm glad.

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

[30:55] **Christine:** I know one of your hobbies is photography. Can you talk a little bit about how that started? And what do you like to photograph?

[31:02] **Peter:** I don't know how much I liked it when. But when I was 18, I got a Canon AE-1. I don't remember why I asked for it. But my parents—that was my first SLR, single-lens reflex camera. And I think it just appealed to me because you could be a little bit artistic if you try it. But you didn't have to have hand skills. I've always wished that I could draw or have beautiful handwriting, but I never really did. And so, photography was a way to just take an eye for a space or a scene or thinking about light. And you could do something a little fun with it. After I had kids, that just exploded because, suddenly, you have your favorite subject in the world. And you think, oh, this is an important moment to capture. I think that's not always true, but you do it anyway. And so, I like that.

And then, I love to travel. And when you see parts of the world that affect you or that you think about shaped the way you see life, you want to save it. So, the best souvenir for me was always a picture that I could look back on and remember. And that's the same for my kids in many ways. What I like isn't the scene that I've saved, but I remember them looking at me through the lens and thinking, that was a great moment. I'm fond of that. And I can plug back into it.

I like photographing city scenes. I think the skill I don't have that I really like to work on—my wife is much better at this—it's just, somehow, getting the composition right without interfering with the moment. So, something is happening and you snap it. It's not just the candid shot, but it's getting the spirit of it in the right moment without interfering. I'm the arranger. I like to push people around and say, "You go there. Stand here. Chin up." You can get a technically beautiful picture that way, but it's not as wonderful if it doesn't have the soul of the others. And so, I'd like to be better at that. But it's fun.

Digital photography changed everything. You could suddenly snap everything in an infinite amount. And so, I've worked on that. And for a while, I was doing everything on my phone, just

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

because it was so convenient. And suddenly, taking around a big camera felt weird. But I've gone back and forth, still trying to get a little bit better, but don't do it enough.

[33:19] **Christine:** A work in progress.

[33:21] **Peter:** Always.

[33:22] **Christine:** As we wrap things up in talking about photography and a picture, when you think of the picture of Rice Business in five years, or maybe even a decade out, what does that look like to you? What are some of your biggest forward-thinking goals?

[33:38] **Peter:** I've always felt like Rice Business had the best strategic foundations of any business school in the country. And what I meant by that was this great global city, connected everywhere, super diverse, wonderful commercial future ahead of it, in the middle of a state that is vast and that is underserved with high-quality business education. I think if you look at the mid-Atlantic or the Northeast or the West Coast, there's a denser provision of these things. But here, this great vast land of opportunity we have less. And so, Rice has a great opportunity there.

We've been growing to a scale that could meet those needs with very high-quality resources in the form of great students, great scholarships from a world-class faculty. And we have both of those right now. And we're building an even better faculty. And we're getting even better and more diverse students all the time.

So, in five to 10 years, I think we will be recognized for the school that we are now and will be even more so than as an essential place in the top 10 to 15 business schools in the country and, I think, unquestionably, the best one in 1,000 miles of Houston, Texas, is probably right.

And by that, I mean this is where people go because they have to have the talent that's here. They need to have the training and the expertise that is here. So, we have that ability to contribute, not just to Houston, but the state and beyond, through that academic mission. And

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

I see that coming about in all that we're doing. So, five to 10 years, we'll have a much more robust undergraduate program to complement the graduate programs that have been world-leading for a while. So, we're going to be a really special place. I think people will look back and think, wow, it's hard to imagine. But in the early 2000s, it was a smaller place or less recognized. I think it's going to be that significant.

[35:30] **Christine:** And in a few decades time, competing with schools and programs that have been around for far longer.

[35:36] **Peter:** Oh, yeah. I think that's right. People don't always remember, the first MBAs were at Dartmouth, the Tuck School. And I believe they graduated in 1900, so 120-plus years ago. Even schools like Emory have been around for more than 100 years. Rice is an absolute newcomer in those terms. But our acceleration and our trajectory mean that we'll be with them and beyond them, I think, at some point. And I can't wait. That's going to be exciting.

[35:39] **Christine:** Is there anything else you'd like to add today?

[35:41] **Peter:** I just like connecting with all the alums at Rice and everyone who's interested in the community. And I'm just grateful to everyone for this opportunity. I think, when I was considering what to do six years ago before coming here, it didn't take me very long. And that's because I knew what was ahead. I suppose you could say it was a chance, but I've been extraordinarily pleased. And it fulfilled all my expectations and more. And so, we've got a great school. And I appreciate everyone that's part of it.

[36:42] **Christine:** Well, we want to thank you for taking time to chat with us. I know a lot of alums and potential students will be interested in hearing our conversation. So, thank you so much.

[36:48] **Peter:** No, thanks to you, Christine. It's great to have a pro like you interview me and be a part of this great podcast. So, thanks.

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.

[36:53] **Christine:** Thank you, Dean Peter Rodriguez of Rice Business. Thank you so much for joining us today on Owl Have You Know.

[36:59] **Peter:** Thank you, Christine.

[40:00] **Outro:** This has been Owl Have You Know. Thanks for listening. You can find links and more information about our guests, host, and announcements on our website, business.rice.edu. Please, subscribe to this podcast wherever you find your favorite podcast. And leave us a comment while you're at it, and let us know what you think. Owl Have You Know is a production of Rice Business and is sponsored by the Rice Business Alumni Board. The hosts of Owl Have You Know are myself, Christine Dobbyn, and David Droogleever.

you have to figure out how to leverage working with other people, what things you need to know that you don't know, and how to make decisions before you're confident of how they'll turn out. That's what leading is. That's what managing is. And it feels messy, and it's difficult, but that's why we study it so much and so carefully. And that's why great leaders say "I never stop learning," because there's so much to learn. You'll never be done. It's not something that you ever quite finish. But that's just a testament to how challenging it is.