



## Adam Morris

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**Annalies Corbin:** [00:00:14] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host. We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all, but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we re-imagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:00:49] So, today, we're going to be talking with Adam Morris, who is the co-founder of Wild Tiger Tees and the host of People Helping People podcast. And I am super, super excited to have Adam join us today on this episode of Learning Unboxed. We're going to talk about entrepreneurship. We're going to talk about how you help and catalyze youth in a very complicated and complex world. So, Adam, thank you for joining us.

**Adam Morris:** [00:01:14] Great. Thank you.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:01:15] So, the last time we spoke, we talked just a little bit about the variety of opportunities and the programs that you're using between Wild Tiger Tees and the work that you do locally with Give Back Hack, with See Change, and the broader community tied to a lot of social ventures and entrepreneurship, especially with, really, students or teens in very difficult situations. I mean, you do a lot of work directly through the Star House. So, why don't we start with you sort of talking about sort of how you came to the space that you occupy in this world, so to speak? And then, we're going to dig into some of the details of those program pieces. So, tell us a little bit about Adam.

**Adam Morris:** [00:01:58] Yeah, a lot of this work started just from my own desire to find a career where I'd make a social impact. And I thought about it for like 10 years and I got nowhere. So, I realized I had gotten nowhere and I decided to start a podcast so I could speak to people who are doing interesting things that were making an impact. And that's how the People Helping People podcast got started. While I did that, one of the people I interviewed was the CEO of the Star House and Bishop.

**Adam Morris:** [00:02:27] And the Star House is just this fantastic drop-in center for youth who are experiencing homelessness. They see over a thousand youth come through the doors every year and just a real need here in Columbus for providing services that are relevant for them. So, in addition to access to food, and clothing, and showers, they have counseling and mentorship, and one of the things that I discovered when I was talking to Ann was that they wanted to start a work program, which really helped these youth develop the

skills that they need to succeed. And something about this story really struck me that it's not just going out and finding a job, they have to find transportation, and housing, and all the pieces that kind of go along with that.

**Adam Morris:** [00:03:14] That sat in the back of my mind. And a few months later, I found myself going to a Give Back Hack kind of weekend event and they're a fantastic launch pad for social enterprises where you come in on Friday night and you pitch ideas of social enterprises you want to start, and very quickly and kind of organically, they find the top 10 ideas on foreign teams, and then you have a weekend to kind of flush things out. And so, I pitched what became a Wild Tiger Tees. Actually over the weekend, we had a team of about 13 people working on this idea and we walked away with five co-founders saying, yeah, let's get this off the ground.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:03:54] I had no idea, I did not realize that the Wild Tiger Tees came out of Give Back Hack. That's awesome.

**Adam Morris:** [00:04:03] Yeah.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:04:04] I love that.

**Adam Morris:** [00:04:05] It was a great experience, too, just that rush of people coming together.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:04:08] Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**Adam Morris:** [00:04:11] I think so often, we have these dreams of starting something, but it's so overwhelming because we know we don't know enough. But just being in this environment, where it's like, okay, I don't need to know everything and here's what I have to offer. And I'm curious and I'm ready to dive in, and you find other people like that with other skills that you can really accomplish quite a lot.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:04:33] It's amazing. And part of what makes it so really, really awing, I guess, is the fact that it's so organic, right? You have this idea, people come together, they add to your idea, they take away from the idea, they give something back in return, and you end up in a place that for most people who participated in that, it can be very altering. And so, you walked away from Give Back Hack with Wild Tiger Tees. And so, tell our listeners, so what exactly does Wild Tiger Tees do? And then, how have you incorporated that directly with the needs of the Star House?

**Adam Morris:** [00:05:14] So, the idea was a work program centered around screen-printing t-shirts, where we could go in and teach the youth how to screen-print t-shirts, go out and get orders from around the community, and print bulk orders. And then, we fulfill these orders and they get paid for that work. But while we're working, we're also talking about jobs, and teamwork, and communication, and giving them feedback, so we notice things that happen.

**Adam Morris:** [00:05:42] And so, the idea is to really give them that kind of support that they don't get from the low-wage jobs that they typically find. So, quite often, they end up working for a fast food or in warehouses, where it's like, you do the work or you get fired. Nobody's really looking after them. And so, we wanted to really start having more of a conversation to really understand what they were struggling with and what they wanted to do to see if we could help them on that.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:06:09] And how do the participants engage sort of ongoing? I mean, the hope in the work that the Star House does, it's just amazing for this very fragile, oftentimes, extremely high-risk population for so many different reasons, but how do you manage to take this program, this entrepreneurship opportunity,

and all the skill-building that you're doing, and plug in with these students, these participants ongoing within the hope that they actually won't be at the Star House long-term? So, how do you manage all that you're able to teach them and the fact that a lot of your participants are somewhat transient? How do you do that?

**Adam Morris:** [00:06:53] We look at a couple of things. So, there's youth that we'll work with on an ongoing basis. We find there's a lot of value in that, like seeing somebody week over week and being able to continue that conversation, because we'll record feedback, and we'll say, hey, this is where you were last week. And this week, I noticed you did X. And they soak up feedback so quickly.

**Adam Morris:** [00:07:15] Quite often, we'll bring somebody on and they're only there for a shift or two shifts. We're not a very big program, so we can only work with three people each week and there's always a huge demand for it. And when we started, like none of us had ever run a work program before, we had never even screen-printed t-shirts before, so we kind of, everyone was just kind of diving in, and let's figure out how this works.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:07:40] Well, why t-shirts then, though? If none of you knew how to do that, how the heck did you walk out of Give Back Hack screen-printing t-shirts?

**Adam Morris:** [00:07:51] I think partly, I've always wanted to be an artist and I've never felt good about my art. I thought, hey, maybe screen-printing t-shirt will get me a little bit closer to that. I think I had already always been interested by t-shirt designs and how you actually make things. And so, I look for things that you could make and this is one thing that kind of came out. I'm not sure it's the best product to be doing, because at times, it's very messy and a lot can go wrong.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:08:24] But it's really not about the product, though, is it? I mean, it's literally about the skills that you are providing to the students. You're teaching them entrepreneurship. You're teaching them basic business. So, what you make almost doesn't really matter, does it?

**Adam Morris:** [00:08:40] No. And I think one thing that we found is that not knowing is really powerful because we can bring in the youth to say, hey, we're having a problem, how do we figure this out? And it's not just us trying to figure it out, but they start realizing that they have that power to make their suggestions, because they see things, they're doing this process, and then they say, hey, wait a minute, maybe it's more effective if I try this. And so, there's a lot of experimentation. And I think that's a very key component of entrepreneurship or any job that you do. Like if you have the skill to figure things out and feel like you're empowered to just contribute to the entire process, you excel a lot faster in what you do.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:09:22] So, do you ever then, with this program or the things that you've learned through Give Back Hack and the fact that you've participated in See Change, and some of the other social and entrepreneurship social venture endeavors that have happened locally, I mean, one of the things that I love about every single one of those is the fact that people enter whatever that environment, that program, that experience is, and they leave very different.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:09:48] And for me, one of the things that really resonates with those experiences is the power of what one can learn and how quickly an accelerated one can learn where that's the immersive environment that you're placed in to learn whatever the thing happens to be. And I know that sounds very circular, but my point is, and I have said this many, many times, and I may have even said it to you when we last spoke, I don't remember, this notion that, what would happen if you take a hackathon, and start-up, and entrepreneurship, and community center, and health care center, and you launch that altogether, and you said, hey, this is going to be high school.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:10:33] You toss everything else that we actually think of a school, and especially in the sort of post-COVID sort of world, we've learned so much so fast about what works, what doesn't work, what we should be doing, what we shouldn't be doing, and on some levels, I feel like the Earth itself has given us a giant wake-up call, us small, tiny, little humans that the Earth has said, you're on notice, do better, be better, right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:11:02] And if we absorb that and say, okay, everything we know, just toss and bring in all the things that we've seen that have worked, that have been powerful, the experience that you have, why can't you go from three kids to 50 kids and imagine what that would be like? But the current structure doesn't allow for that, but what if you could take those experiences and internalize them for others?

**Adam Morris:** [00:11:28] Yeah. I think that's super powerful. There's this element of curiosity, right? When you're in a situation and you're curious, you kind of have this drive to figure things out. And what I found from Give Back Hack, and See Change, and all these programs where you bring people together in the community, it's that there's real power in peer support. CEOs do this, they get together in Vistage groups where they're kind of peer-mentoring each other and talking about the issues that they're facing. And just being able to talk, and connect, and listen leads to change and leads to learning.

**Adam Morris:** [00:12:06] Because I think if you look at the education system today, it's very much like one person is on their own learning to succeed, right? It's not a collaborative effort. And when you get out into the world, like if you look at a lot of these social enterprises that start, it is all about collaboration, right? How can people work together, and understand what the issues are, and really kind of this validating your idea, which is talking to more people and realizing that you're not alone, and together, you can really make something much better. So, I think there's this whole piece of collaboration which drives a lot of this entrepreneurship.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:12:49] I think so, too. And I think that helping folks understand, it's not just smarter, faster, but it's smarter, faster, deeper. And if we can get to the deeper component, I think that's where the real social change can come about. When we talk about workforce and work readiness, that's the other piece that I love about the work that you're doing, because we feel that very deeply at PAST as well, what is it that we're supposed to be doing? What is the outcome we're looking for, right?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:13:23] In my mind, it's always been, if the outcome is to have a community of participants, students, young adults, you name it, entering the world, ready to fully be an engaged citizen, how do I get there because we're not getting there the way we've been doing it? And so, one of the things I tell everybody that visits here when they're asking about what's going on at the Innovation Lab itself is, look, this is a place that's, you think there's school happening here, but really, what's happening here is emerging workforce. We're literally helping folks be ready to enter the world without the stumble, but we're doing it just like what's happening in Star House, and I think the program that you're leveraging there was support, to help you be ready.

**Adam Morris:** [00:14:15] Exactly.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:14:15] And that's a very different ethos. And so, how do you scale that?

**Adam Morris:** [00:14:20] That is a really good question. I think a lot of it is understanding what your own interests are, and what you bring to the table, and then having some focus for that, where you can come together and be part of that. I've always struggled with this, where I went through the education system and I

ended up with a job which never felt like it quite fit. And over the years, realizing that my own skills are, one, in figuring things out and kind of exploring.

**Adam Morris:** [00:14:52] And I took the StrengthsFinder and one of my strengths was empathy. And so, realizing that some of these pieces weren't part of my day job led me to understand that, hey, I've got to go and seek that out, how do I bring that in? Because, one, there are aspects of myself that I enjoy. And everybody's different, like they have different things that come out and I think you need to be in a place where you can bring the skills that you enjoy to the table to grow and develop. But it really helps to have something that's inspiring that you can rally around. Quite often, you look in jobs, and then they're not inspiring because you're treated like an employee that doesn't matter, and you get the work done, and you earn your paycheck so you can buy things.

**Adam Morris:** [00:15:36] And there's something that's inherently not inspiring about that. But when you go to an event like Give Back Hack or through an accelerator like See Change, even if you tap into like the freelancing community, like people who are out there working for themselves, there's this different energy of, I care about this because this is my life and I'm going to figure this out. Nobody knows all the answers, but it's like, those that are willing to scratch that curiosity and figure it out make something interesting happen. So, I think one of the big pieces is, it's just finding that source of inspiration that says, yeah, this is something I care about and I want to participate in.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:16:18] Yeah. And there's a lot to be said for that. In our work over the years with teachers from all over the country and around the world, one of the things that we always say, especially when we watch a teacher or instructor, in particular, whether it's formal or informal, whether it's in a school or it's a museum program doesn't make any difference, when we see those folks struggling, the place we always go with them, the place we try to take them back is, teach your passion. What do you love?

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:16:46] It doesn't matter that maybe you're the science teacher, but you love knitting or you love soap box cars more than anything else, you can teach whatever that thing is that you're supposed to be doing for your job via your passion if you just think about where your passion has to do with that and how you sort of draw on that sort of internal self-worth. I think back to your point, lots of folks end up doing things and it's just like, it's just a job. And although I suspect we can't collectively change that sort of experience or ethos for everybody, we could probably sort of change a lot of the dynamic by helping folks recognize that the thing that you're passionate about is something that you can actually work through and with.

**Adam Morris:** [00:17:34] Yeah. And even that it's possible to figure out your passion if it's not delivered to your doorstep.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:17:42] Yeah. Amazon doesn't bring your individualized passion in a box, and say, here you go, open this up, right? Quite frankly, you have to explore to find it. And I think, again, that's the beauty of some of those pieces of being able to provide those opportunities. So, what happens next for Wild Tiger Tees? I mean, I suspect that because of COVID and what's happening in the world, the way you were doing it had to pause or at least morph, so what's next for that program, ongoing?

**Adam Morris:** [00:18:16] Yeah. So, one thing that we identified was that we're just a piece of the puzzle, right? So, in order to be truly effective, we need to plug into the right programs that can really carry them through. And so, one of those is talking to Columbus Works about, hey, can we get the people that we work with ready to go through your work program at a larger scale, where they have the connections to jobs which are going to be better suited for them, right?

**Adam Morris:** [00:18:44] What we found is that there are certain jobs where when an employer is just kind of looking out or understanding of somebody's situation and more willing to coach them or give them feedback that they're going to be more successful. And so, if we can work with partners that have connections to those companies, then we're going to be more successful in getting somebody from these temporary fast food jobs the last couple of weeks to something that's longer and stable, which will, in turn, help them with stable housing and change in the situation.

**Adam Morris:** [00:19:21] The youth that we work with, it's amazing, they're so different from an adult homeless population. Like they have this hope, these dreams, like these aspirations, they've been through really tough situations, whether it's abandonment, or abuse, or drugs, like really complicated stuff that they're dealing with the best that they know how. But they still have that kind of spark of, yeah, there's something that they want to do. So, I feel like if we can give them the right tools, that they'll use them, they'll jump on that, and they'll find their way.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:19:58] Yeah. Kids are resilient. That's the thing I think people forget, right? And I think there's something to be said about that resiliency. And I think you're right. I've seen the same thing over the years that we watch kids who can come from and through a million different scenarios and circumstances that, quite frankly, adults would crumble. They would not be able to pick themselves up and move on, much less still have hopes and aspirations. And yet, to your point, we see the same thing.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:20:28] You see that sense of sparkle, that sense of wonder, that sense of curiosity, and I'm not talking about even just the littlest kids, even in middle school, high school, and young adults, to your point, they still have that thing, it's hard to put your finger on, but it's important, right? Because it does mean, I think, that there is still aspiration. And as long as there is aspiration and there is hope, then we can do and help with some pretty amazing things. So, that's fascinating. So, again, sort of next pieces then working with Columbus Works and working with others, but the program fully coming back online, that's the plan?

**Adam Morris:** [00:21:11] Yeah. And we're moving towards that. And we've been doing a lot of work just thinking about how we can really grow our program to make the youth more involved in running the details of it, so we can expand and provide more opportunities that kind of feed on each other. So, getting youth who are there for a longer period of time to take on more responsibility, and training, and running the program so that they get that leadership experience and they can kind of grow into that as well.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:21:43] So, how do you, as you sort of grow into these next pieces, so in addition to sort of helping the students figure out where they're going to ultimately find themselves that great job, that takes the leveraging of an awful lot of partnerships within the community, and so, how are you navigating that space? Because Columbus is an awesome place, people ask me all the time, why Columbus? And my response is, why not Columbus? Right? Columbus is a pretty amazing community.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:22:13] And it's often not difficult to find partnerships where you sort of have to wade through and figure out what are the right ones, what's the right fit, what's the right mix. And so, how do you think about that when you're trying to figure out how I'm going to scale the t-shirt operation into sort of a meaningful next step for others? Because folks ask me that all the time, how do you navigate the partnerships? And so, when I have folks that are working, that's a question I always want to ask. So, how do you figure that out?

**Adam Morris:** [00:22:43] I think, one of my favorite entrepreneurship concepts is that of your MVP, the minimally viable product, right? What's the smallest thing that you can use to test a partnership? Is there a project or can you put one person through a program and just get their feedback? And so, I think for us, the

next step is really, in our program, can we identify certain youth that work as leaders within our work program and test that out? Because that's going to take our work program forward.

**Adam Morris:** [00:23:19] And the Star House is working with these youth at many levels, right? So, they have a roundtable that's helping provide them support where they can get the support from the right person that they need for whatever they're facing. One thing we found from this is that everyone is completely different. They come from tough backgrounds, but every single person has something else that they're struggling with, so there's no one-size-fits-all. It's very much, you have to meet everybody where they are.

**Adam Morris:** [00:23:47] And if you look at kind of the traditional path that people go through, there's a lot of work done on these external skills developing so that you're ready, but not a whole lot of work that's been done internally on what's going on on the inside. And I think as adults, like people struggle with that constantly. You're out there in the world and things are messy, but inside, you don't really know how to navigate or develop yourself. And so, I think there's some element of being able to tap into that and figure out.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:24:21] Yeah, I would agree with that. I think that somewhere along the way, we decided that, the developing our skills, external skills, however you want to put that, work skills became paramount to developing human skills, right? And so, I think we need to flip that back again and do think about that, we have a set of unique characteristics, humans, and yet, we have to be able to develop our humanness.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:24:56] Otherwise, we'll find ourselves in the midst of exactly what we're in right in this moment, right? In our community. And we can't fix those things if we don't have empathy or if we don't fully understand what it means to sort of view and be the other for all of the host of different pieces that it has. And so, I would agree with that. I mean, I think that we are confusing the ability to do stuff technologically with the ability to be and create technologically.

**Adam Morris:** [00:25:30] Exactly. And I think there's something really powerful about that beingness, and that creativeness, and even just how we connect with each other, that is just really satisfying and it enriches our experience. But quite often, what you see in the world is valued as more productivity or fitting into a role and producing X. And part of that has to do with just capitalism in general. It's like, the system is designed to produce more and to encourage that consumption and production, and consumption and production.

**Adam Morris:** [00:26:05] And I think so many people feel driven to work harder, to earn more money, to buy more stuff that they lose grasp of like either doing it or what's really important. And so, stepping back and understanding these connections that we share really takes that forward. And I think that's one of my draws towards social entrepreneurship. I used to volunteer a lot, and going out and just working with people in the community, you start to realize how similar you are somehow working together just brings so much life and so much character to it. And there's a lot of really exciting stuff that comes from that.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:26:49] There is. That human connection cannot be underscored. And we miss it when we don't have it, and we also, I think, probably sometimes, even in the moment, don't understand how powerful it is. But with the opportunity to reflect and think about it, we can help ourselves get there. So, there's definitely something to be said for that. So, I always try to sort of wrap up the program with sort of asking about the big giant lobs. And I think for you, for the folks that are listening and thinking about how they could tap into some of the similar experiences that you've been able to leverage and launch in your work with the Star House and other places in the community, sort of, what would your best set of recommendations be to somebody saying, should I do this thing?

**Adam Morris:** [00:27:41] I think one of the first things, especially in the social impact work, is to get out and volunteer. We're very lucky in Columbus. There are so many ways to volunteer. You can download the Point app to your phone and it shows you exactly, hey, I could jump on this opportunity here, there. There's Columbus Gives Back, which they're really great about going out and volunteering in places, but socializing afterwards so that you really form those connections or if your company is tapping into like Besa, does a really great job of organizing volunteering events.

[00:28:14] And so, there's so much going on here. And just tapping into that and experiencing, hey, here's what's going on in the community, you start to say, hey, I want to help out with this or I want to be part of that. And I think if you don't know where to start, sometimes, volunteering is the best place because you can try things out and figure out what you like and what you don't like, and then it just kind of snowballs from there.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:28:41] And if you're really lucky, it will snowball into, hey, I'm going to do this thing now instead of this thing over here that I just was kind of doing because it was the job to do, right? Finding yourself along the way.

**Adam Morris:** [00:28:53] And it's such a supportive network for people who are social entrepreneurs. Like it's really empowering and it's very enheartening to see.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:29:01] It is. It is. Absolutely. Well, Adam, thank you very much. Truly, truly appreciate you taking time out of your day to talk with us on Learning Unboxed.

**Adam Morris:** [00:29:11] Great. Thank you. It's a topic I love. Thanks.

**Annalies Corbin:** [00:29:15] We appreciate it. Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media @AnnaliesCorbin and join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to re-imagine education.