

[00:00:00] Ryan Newman: 50,000 downloads. I mean, what that tells me is that when the university community, when the Penn State community gets behind something, look out. There's no stopping us.

[00:00:19] Sean Goheen: Welcome to a special crossover episode from two of your favorite Penn State podcasts, Following the Gong from the Schreyer Honors College and Dare to Disrupt from Invent Penn State. My name is Sean Goheen. I'm your regular host for Following the Gong, and I'll be your host today. The hope is that listeners of both shows will get some insight into the entrepreneur side of Penn State and exposure to both shows. I'm joined by Katie DeFiore, behind the glass as they say, who is your regular producer and editor on Dare to Disrupt. I'm very excited to introduce you to our two guests on this special collab. But first, a bit about both shows. If you're a new listener. On following the Gong, I sit down with Scholar alumni to provide mentoring on demand with perspectives across a wide array of Penn State experiences, identities and industries. When Scholars have their honors thesis approved, they ring a ceremonial gong, something both of our guests have done. On Dare to Disrupt, our first guest interviews Penn State alumni who are innovators, entrepreneurs and leaders and shares the stories behind their success. Ryan Newman, Class of 2001, is your regular host on Dare to Disrupt. He earned his BS in economics with honors and is Managing Director at Goldman Sachs. He has over 20 years of experience at the firm working in wealth management. Ryan also has had an equally long career as a Penn State Volunteer for both the Smeal College of Business, the Schreyer Honors College, and Invent Penn State, which dates back to the fall after graduation. We're also joined by Dr. James Delattre, class of 1997, who serves as the Associate Vice President for Research and Director of the Office of Entrepreneurship and Commercialization. James earned his BS in chemistry with honors from the Eberley College of Science and his PhD in chemistry from Cal Berkeley. After several years in industry, James now oversees Penn State's entrepreneurship efforts, including Invent Penn State, the Launchbox and Innovation Network, which has locations across the Commonwealth and this very podcast.

James and Ryan, it's a pleasure to chat with you both today on both of these shows. It's even more exciting that we're recording this all together here live at the Eric J. Barron Innovation Hub downtown, while Ryan is here to receive the Alumni Fellow Award from the Penn State Alumni Association. So, we'll start off and say congrats, Ryan.

[00:02:20] Ryan Newman: Thank you so much, Sean, and I just can't get over the fact that we're all sitting in one room together with microphones and booms and all the other pieces to it.

[00:02:27] James Delattre: This is fantastic to be here, and I feel like I'm amongst podcasting royalty here. So, thank you so much for inviting me. And Ryan, congratulations on the Alumni Fellow Award.

[00:02:37] Ryan Newman: Thank you so much.

[00:02:38] Sean Goheen: Yeah, this collab has been months in the making and we're very excited to bring it to you as our listeners and welcome to anybody who's new to the respective shows. And so part of our goal today that fits both pods, since Dare to Disrupt is all about highlighting entrepreneur and leaders and Following the Gong centers career advice from Scholar alumni, is to get to know you both as two key leaders at Invent Penn State from the volunteer and industry side and from the Penn State side respectively. Ryan, as the normal host, I'm going to start with you. How did you end up coming to Penn State as a student? Can you tell us about your experiences, including getting into the Honors College as a current Penn State student and any form of activities that you were involved with?

[00:03:18] Ryan Newman: Wow, I feel like déjà vu. These are normally the questions that I'm asking and now I have to answer it. Well, I'm originally from New York, Long Island. My parents would say New York proud and moved to Bucks County when I was in my young adolescence and went to public school in Bucks County. And I remember the first time I visited Penn State, I was like, wow, this place is like summer camp, but you actually get to learn here too. So I was really taken by the university the first time I visited. I love those Lion Ambassadors, giving those tours, walking backwards on campus. And so, that was my entrée into Penn State. In terms of the Honors College, I did not get accepted to the Honors College straight out of high school, but one of our tour guides actually was a Scholar alum. And I remember my mom saying at lunch, Ryan, this sounds like something that you would be interested in. And so, from that moment in the back of my head, a seed was planted, perhaps somewhat subconsciously by my mother, to really work towards that. And so it was after my second year that I actually joined the Schreyer Honors College. And in some ways I say like, I had two Penn State experiences. It was the initial experience in Penn State and then it was like the rediscovery of Penn State all over again as a Scholar alum.

[00:04:22] Sean Goheen: Awesome. So, I think it's safe to say that you were doing Mr. and Mrs. Shrier proud. I know you got to meet them. And one thing that they were very proud of was the thesis project that every Scholar does, which is certainly something I imagine can be useful to any entrepreneur as we'll get to. So, how have you used your thesis experience in your career, whether it's private industry or in your volunteer career here at Penn State? Because you really do seem to have two jobs.

[00:04:47] Ryan Newman: Well, I appreciate you saying that. I absolutely love the thesis concept. I will say the work and research maybe was a little more challenging, but for me, I took a really big risk. And instead of just picking a thesis topic that was sort of in line with either my previous life experiences or my major, I actually teamed up with a great professor, Dr. David Shapiro, and had the chance to travel to Cameroon and did a thesis on fertility transition of female adolescents living in Cameroon, something that I knew nothing about. But under Dr. David Shapiro's leadership, I was able to build an econometric model and use that model to really suss out some of the details related to the behaviors of female adolescents and

around the timing of first birth. And while that experience was very impactful personally, it really didn't directly relate to my day job. But the act of doing rigorous research, building an econometric model, all really did pay off in folds. And for me, here I am, 23 years later, still talking about my amazing experience in Cameroon.

[00:05:47] Sean Goheen: Awesome. I love it. Now, James, you oversee this entire operation here that we sit in the Innovation Hub. And before we dive into more about Invent Penn State and the background of the day or Disrupt podcast, let's get to know you. So tell us your Penn State origin story. How did you end up as both a Nittany Lion and a Schreyer Scholar?

[00:06:06] James Delattre: Happy to. So, I grew up in York County, Pennsylvania. It was a wonderful neighborhood experience where when Penn State was on, everyone was out in their lawns, in their lawn chairs. They'd drag a TV out, and it was a neighborhood party. So, Penn State neighborhood. And then my sister, who's four years older than me, came to Penn State, and I started following her up starting at the age of 14. By the time I was 14 and a half, I knew I would be a Nittany lion. I fell in love with the place. I did not originally even contemplate the Honors College because we had so few AP courses in my small high school. I was just hoping that I could kind of keep my head above water at Penn State. Shortly after I got here, I connected with a chemistry professor, a junior faculty member. He was looking for people to do research in his lab, and that sounded fun to me. So, I started working with him. And after two years, I'd started to work on my first publication and another one of my colleagues in the lab. You know that publication you're working on could be your honors thesis. Hadn't really thought about it that way, so I started talking to some other colleagues that were in the Honors College, and within a year, I was in. Strangely, my first honors course was with Dr. Shapiro. Honors economics. And that was my first introduction to business and made me absolutely fall in love with business. So that is a wild coincidence that he was your thesis advisor. I had no idea.

[00:07:28] Ryan Newman: So not only was Dr. David Shapiro my thesis advisor, he was also at my wedding, which just shows you that the amount of time you spend together with your thesis advisor in college.

[00:07:39] James Delattre: So, yeah, it was a great experience. And then having those research publications and experience in the laboratory was incredibly helpful

when it was time to apply for graduate schools. So I think that work in the lab and my honors thesis distinguished me whenever it was time to apply. And so I was fortunate enough to get into Cal Berkeley.

[00:07:58] Sean Goheen: Awesome. Well, James, let's talk about that. How did you take the undergraduate thesis and roll that into your PhD research?

[00:08:05] James Delattre: Yeah, so I was focused on inorganic chemistry, crystals

in particular. So studying the crystal structures of inorganic materials, and that's fairly specialized. It's not very common for folks to be coming out of their undergrad having studied powder diffraction and all these different techniques that are common. So, it instantly gave me a leg up. Whenever I joined a research group out of Cal Berkeley, I already had all that experience. It led directly into my thesis work, which was originally in new materials and eventually was working in ways to remove greenhouse gases from the chip manufacturing process, a very big problem in the 90s. So, the work kind of got me in, got me started, and then very quickly started working with industry and pivoted into other areas that I think were really impactful.

[00:08:56] Sean Goheen: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that. You got your PhD, but you did not go the traditional academic route. You went into industry. How did you make that determination? You said you liked business but walk us through your mindset of how you made that decision.

[00:09:09] James Delattre: Yeah, I started working in Silicon Valley before I even graduated, doing some consulting jobs, and then ended up working at a large chip manufacturer. And I just knew that I wanted to be in the fast pace and innovation driven part of the workforce. Didn't really start thinking about entrepreneurship until a few years in, but just being exposed to the fast pace, all of the role players that can take an idea from that line of sight from, I think I want to try something through testing it, prototyping, understanding market dynamics. I just fell in love with that whole process. I still enjoy the chemistry, but ultimately that application to impact the world is what got me really excited.

[00:09:54] Sean Goheen: Awesome. And I'm curious, you had this hard science background. How did you go about adding in the business experience? Did you kind of just learn that on the fly? Did you take classes? What was your approach to that professional development?

[00:10:06] James Delattre: Yeah, I was very fortunate to have some wonderful mentors that were willing to increasingly give me opportunities. So that's one of the things that's wonderful about startup companies. Right. I started as a director of R and D. Pretty quickly was out doing customer visits, learning about the unique challenges that come with implementation in the market and yeah, with mentorship and support, I was increasingly on the management and operations side, overseeing sales and marketing. So, I really enjoyed that journey, and I was fortunate to have the mentors that I did.

[00:10:42] Sean Goheen: Awesome. And mentorship is a cornerstone of the Following the Gong podcast. I think it's a big theme on Dare to Disrupt as well. And I think it's a good transition point to talk about Invent Penn State and the work that you two are doing. So, for the unfamiliar, maybe a first year student or an alum who has heard an episode or two but doesn't know all that you offer here. James, can you give us a bit of a backstory on how Invent Penn State came to be?

[00:11:07] James Delattre: Absolutely. So, this building's namesake, Eric J. Barron, when he joined the university, I think he saw that there was an opportunity for us to do more in a couple of different areas. One, we're consistently a top 20 research institution, but if you look at some of our commercialization outputs, we probably weren't in the top 25, more like 60 or so. So, focus in that area for sure. Also, as you look around the Commonwealth and you look at the communities that are home to our Commonwealth campuses, many of them are in need of innovation and economic revitalization. So, programs that help demystify the process of starting businesses is something we saw as a real need. So, this combination of this kind of service to the public to better serve the entrepreneurial ecosystems of the state, plus focus on research commercialization is what kind of brought us in and crystallized this view of Invent Penn State as an important part of the University.

[00:12:08] Sean Goheen: Awesome. And I like your choice of words there, giving your background there with your honors thesis. So well played there, James. So, Invent Penn State, like the Schreyer Honors College is very cross disciplinary, but can you explain exactly how your work, your team, as we sit here in your building with you and Katie, how you fit into the Penn State ecosystem, as well as both the mission and vision of Penn State?

[00:12:31] James Delattre: Yeah, happy to. So, we play a coordinating role across the Commonwealth, working with every college and every campus to drive economic development, job creation, and student career success. None of that can be done in a silo. Those are big, lofty goals. It's hard. The tagline of Invent Penn State is the ingenious power of partnership. So we have to work with everyone, otherwise we'd never be successful. None of these things can be done alone. Faculty, students, community members, all of them are supported. This really flows from our land grant mission. So as a land grant institution, we teach, we do research, and we serve the public. And so, our land grant mission for 130 years has largely been lived through agricultural extension.

Every community in Pennsylvania, if you're a farmer, you've got some type of an issue you go to Penn State's AG Extension office, all the know how of the university springs into action to help solve your issue. We're trying to complement that service model that for 100 plus years we've delivered for the agricultural industry to all the other industries that require support; the tech industries, food service, you name it.

[00:13:44] Sean Goheen: Awesome. And I think there might be some words inscribed on Old Main that probably fit into that too. So, you mentioned all the community members, the faculty, the students. So how can students, whether they're in Schreyer or not, any Penn State student or even alumni or community members across the Commonwealth, how can they get engaged and leverage these programs? Obviously, if you're listening to this, you can click and follow the Dare to Disrupt podcast. If you're not already doing so, you should pause this and do that. But tell us about some of the other great programs that you've got going on here and how folks can plug into those.

[00:14:17] James Delattre: First and foremost, I would encourage everyone to go to Invent.psu.edu, that's our website, where we describe all the programs under the Invent Penn State umbrella. And at the bottom, there's a place to sign up for the Invent Penn State newsletter, and each month you'll get a description of all the wonderful things that are happening. Opportunities to engage. We showcase events like Global Entrepreneurship Week, the Venture and IP Conference. So, these are all wonderful places for either entrepreneurs or people that are interested in exploring entrepreneurship to engage, learn more, build these networks that ultimately are so helpful. People take their ideas and start to explore the possibility of taking them to the market.

[00:15:00] Sean Goheen: If a student or community member says, I don't have an idea for a business, but I have some skills that could probably be helpful to a startup and I want to plug into that culture, how can they get involved?

[00:15:10] James Delattre: Definitely visit your local launch box across the state. 96% of Pennsylvanians are within 30 miles of one of our launch boxes. So go there, meet the director, learn more about your local ecosystem. They're natural places for things like internships, mentorship, opportunities. That's the link up point across our network. So definitely encourage people to find their local launch box, go visit and take a tour.

[00:15:34] Sean Goheen: Perfect. And if you're in State College, it's right downtown here on Burrowes Street where we're recording. You know, you heard it straight from the boss on how and why you should make the most of these. Really, any major can plug in here, right, James?

[00:15:48] James Delattre: That's right. Absolutely. Yeah. This is not limited solely to folks that are in business majors or engineering. We're seeing awesome business ideas and successful startup companies coming out of everything from anthropology through the arts. If you've got a passion about making an impact, entrepreneurship very often is a way to do that and have it scale. We're happy to talk to anyone from any background.

[00:16:13] Sean Goheen: I think that's awesome. Transitioning a little bit, Ryan, I mentioned in the intro you work in private industry, and you volunteer your time and energy to host Dare to Disrupt, and some of our folks listening today are quite familiar with your voice. But how did you get plugged in as a volunteer with Penn State and then specifically, you know, we mentioned Smeal, Schreyer Honors College and Invent Penn State?

[00:16:37] Ryan Newman: Well, I appreciate you asking that question. I graduated in the spring of 2001 and by the fall of 2001 I was already coming back to campus. So, my first inaugural trip back to campus was in the fall of 2001. And I remember thinking it's so unusual to want to come back so quickly. But for me, I've always had this duality of

being a teacher and a learner. And in some ways, I always say that teaching is the oxygen for my learning. And so, with that as a backdrop for me, I wanted to come back and to articulate to my fellow classmates what I had already started to learn just in the days, months, weeks after leaving State College.

And I actually got my first formal mentee, a gentleman by the name of Trevor Walter, who's now a very senior executive at Sheetz, and prior to that was a financial trader on Wall Street. And literally he was the first mentee I had as a mentor. He was a first-year student, I had just graduated and then the line continued on from there. So, for me, I just never disconnected from Penn State. It was a continuous degree of connection because there were so many ways I could exercise so many muscles here at the university that, quite frankly, weren't yet being exercised in a working environment because I was obviously just sort of getting started and then from there got reconnected with the Schreyer Honors College. Joined the External Advisory Board which was a chance to really provide some input to the Dean of the Schreyer Honors College.

And my experience with Invent Penn State, that really started in the later years. It was really, I have to give President Eric Barron a lot of credit, as I'm sure James does as well, for really just having this vision of what entrepreneur and the role that it can play within a university as an economic engine driving growth and change. And I do believe that so much of the future of Penn State sits at the heart of innovation, which is going to happen with entrepreneurship. So I received a visit from Dr. Eric Barron during his time. He expressed to me this interest of this idea of the Summer Founders program. We're basically creating an endowment for gifts to be able to support students who take a summer to work on their business ideas, as members of the Penn State community would say, to de-risk those ideas to then give them greater probability of success. And it was from there that I really started to latch onto this idea of combining all these different interests here at Invent Penn State.

[00:19:01] Sean Goheen: That is awesome. And I do want to ask a follow up. Ryan, so you talked about you stayed connected to Penn State and obviously there's football and THON and some ways that people stay connected. But as a volunteer, how and why should somebody reconnect if maybe they've kind of gone and done their own thing, but they want to get reconnected and volunteer with the institution? Whether at Invent Penn State or at a campus or one of the colleges or some other place across the university.

[00:19:29] Ryan Newman: I'm a firm believer that there's only really two sources of fulfillment in life, and that's to grow and to give. And so many of us are out growing in our profession, but the question we have to ask ourselves is what are we doing to give? And for me, the greatest form of giving is mentorship. And when I talk to students at Penn State, when I talk to students on campus, the number one question they have for me is around what they want to do with their future. I was asked that question just today. And while I can try to answer that question in a group setting, you'd never do it justice the way that a one-on-one mentorship relationship does. So, we have countless mentorship programs across this university, both at University Park and the various

commonwealth campuses, not to mention in all different academic departments and genres. And so, it's never too early to become a mentor. And the greatest gift of all is that when you are mentoring a student, you're getting so much out of it and you're learning just as much as they are about yourself and them.

[00:20:21] Sean Goheen: Excellent. And I would also say you're never too old to be a mentee as well. So, there's always lifelong learning. Right?

[00:20:28] Ryan Newman: That's great. I'm looking at James, listening to him and I'm wondering if maybe I can recruit him to be my mentor.

[00:20:33] James Delattre: I was thinking the same thing.

[00:20:35] Sean Goheen: Well, sometimes the best mentors mentees teach each other something. So, I think that's a nice back and forth there. Now, Ryan, in the space that I work in, in alumni relations, there's kind of this golden triangle, if you will, of time, talent and treasure and something you and I have talked about, know it's really important that entrepreneurs branch out. You know, we're talking about giving back of your time and your talent here with mentoring, with coaching the Summer Founders program and students there. But it's also great if they become philanthropists. So, question for both of you, why should they consider that?

[00:21:08] Ryan Newman: Yeah, certainly. So look, the reality is that students are in many cases financially struggling, right? They're having a hard enough time with just tuition and room and board. And it becomes almost impossible for them to consider how would they potentially, even if they have a great idea, launch a business on top of all the other obligations they have. And I just met with some students just before this session who expressed similar sentiments. And so, what's amazing, and I think many entrepreneurs and successful folks would be surprised, is how few dollars go so far. And so the ability to create a Scholarship or to endow some type of gift, whether it's for anything like I described earlier, the Thesis Research grant traveling to Cameroon that required donor dollars to be able to pay for that plane ticket and play for my room and board when I was living in Cameroon. So, it could be in support of Thesis Research, but also in support of a new business idea, or simply dollars to help a student subsidize the cost of an internship in a foreign city where they don't have lodging available. So, all of these things can be done. And what I always tell my friends and peers is it doesn't have to be a major gift to have major impact. The key is to do something and start somewhere.

[00:22:20] James Delattre: We've been very fortunate to have some alumni, entrepreneurs make significant gifts to the university. And whenever they explain the rationale, the logic behind that, it traces back to wanting to pay it forward. They see themselves in the young students that they meet through programs like the Summer Founders program. They get very excited about enabling that creativity, and they want to make sure that Penn State is a national player in entrepreneurship and innovation in tech startups. So they're paying it forward. They see an opportunity to

give a gift and an opportunity that maybe they didn't have. So, we're very thankful for them. And then with the financial support, when that's complemented by the mentorship, that really changes someone's trajectory. And we've got many examples of students that can trace back to engagement in programs like Summer Founders. Working with people like Ryan, it changes their whole trajectory in life.

[00:23:20] Sean Goheen: Awesome. So, James, if somebody wanted to help out students, whether through mentorship or through philanthropy or both, how can they get that conversation going?

[00:23:30] James Delattre: So we work closely with colleagues in university development. Heather Winfield from Strategic Initiatives is always happy to have those conversations. And we work closely to make sure that the time spent is equally weighted and valued as any contribution financially, because we think that the learnings that come from the mentorship are equal, if not greater, in terms of changing someone's life path.

[00:23:57] Sean Goheen: Awesome. Now, going back to the volunteerism side, right, we're talking time and the talent. Ryan, you've invested a lot on that side as well. And one of the ways you've captured that is with the Dare to Disrupt podcast. But you're 20 episodes deep. 20 some episodes deep at this point. How did it actually come to be? What's the origin story? I think we all want to know. How did this get going?

[00:24:21] Ryan Newman: Well, I deserve zero credit. I will simply say that I was talking to some folks in development, Sean Miller and Rob Jackson, about this concept of having a successful entrepreneur in particular that I thought would make sense that the university needed to hear from because quite frankly, there are some amazing entrepreneurs doing some incredible things out there. And so, I went to my normal contacts and said, hey, we need to do a Zoom. I want to do a zoom meeting with this person.

And Sean and Rob quickly said, well, we actually have some other ideas in store for you. And a name of someone that up until that point was unknown to me became instrumental not only to the ability for the podcast to even get done, but to be nearly as successful it is. And that's Katie DeFiore. So, in walks Katie DeFiore. And quite frankly, I got nothing else to say about that, but I'm sure Katie can say a whole lot more.

[00:25:16] Sean Goheen: Well, Katie, do you want to step out from behind the proverbial glass and join the conversation here and add some more context to the story?

[00:25:25] Katie DeFiore: Sure. So, I'm a multimedia specialist with Invent Penn State. So, what that means is I manage all of the storytelling that we do that comes out of Invent Penn State. So that's written stories, that's our videos, and most importantly, I

think, and my favorite, the Dare to Disrupt podcast. And so, kind of going back a little bit, I actually participated in Invent Penn State programming when I was a student and got really interested in entrepreneurship. And I actually started my own podcast when I was a student about student entrepreneurs. And so I started launching podcasts left and right while I was a student. I got the bug and knew it was what I wanted to do. And then after a few years, after I graduated, I got reconnected with Invent Penn State and ended up in my current role. At the time, the role was mostly writing, but I was really itching to get a podcast going. And then James reached out to me about two years ago and said, hey, we have this really enthusiastic alum named Ryan.

He's interested in doing an interview series with successful alumni. What do you think? Do you think we could do that? I said, you know, I think we have a podcast. Let's do it. I was delighted to meet Ryan, and we worked together to sort of figure out what we wanted it to sound like. I know I was really inspired by how I built this, a very popular podcast that does sort of the similar format as we do interviewing successful entrepreneurs. But I really wanted to focus, make sure we were focusing on the stories of the people who were on the podcast because I think that's what people really latch on to. And that's turned out to be a really great approach for us. So over the past two years of the podcast, we've really fine-tuned and adjusted our method and found a way that we work together that really is successful. And so it's been really rewarding for me because I get to apply all my experiences I've had up until this point of launching podcasts. And when I was in college doing podcasting, I was sort of only doing two or three pieces of it, you know, and not really putting all of it together. So, it's really cool that in my full-time job I now get to do that and have a podcast that is really successful and impactful.

[00:27:22] Ryan Newman: And Sean, I just have to chime in and say that at the risk of stating the obvious, there's no way that I could be involved in this podcast and have the degree of impact that we've had if I couldn't just, quite frankly, show up and hit record. And the only reason why I'm able to do that is because of our tremendously talented and multifaceted producer, Katie DeFiore. I mean, everything from sourcing the guests to the research to the recording to the editing postproduction. I mean, she is literally a walking wonder.

[00:27:55] Katie DeFiore: I appreciate the compliment.

[00:27:56] Sean Goheen: So, I was going to ask you about kind of how you two go about putting this together every month because personally, as the Alumni Relations contact for the Honors College, I love that it's a Schreyer Scholar who is hosting and interviewing these great entrepreneurs every month. But it begs the question, know, taking that a step further, how do you actually go about this partnership? How do you make this happen every month? Because you've got entrepreneurs and I've experienced two types of entrepreneurs working on my podcast. There's the ones who get back to you in five minutes and then there's the ones that you have to track down. So how do you get on these people's calendars and make this great resource for our students and our alumni happen?

[00:28:35] Katie DeFiore: Well, I mean part of it is that we have a really supportive network at the university and Ryan of course has a supportive network as well of people. So all that combined ends up meaning that someone knows somebody and we're able to make a very warm introduction to the people who end up being the guests on our podcast. And that's just been a really wonderful thing. But then, like you said, these are generally higher profile individuals who are very busy. And so that's why we are on a monthly release schedule as compared to like a weekly or biweekly. Trying to find time for my calendar and Ryan's calendar and our guest's calendar to sort of overlap is sometimes a challenge, but we make it work and it always works out.

[00:29:16] James Delattre: I would say another effective tactic is to send Ryan's bio and to say, hey, you get to spend an hour getting to know this person and that definitely helps prompt the reply email.

[00:29:28] Sean Goheen: So I have to ask you two normally just like on mine. Most of mine are recorded remotely. Yours are all recorded remotely. How does it feel to actually do this? Like, you see the YouTube videos of people. How does it feel to do this in person?

[00:29:41] Ryan Newman: I think it's great. I'm such a huge fan of Katie's, and so any time I get to spend in her presence is amazing. I think the setup today is really awesome. I mean, this is so cool looking, and I just think I look forward to future collaborations in person as well.

[00:29:55] Katie DeFiore: Yeah, it's a throwback for me, really, because the podcast that I did while I was in college, I actually built my own podcasting studio in the house that I lived in in college. I built the soundproofing panels and someone was nice enough to donate a really nice microphone. So, it's cool to do it in person, but it's also been a fun adventure to learn how to do it remotely and do that effectively and learn all the tools involved with making that successful as well.

[00:30:22] Ryan Newman: Well, Sean and James see, we need to add that yet to the long list of already things that Katie's talented with. She not only can design a great podcast digitally, but also physically, as in the space.

[00:30:33] James Delattre: We knew that Katie was a rock star coming in. I didn't know about the construction skills. On top of everything else.

[00:30:38] Ryan Newman: We need to get her in the maker space after this.

[00:30:40] Katie DeFiore: I actually have been taking welding classes down at Origin Labs.

[00:30:45] Sean Goheen: So, if you're interested in that, that is clearly another

reason to come visit the innovation hub here. I didn't even know you had welding. That's awesome.

[00:30:52] Katie DeFiore: We do. It's really cool. It's really cool.

[00:30:55] Sean Goheen: That is amazing. Well, that's a little bit of a peek behind. Obviously, there's lots of editing promotion that goes into it, but it's so rewarding to put these out for you, the listener, to get something from these incredible people that we bring on every week, and in this case, three of you. So we got that peek behind the wizard's curtain, if you will. But now the why, right? You clearly want to highlight these incredible things these incredible Penn State alumni are doing in the entrepreneurial sphere. And it's clearly resonating because, Katie, you shared with me as we were planning this collab some data points and that you've published as of the time of recording this, over 20 episodes. And mind you, this is a monthly show, and you have over, as of September, 50,000 downloads and streams across the different podcasting apps that you can use. How does that make you all feel?

[00:31:43] Ryan Newman: Woohoo. 50,000 downloads. I mean, what that tells me is that when the university community, when the Penn State community gets behind something, look out. There's no stopping us. And on one hand, we've had 20 episodes here in the can, as they say in the business. But in many ways, it feels like we're just getting started. And quite frankly, as difficult as it may be to book your 21st guest, I can assure you it's a lot easier than booking your first guest. And so now we have this tremendous snowball of momentum behind us. And so, when we go to people and approach real founders and leaders of tremendous businesses and enterprise and industry, we have the credentials behind us. And quite frankly, we wouldn't have that if it wasn't for the tremendous support of the Penn State community and friends of the Penn State community.

[00:32:34] Sean Goheen: Well, Ryan actually makes me think of something you said in a session earlier about how success begets success. Right?

[00:32:39] Ryan Newman: Absolutely. And success compounds. And I didn't learn that early on in life, but once I figured that out, I was really hooked.

[00:32:46] Sean Goheen: So what has been the most exciting part of this whole endeavor for you three?

[00:32:51] James Delattre: Wow. So many amazing stories. I find myself after every episode kind of reflecting on my journey, what more I could do, missed opportunities I had where others were able to capitalize on those opportunities. Yeah, I think it's just a wonderful stream of learnings around leadership and keys to success.

And I tune in immediately as they're coming out. Katie doesn't let me preview. She makes me wait like everyone else.

But it's really enriching. And it makes clear just how amazing Penn Staters are. I think we are probably, in many ways, too humble of an alumni group. And after you hear story after story, it's just amazing what Penn Staters are doing in this world and the impact they're having.

[00:33:45] Katie DeFiore: Yeah. I would say one of my favorite parts of the podcast is the part that we do at the end of every episode. We have a current Penn State student on every episode to ask the alumni entrepreneur a few questions of their own. And I just love that segment so much because what happens with that is usually a really meaningful connection is formed between that current student and the alumni. And those have turned into several of them have turned into long lasting mentorships. And I really think it embodies. What Invent Penn State and Penn State is all about. Making those really meaningful connections and helping one another succeed. So, I'm really proud to have played a part in creating that opportunity for those students.

[00:34:28] Sean Goheen: That's awesome. And so, Ryan, speaking of, we hit the 20 mark. There's always this, how can we fit in? You have a Super Bowl winner on your show like we have humble brag. Then you try and time that around the Super Bowl. Right. So how does the role of timing when you interview and release these episodes play into both the promotion side but also the growth cycle and the evolution of the business for those founders?

[00:34:52] Ryan Newman: I appreciate you asking that.

The short answer is we have a lot more work to do on this and I think it actually might be a thesis topic for somebody one day to sort of analyze the Dare to Disrupt podcast and the role of the founders, which is not really to say anything about our importance to them, but more along the lines of if you capture the right founder or entrepreneur or dare disruptor, what you're really capturing is that momentary lightning in the bottle. It was our, I'm looking at Katie because it was our second podcast interview. We were just getting off the ground and we had secured Mo Bhende, the founder of Karat, as one of our podcast guests, who another David Shapiro plug. He was in my honors econ class with David Shapiro as well. So, I had fond memories of Mo. And the interview was scheduled for early October. And all of a sudden we get a message from his assistant asking if we can delay the interview until mid-October. And we were already under the gun to get the next episode released. We were super stressed. We're still trying to figure out all the mechanics, but obviously we're always at the will of our guests. And so of course we acquiesced.

Well, sure enough, literally the day before we interview, which ended up being two weeks before the interview was released, Karat announces that they are the latest company to become a Unicorn founder. So for those of our listeners who don't know, unicorn founder is like Nirvana for any entrepreneur, which basically technically means they achieved a market valuation of a billion dollars. And so, on the one hand, we were really struggling ahead of Mo's delay of the release. On the other hand, once we found out that the reason why he held it up was to be able to announce that they're a Unicorn founder and for that to be our second guest, it was

just extraordinary. And they've continued to go on to do amazing things like having Serena Williams come in as a partner and investor in their business.

And you'd think that that would be just a one-time occurrence. But most recently, we had Doug Wilbur on of Denim Social earlier in August and that interview was recorded or released on August eighth. And a mere two weeks later, on August 30, Doug's company Denim Social announces they're merging, which again is another great achievement in the eyes of an entrepreneur. And Doug had a really heartfelt, thoughtful post about that. So, it just speaks to this idea that I don't think Katie and I as amazing as Katie is. I don't think we deserve credit for necessarily timing the release of our podcast. But when you're talking to the right people, great things happen.

[00:37:15] Sean Goheen: Yeah, it's definitely a challenge because if you had waited a little bit longer on that know you have another cool announcement, but also shows that, hey, people are you capture a moment in time with the guests. So I think that's pretty cool. Now, you two spend a great deal of time preparing the interviews because really, for a 30 minute or a 60 minutes podcast episode, there's probably triple that in prep. Right. All the work goes in on the front end to make sure that you're having a good listening experience, but I'm sure you've encountered quite a few things that you just were not expecting during your interviews. Was there anything kind of out of left field that comes to mind?

[00:37:51] Ryan Newman: Absolutely. Every one of the interviews we record has some element of an unexpected surprise, and there's so many I could name. It's like asking to choose among your favorite children. Not possible. But two that come to mind know we had an amazing speaker. Susan Robinson, who has been a Ted Talk speaker, has over a million views on Ted Talk, and she talked about this concept of rejecting the label of being disabled and how she talks about how she failed at being disabled and she's legally blind. And you know, even though our podcasts are all audio, we record them on video. And so I was just a little concerned at my ability to connect with Susan. I wanted the interview to go so well. It was one of our earlier interviews and I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to connect in the same kind of way. And it was just extraordinary. Her podcast literally is one of our highest listened to episodes because she has such a following and she's so incredible.

And another one that comes to mind is Ryan Owen, who I met many years ago, and we reconnected through the podcast. We thought we were coming in to talk to a Wall Street trader turned entrepreneur. Instead, we got this stirring emotional story, in addition to all of that, by the way, about his experience in 911 and how he was in one of the buildings near the World Trade Center and how he literally, to this day forward, always wears sneakers to work because, in his words, he always wants to be prepared. I mean, it was just gut wrenching to hear him tell this story. And I come from a long line of family members that did some brave things in 911, so for me personally, it was just incredibly unexpected but also equally touching.

[00:39:21] Sean Goheen: Yeah, as a storyteller. To your point, Katie, sometimes you got to roll with those things because no matter how much prep you do, people are going to find a way to move you. In that vein, Ryan, one of the things I love about hosting Following the Gong is that I'm getting mentored as I'm conducting the interview. I have to be a generalist and have just enough of a knowledge of so many industries to be dangerous, and that's how mine has impacted me, knowing that hopefully the Scholars listening have some benefit. How has moderating the podcast and hosting this for going on two years, how has it impacted your own personal or professional growth?

[00:39:58] Ryan Newman: Yeah, I appreciate you saying that and for me, it's like you'd think it'd be a business answer, but it all comes back to just life and death and just how precious life is. I lost my best friend at the bus stop in fourth grade, and that really shapes so much of the way I think about life. And two podcast guests in particular touched me in this way and really educated me. One was Doug Leech of Ascension Recovery Services, who's a huge Penn State supporter. And Doug talked very candidly about dealing with anxiety as a student at Penn State and the coping mechanisms that he had to turn to, to be able to achieve that.

I just I was listening to him. And there was a former Penn State student, somebody that I grew up with who had recently passed away and that I know had had some issues and bouts with anxiety when they were younger. And I couldn't help but to look at Doug and really kind of understand for the first time what this friend from growing up was possibly dealing with. And yet at the same time, to see Doug grow from that in the way that he has and have such tremendous success, it's really extraordinary.

The other one that comes to mind is Gary Gilliam, who's another Super Bowl person that you can maybe not the same one we had on Following the Gong, but certainly somebody that's also done incredibly well. And there was a colleague of mine who, former colleague of mine, who was dealing with a very big health challenge. And I wanted to write him something that I thought would be very impactful. And rather than use my own words, I actually went back to the Gary Gilliam podcast. And Gary had this very stirring moment where he was going to quit football. This is when he was at Penn State before he ever went to the NFL. And he called one of his teachers from the Milton S. Hershey School. And I could never do it justice. But what Gary said, the teacher said to him in that moment of trial and tribulation, he said, God gives the hardest battles to its strongest soldiers. What you are currently going through has nothing to do with you, but will be a testimony to the soldiers you lead one day. So have faith in that. Control what you can control. Your mindset and your efforts. Show up every day and you let God take care of the rest. Now, I can't say it nearly as well as Gary can, but just the idea that in that moment I was able to call back on another experience of a podcast guest to hopefully give solace to one of my friends who was dealing with a challenge just was a tremendous benefit and quite frankly, a blessing from all this.

[00:42:16] Katie DeFiore: Yeah. And if I could add, I think it just really speaks to Ryan's interviewing ability that he's able to make these guests comfortable enough in this interview environment. Right, because no one loves being interviewed. I mean, I guess some people do, but most people get a little nervous and don't necessarily want to get to that really vulnerable place and share those kinds of stories. But Ryan's able to do these interviews and get these individuals to feel comfortable enough to share these stories that I think are the key to why our podcast is successful. So, it's just always phenomenal hearing each of these individual stories of challenges that they've faced and how they've overcome them.

[00:42:57] Sean Goheen: Absolutely. You two do a great job of kind of taking what should just be a business case and taking it to the next level and taking it deeper. And so that's something to be proud of. But if you went back to the beginning and could change one thing, what would you do differently?

[00:43:10] Ryan Newman: Wow, that's such a hard question to answer, because honestly, I feel like the podcast and the whole experience has so outstripped my expectations of what I thought this was. So, honestly, for me, I'm going to give kind of a cop out answer, which is simply to say, I wish I met Katie sooner, or maybe, I wish James knew what I was thinking so he could have tapped me into Katie and all the great resources of Invent Penn State. But the lesson I do take to heart what you're saying, Sean, about how does this relate to other entrepreneurs or other people listening? And I would simply say, if you have a great idea, don't wait. I mean, again, back to that example of the friend at the bus stop. If that taught me anything about life, it's don't wait for tomorrow. That which you can do today.

[00:43:52] Katie DeFiore: It's very interesting. I think I was very lucky in college to have been told pretty early on that what I was doing with podcasting was entrepreneurial. And so that sort of allowed me to enter into this whole world of entrepreneurship with open arms. And I think that's a key takeaway that people can have from this is maybe that something that you're doing, something that you're working on, a project, whatever it may be, is probably more entrepreneurial than you think it is. If you're out there looking for the resources and you're out there trying to put your idea into action, then that's entrepreneurship right there at its core.

[00:44:27] James Delattre: I'll add that universities are based on wonderful storytelling in the classroom. And what I think we've learned, and probably learned it a little too late, is how important storytelling is to bring together alumni, friends of Penn State, mentors, mentees. Good storytelling is just amazing, and I'm glad that we have this incredible team committed to doing that on a regular basis. It just amplifies all the wonderful things that are happening not just at Penn State, but across our alumni base.

[00:45:04] Sean Goheen: Ryan, did you ever envision yourself hosting a podcast? How do you fit this in with what I'm sure is more than 40 hours a week at work.

[00:45:11] Ryan Newman: Well, the only way I fit this in is because of Katie DeFiore, which I think we've covered. But in terms of if I've ever visioned myself doing, I guess I would say I really aspire to live by that Einstein quote that he said he was not smarter than everyone else. He was just passionately curious. I do have an insatiable curiosity and in particular, I feel like I have an insatiable curiosity to learn about people. And so, when we hit record on that know, we've got a list of questions that Katie has aptly prepared. But so much of where we go with the conversation is a function of the guest. And so, for me, when it becomes a labor of love, you somehow want something done in life, ask a busy person.

[00:45:50] Sean Goheen: So something I always like to ask in the tail end of following the Gone is to talk about your biggest success and the biggest mistake you've made and what you've learned from those experiences in a way that those listening can also learn something from that experience. So I'd love to have Ryan and James if you can answer that question.

[00:46:07] Ryan Newman: Wow, that's a doozy. I can go first only because I talk about this incessantly to Penn State students. My biggest mistake slash failure was going back to that tour of Penn State and seeing those Lion Ambassadors give that tour, you know, the little seed that was planted by my mom that said maybe you could be in the Scholar's program one day. She also planted another seed that said you'd be great at giving tours of Penn State. And so I really wanted to do that and that's the Lion Ambassadors. And I dutifully applied and was not accepted. And so I said, well, I'm going to try again. And the next year I filled out the application and tried again and I did not get in two years in a row. In fact, I still have the rejection letter from a person who will remain nameless but is on my wall at home hanging up. And I hung it intentionally because at the time it was such a tremendous – it was a crushing blow. It felt like the biggest failure that ever could possibly come. But I share with Penn State students because it really speaks to this idea that even the things that we sometimes put too much importance or focus on ends up being not what the universe has in store for us. And I never got to be a Lion Ambassador, but that didn't mean I wasn't going to find ways to give back and contribute to Penn State in some way.

[00:47:18] Sean Goheen: Well, Ryan, I think you have ended up giving tours of Penn State through the stories of the alumni that you interview here for so many to hear on demand. I think you're right. I think it all worked out for you.

[00:47:29] Ryan Newman: I love that, Sean I still don't have a Lion Ambassador license plate, but I'll take that.

[00:47:33] Sean Goheen: James, what about you?

[00:47:35] James Delattre: I was a Lion Ambassador, and I feel bad. I feel badly. I don't believe I was on the selection committee.

[00:47:44] Sean Goheen: I think you graduated before Ryan was a student, so

you're off the hook.

[00:47:48] Ryan Newman: Therapy session will begin when the podcast ends.

[00:47:51] James Delattre: The walking backwards part is very hazardous, so I just want you like I'm glad that you never had to endure that. Taking advantage of all the opportunities that Penn State had was life changing for me, but I could have done more. And I look back at several clubs. I look back at other ways that I could have started to pay it forward earlier. I was taken aback by the fact that a year after you left the university, you were already giving back. It didn't even occur to me. So, I could have done more because Penn State gave so much to me. I'm trying to make up for lost time now.

[00:48:26] Ryan Newman: You're doing a great job, James. You're incredible. You're a great asset to invent Penn State and the broader Penn State community. And the day I met you, and especially the day you introduced me to Katie, who I give you credit for, obviously, hiring was really life changing my Penn State journey.

[00:48:39] Sean Goheen: So we have three questions left for everybody. What's a final piece of advice that you would give for each Penn State student, alumni, or fan who's listening? Who want to take the leap into something out of their comfort zone and pursue it, be it a business, a podcast, a career change, or something else?

[00:48:56] Ryan Newman: Well, for me, I would simply say, to quote a famous quote that I don't know who was originally attributed to, but I've heard it the most by a motivational sports psychologist named Dr. Rob Gilbert, which is simply it's the start that stops most people. So what are you waiting for?

[00:49:13] James Delattre: I love that. I would say be vulnerable. These things are hard. And if you lean into the people that are around you, that are there to support you, you will go so much farther, faster than you ever imagined.

[00:49:27] Sean Goheen: So, on Following the Gong, as I mentioned in the intro, we like to say that it's mentoring on demand. And, Katie, you talked about storytelling on the Dare to Disrupt podcast. There's really only so much we could cover here. I feel like we're just scratching the surface of both your stories and that of invent Penn State and the impact that you're having on the Commonwealth. So that being said, what is the best way that a listener can reach out and connect with these different opportunities and you all, as alumni and volunteer or staff leaders to take the conversation further if they want to learn more about you, give back through the volunteer programs that you have?

[00:50:04] Ryan Newman: Well, for us in particular, I think, LinkedIn is the place where a lot of our business and our guests really tend to be. It's sort of like professional social media or social media for professionals, so to speak. Although that's obviously changing. I was just meeting with one of our summer founders who

made it pretty clear that there's a lot of other social media vehicles and platforms that are in existence now and will continue to thrive. But for me, personally, LinkedIn is where I spend most of my time in terms of connecting with students, alums, volunteers, et cetera.

[00:50:32] James Delattre: I love just getting a call, getting an email. So my contact information is available through invent Penn State website. My email address is jdelattre at psu.edu. So happy to hear from anyone and play a role to direct them to the right person or program to help them through their journey.

[00:50:51] Sean Goheen: Awesome. And finally, as we traditionally wrap up on following the Gong, if you could be a flavor of ice cream from one of our favorite local businesses not sponsored yet, the Berkey Creamery right here at University Park, which would you be? And Ryan and James, as Scholar alumni, most importantly, why would you be that flavor? And Katie, I'd also love if you want to jump in and give an answer too, as our producer behind the glass and friend of the Pod.

[00:51:18] James Delattre: So I have been trying to get the Berkeley Creamery to launch Entrepreneur-chip for years, and it would have a good amount of caffeine and chocolate in it would be the key. So, yeah, we've been hoping for that for a while. Maybe someday, like upcoming Startup Week, that could happen.

[00:51:38] Ryan Newman: So, for me, I've got to go with Scholar's Chip. I had the distinct pleasure, and I really view it as an honor, of giving the official tour to Atherton hall of Bill and Joan Schreyer. And it was one of my crowning Penn State achievements to be able to share that space with them that they had generously donated to create. And I remember the original story of what the flavor should entail in Scholar's Chip by Mr. Schreyer, and I feel like I'm walking in the shadow and footsteps of giants, people like Bill Schreyer and Frank Smeal and others who've been tremendous donors to this university. And so for me, when I go to the creamery, it's all about Scholar's Chip.

[00:52:20] Sean Goheen: Perfectly on brand, Ryan.

[00:52:21] Katie DeFiore: So I did spend some time perusing the different ice cream flavors on the creamery's website before this because I always get death by chocolate, and I feel like that's not a personality that I want to have. As far as flavors I enjoy, that's my favorite. But the one that I found that I think is more closer to my personality would be Arboretum Breeze. I spent a lot of time as a student at the Arboretum. I love the outdoors. I love all the hiking that's available in State College. That's half the reason why I'm very happy that I ended up here. And also, if you don't know, Arboretum Breeze is mint vanilla ice cream with chocolate chips and raspberry swirl. So, it's a lot of things that don't sound like they'd go together but actually work out really well. And as we've talked about a couple of times, I'm a collector of hobbies of sorts, so they don't seem like they go together, but they end up working out.

[00:53:13] Spean Goheen: Excellent. So James, in your vein, I think we'll assign Scholars Chip in the absence for now, hopefully the Creamery, the folks are listening there, we can get that collaboration going after a great collaboration here today. But that will chalk up three new entries on team menu with two Scholars Chip and Arboretum Breeze. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, go back and listen to past episodes of Following the Gong on your favorite podcast app.

So, thank you all so much for listening on this first ever crossover for both following the Gong and Dare to Disrupt. On following the Gong, you can hear conversations biweekly during the fall and spring and monthly during the summer with Schreyer Scholar alumni like Ryan and James here, and plenty of entrepreneur who are providing insight and wisdom on the student experience in just about every industry you can think of. On Dare to Disrupt, you can hear Ryan with Katie's production discuss with Penn State alumni entrepreneurs their stories and advice monthly. Both are designed to help you in your own Penn State journey, be it as an applicant, a student, an alum, or just a fan, and especially if you have been bit by the entrepreneurial bug. Be sure to check out both shows and follow like or subscribe, whatever verb the app uses, on your favorite podcast platform. You can learn more about both the Schreyer Honors College and Invent Penn State at shc.psu.edu and invent.psu.edu, respectively, as well as our social media threads. With that, I'll let James Delattre, fearless leader of Invent Penn State, and Ryan Newman, your Dare to Disrupt host have the final words today.

[00:54:37] James Delattre: Well, thank you so much for having me. This has been so much fun, just really wonderful. Ryan, thank you for everything you do for Penn State. Congratulations again on your Alumni Fellow award. It's so well deserved. So, thank you.

[00:54:51] Ryan Newman: Well, I'm so grateful for the time. And Sean, great job with the interview. I love having the chance to sit across of our fearless producer Katie DeFiore and James Delattre. Without James, there would be no Katie, which means there would be no Dare to Disrupt. So, thank you so much for having us.

This episode was produced and edited by Katie DeFiore. If you haven't already, be sure to subscribe to Dare to Disrupt wherever you listen to podcasts and look out for next month's episode. Thanks for listening.