

Interview with Andy Kaufman¹

**Award- winning Project Management & Leadership
Keynote Speaker, Author & Coach**



Interviewed by Ipek Sahra Ozguler
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Andy Kaufman, PMP is an international speaker, author, & executive coach, and President of the Institute for Leadership Excellence & Development Inc. Andy works with organizations around the world, helping them improve their ability to deliver projects & lead teams.

His keynotes, workshops, and executive coaching services have reached tens of thousands of people from hundreds of companies over the years, helping them deliver their projects, become more confident leaders, take focused action, and deliver results. He brings a rich background of over 25 years of experience in executive management, technology, team leadership, project management, consulting, coaching.

He is a certified trainer and author of "Navigating the Winds of Change: Staying on Course in Business & in Life", "Shining the Light on The Secret", and an e-book entitled "How to Organize Your Inbox & Get Rid of E-Mail Clutter", all published by Zurich Press. He is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP®) and a member of the Project Management Institute (PMI®).

He is the host of "The People and Projects Podcast" (<http://PeopleAndProjectsPodcast.com> or any podcast app) which provides interviews and insights to help listeners lead people and deliver

¹ How to cite this interview: Özgüler, İ. (2020); Interview with Andy Kaufman; *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue I, January.

projects. The podcast focuses on the intersection of People and Projects--where work gets done in the real world.

He is a recognized expert on topics related to leadership, project management, managing conflict, networking, relationships, time management, team-building, and delivering results.

Ipek Sahra Ozguler (Ozguler): Andy Kaufman, thank you for accepting the interview invitation of the PMWJ. Could you please introduce yourself to our readers? Who is Andy Kaufman? What are your areas of expertise and how do you use them?

Andy Kaufman (Kaufman): It's a pleasure to join you for this discussion, Ipek! I started my career as a software developer and was promoted into management for all the wrong reasons! You know how this works, right? Someone is reasonably good at one job and we assume that they'll be good at managing those sort of roles—it's often called the halo effect. Anyway, after making plenty of mistakes, I grew to love leading teams. Over the years, I grew to be a Director, then Vice President of Systems. During that journey, I started speaking at conferences and ran into people who asked me to share the same messages at their companies. In 2001, I started a company that does training, keynote speaking, and executive coaching. I now spend most days helping people learn how to lead and deliver—it's a joy that I never get tired of. And it's an honor to work with leading companies around the world.

Ozguler: You are the President of the Institute for Leadership Excellence & Development and help the organizations around the world improve the ability to deliver projects and lead teams. How do you achieve this?

Kaufman: Most days would find me and our team members in front of groups, helping them improve their ability to lead and deliver. In practice, that means leading project management and leadership workshops and keynotes, to groups as small as 15-20 and as large as many thousands. Our underlying philosophy is that everyone is a project manager, regardless of their title. We all need to deliver and our workshops are tuned to help people learn how to do that in practical ways regardless of their title. I might also suggest that our project management workshops are actually leadership workshops cloaked as project management. What I mean by that is we find the most challenging aspects of delivering projects is not the technical aspects of project management. It's learning how to influence, communicate, deal with conflict, facilitate decisions, and other facets of leadership. Helping people maximize their potential, to see that they are leaders—once again, regardless of title—is a privilege for all of the facilitators and coaches on our team.

Ozguler: We know that you are an international keynote speaker. Your keynote presentations are: “The Dirty Little Secret of Business”, “Leading Under Pressure”, “Lipstick on a Pig: How Illusion Leads to Crisis”, “How to Win Friends, Influence People, and Deliver Projects”, “Leading and Delivering in a Changing World”, “Beyond the Rock and the Hard Place: How to Deal with Conflict More Effectively”. How did you decide to become a keynote speaker?

Kaufman: When I started speaking at conferences, I ran into people who asked if I did this for my main job—speaking for a living. Frankly, I didn’t even know that was a thing. The company I worked for was quite supportive of me speaking, so I did it more. Eventually I got to the point that I wanted to give it a try—start a company that would focus on building leaders who can deliver, through keynotes, workshops, and coaching. My goal: try it for a year! If I’m able to build a viable business by then, great! If not, I will be glad that I tried, even if it fails. I’m now in my 19th year of that and cannot tell you the true privilege and honor it is to be in the people development business.

Ozguler: Furthermore, you are an author. Your first book, titled “Navigating the Winds Change: Staying on Course in Business & in Life”, was published in 2007. You argued that “learning how to effectively manage change is one of the fundamental skills we must develop to be excellent leaders”. From your perspective, why is managing change so critical. How could a leader develop this skill?

Kaufman: In some ways, you could argue that everything comes down to change. Clearly, we constantly face it so we need to learn how to deal with it ourselves. But anyone delivering projects is in the business of creating change for our stakeholders. If we do our jobs well, that change will deliver value for those stakeholders, but learning how to help our stakeholders through change is critical as well.

We could have a lovely discussion about how to develop the skill, but here’s one idea. I try to constantly remind myself that in every change there is opportunity. Psychology might suggest that we have a strong aversion to change—the mere exposure effect speaks to this. But if we can remind ourselves that there’s almost always opportunity when we’re faced with change, we can stay open-minded enough to find it. It’s easier to say than practice, but that mindset helps me to this day.

Ozguler: What other skills does a leader need to be more successful?

Kaufman: There are many, but if I had to pick only one, I'd say it's the ability to keep learning. Every once in a while, I run into someone who says they have 20 years of experience, but after some discussion, it would appear they have one year of experience repeated 20 times. Learning is not a strategic, intentional part of their development. Hosting the People and Projects Podcast has been a forcing function for me in this regard. Talking to some of the best thinkers about leadership and project management forces me to read their books, wrestle with their ideas, and find ways to apply them in my own life as well as those of my clients. Learning how to learn is critical in a world of disruptions.

Ozguler: Your second book, "Shining the Light on the Secret", was published in 2007. In this book, you responded to Rhonda Byre's best-selling book "The Secret" from a biblical worldview. What did you say in this book?

Kaufman: When The Secret first came out, I kept running into people talking about the law of attraction. There are aspects of the law of attraction that I understand and agree with. We observe some truth in "you reap what you sow". But many people were applying the idea by insisting that one could just sit back, close your eyes, visualize success, and it drops into your lap. I'm exaggerating, but the point is that I have interviewed accomplished researchers who say this sort of passive interpretation of the law of attraction is not just nonsense—it's dangerous. It keeps us from taking the actions we need.

Years ago, I found that a Biblical worldview was the most tenable for me personally. I thought it might be interesting to compare and contrast what The Secret was saying to principles in the Bible. Regardless of whether someone subscribes to the same worldview, they may find the insights thought-provoking.

Ozguler: You have been the host of "The People and Projects Podcast", which provides interviews and insights to help thousands of listeners lead people and deliver projects, for more than ten years. Jim Kouzes, best-selling author of Leadership Challenge, stated that "I've done a whole lot of interviews, and without a doubt, yours are the best! You clearly have done your homework, your enthusiasm is infectious, and your personal and professional integrity shines through. I really appreciated your exceptional questions and contributions. You asked what I had learned recently, and I can honestly say that today I learned how to be a better interviewer from you". What is the secret of your success?

Kaufman: There really is no secret to creating content beyond “deliver value”. I hear from listeners almost every day and typically what they say is that they find the content practical, helpful, and engaging. I try to come up with unique questions—not just the standard ones that authors typically get about their book. I try to get them to reveal more of themselves to people, which is why I include outtakes of our discussion outside of the normal interview. I want listeners to keep coming back, not just for free PDUs, but because they enjoy the learning and can apply it.

I started the podcast in 2009—there weren’t many around back then. Today there are over 770,000 active podcasts. We are regularly in the Top 100 for Careers in many countries, and I take that as an honor and challenge to keep finding ways to make it more valuable and relevant.

Ozguler: Thank you.

Kaufman: Thank you for the opportunity to interact! It’s truly my pleasure!

About the Interviewer



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İpek Sahra Özgüler graduated from the Istanbul University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 10 years' experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in January, 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has managed a variety of projects across manufacturing, defence, FMCG (Cola Cola), insurance (Euler Hermes), audit (Deloitte), telecommunication, ICT and aviation sectors and gained broader insights. In addition, she has worked as international correspondent for the *PM World Journal* since 2014.

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