

# TRANSCRIPT

## Learning Unboxed

**NOVA**

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Episode #297

Krystal Popov:

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**Krystal Popov:**

You've got to build grit in your kid and it's our job to do it. They have to have a goal that they want so bad, and they can't get it unless they complete, right? You can't let them quit throughout.

**Annalies Corbin:**

Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I'm your host and Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation, Annalies Corbin. We know the current model for education is obsolete. It was designed to create fleets of assembly line workers, not the thinkers and problem solvers needed today. We've seen the innovations that are possible within education, and it's our goal to leave the box behind and reimagine what education can look like in your own backyard.

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**Annalies Corbin:**

Welcome to Learning Unboxed. As always, I'm excited to talk with another great innovator in the transformative education space. And joining us today is Krystal Popov, owner of Futurepreneur. So Krystal, welcome to Learning Unboxed.

**Krystal Popov:**

Thank you, Annalies. I'm so happy to be here with you today.

**Annalies Corbin:**

Oh, thank you. I'm happy to have you. So, let's set a little context for our listeners as we get started here. Futurepreneur helps kids six to 16 turn their creativity and tech skills into successful ventures. Through business startup challenges, Krystal teaches kids essential entrepreneurship skills, including creativity, financial planning, team leadership, marketing, and sales. She's committed to filling the gap in education and inspiring the next generation of business owners.

So, Krystal, super excited that somebody's doing this work because, oh my gosh, do we desperately need this. So, I always love to start with my guests who've been the creators of things, my listeners know, I wanna know, what were you thinking? Why do this thing? Because starting things is hard.

**Krystal Popov:**

Oh man, it's hard. So, I'm like a serial entrepreneur. So, this is my passion project, but I've started six businesses in the last five years. Four of them are still running, two failed, right? That's what happens. So, I have other businesses that I own. I own a big co-working space. I own something in downtown Tucson called Proper Shops, which is a collective of retailers. But everything I do is to really support the entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurship changed my world. I went to school, went to college, became an engineer. I worked in the engineering world for about seven years. But when I settled down to start a family, I just couldn't put in those long weeks at the corporate company and I needed some freedom. That's how, usually, people want to become entrepreneurs. The problem was I was at a stage in my life where it was a little bit risky 'cause I'm now starting a family and I'm going to start a new venture.

And so, I've just always thought, "Man, if I could go back again, I want to be in my 19, 20, 21 years old," and that's when I want to start a business when I can sleep on my mom's couch, if I need to. Like your risk is real low, you kind of got all the time in the world, you're fearless. So, all of this stuff. And so, I just knew as I went through entrepreneurship, I said, "Man, I wish I started earlier." And I don't blame the teachers or the school system. It's hard to teach entrepreneurship if you've never done it. And a lot of teachers haven't.

I mean, grateful. I'm so grateful for teachers. I've three kids. They're in school. In fact, the teacher was so sweet this morning. She came up and, and told me, she said my 8-year-old is kind of a perfectionist. And she said, "There might be some tears after school today." And I said, "Okay." And she said, "She got a 77 on her math exam." Now, this is my kid that has an A-plus in math until today, right? And I said, "Oh, we'll get through it. It's okay," right?

**Annalies Corbin:**

Yeah, it's true.

**Krystal Popov:**

So, I have little ones, love their teachers, grateful for their teachers, but entrepreneurship, it just isn't being shown like it should.

**Annalies Corbin:**

You know, and you're right. It's a really interesting thing, right? So, a lot of educators really do recognize how the entrepreneurial mindset and that skill set is incredibly valuable across a whole host of lifelong opportunities and options that kiddos will opt

into. But let's talk a little bit about sort of those qualities and the specific things that through Futurepreneur, you really choose to teach.

I want to start with a high level, the macro view, I guess, if you will, around those skills that are necessary. And then, we'll get into the nuts and bolts of how the programming piece works. Because here's the thing I know about really great and creative educators. Everywhere that they could pull in that entrepreneurial mindset, if you will, that thinking and problem solving and just creativity out in sort of the raw world, they will. But to your point, it's not always easy to grab and incorporate into what we do. Maybe we're the English teacher, that's okay. Entrepreneurship's got a place in my English class, right? But we don't always equate it with those things. We will often park it in a business teacher's class. And the reality is it lends itself to so many things. So, help us understand.

**Krystal Popov:**

Yeah, I think ... Okay. So, especially in today's world where AI is coming, we can't stop it, we're gonna just try to use it as a tool that jobs are gonna be taken. And the people that are gonna rise above, they're just gonna be the top three percenters, right? So, even STEM. STEM before, it was like, "Man, Krystal, if you get a job in engineering, you're definitely gonna have a job. You're gonna get paid well." That's not so much anymore because, now, there's AI programming way quicker than we are.

So, it's not just a ticket to a good job anymore, but what is a ticket to a good job? What is a ticket to a secure high-paying career? And that's your stuff that are very hands-on. I don't think we'll ever get rid of doctors and hospitality and things like that. However, the people that are going to rise to the top are going to be three things. Number one, people that look at a problem and they're constantly looking for the solution rather than dwelling in the problem.

**Annalies Corbin:**

You mean, you don't want people admiring the problem? I have a colleague, that was always her phrase. "Oh, you're doing a great job admiring that problem."

**Krystal Popov:**

Yeah. Just the more you talk about it, the more it gets, and the more it's coming, and the more you're going to wallow in it, right? So, it's like, okay, if you can start looking at the problem as an opportunity, that's something you've got to be teaching. Now, it's tough to integrate that into math 'cause math is a problem and you have an answer.

So, where does creativity come in math? Well, it comes, if you're going to start a project, you're going to start a business, you're going to start a lemonade stand - let's

just go down to fundamentals - how much do I need to buy to ensure where's my break-even point? So, I don't need to spend X amount on lemonade, X amount on this. But where's my break even point, right? And what can I do to bring that profit up, right? So, this is where the creativity comes in, and this is what we teach throughout our business plans of Futurepreneur, those things.

So, number one, really looking at those problems as an opportunity to innovate. That's the people that are going to be paid well. It's those real innovators that they want to get after it. Like they want to find a solution.

The second thing is we've got to teach grit. And I'm going to come from a real heartfelt place in this, in that I have a niece, my cousin's kid, that just gave up on college in their first year. And I was just talking to my mom, and I said, "What's causing them to just give up on college in their first or second semester?" Like, I remember going to college, and I didn't have a choice. Like my mom's like, "You will finish," right?

**Annalies Corbin:**

Right.

**Krystal Popov:**

So, if I got stuck anywhere, I'm going to go find help. I'm going to find resources. I'm going to call my mom. I remember getting a C on a physics test and it was like my first C - I'm like my daughter like very perfectionist - and being like, "I'm not gonna make it." Mom's like, "It's okay." And I dropped the class. It was freshman year. I was devastated, but I was never gonna give up.

So, why are kids? And as I dig deeper, and everyone knows this, kids are in consumption phase. So, instead of facing the problem, instead of having some grit, stick-to-itiveness, "I'm not going to stop," nope, they'll just spend that six hours, eight hours a day scrolling on their phone. They will just wallow and distract. And so, that's what happened. When I was young, I had friends that were distracted, and maybe they would be partiers or they would do, but we didn't have this thing at our fingertips that we could just get lost in for six hours a day.

So, problem-solving, grit, and then, honestly, just like you're good at, Annalies, is conveying a message. Not being scared to step up, to talk, to learn storytelling, to learn the things you need to learn to really sales. And not everyone's going to be great at all three of those. But if you're really good at one of those, you're going to rise above the rest in the future.

So, how do we teach those? I think schools are doing a decent job teaching, at least the schools that my kids are at, of stepping up into those leadership roles, running for student council. I have one daughter at Montessori and two daughters that are at a Christian Academy. This Montessori school, and the reason she's there is she's the kid that's got a little bit of anxiety. She's got test anxiety, she gets overwhelmed. I battled her homework every single night and I'm like, "She's not a happy kid." I mean, she would leave school just deflated. Like the little light inside of my little Liviana – is her name – was gone.

And I went to the teachers and they're like, "She's doing fine," but these teachers have classes. She would rotate classes between four teachers, but their class size is 30 people. They've got to get through a curricula. And they recognize she had a problem, but she wasn't a troubled kid, but she wasn't excelling. She was just kind of flat in the middle. And I took her to this Montessori school and these teachers just breathe life into her. And she didn't even come ask me. They said, "Did you know Liviana ran for student council?" I'm like, "No." Like she got up in front there, like she wrote a speech.

**Annalies Corbin:**

So, she found her place. Part of it was she was in the wrong place and she found her place.

**Krystal Popov:**

I don't know, but I'm just so grateful for that.

**Annalies Corbin:**

Yeah.

**Krystal Popov:**

So, how do we give other kids those opportunities, and lots of kids that want to innovate, and I was looking for entrepreneurship stuff that I could do with my kids without me having to, like, research and pull off ChatGPT. I just wanted to order it and it'd be there. And it didn't exist. So, then, Futurepreneur was born.

**Annalies Corbin:**

So, you built it. You built it.

**Krystal Popov:**

Yeah.

**Annalies Corbin:**

Well, it's really interesting because one of the things that I've seen over many years is the creative folks that are out there, I mean, to your point, they're creative because they are actively trying to solve for something. It could be a business idea, it could be a fit idea, it could be everything in between. But the reality is, you see a need, and you're like, "I'm gonna create a thing," or "I'm gonna build a thing because I can't find what I'm looking for." And just like with your daughter, oftentimes, it's finding that magic where you can get passionate about something that's really exciting and intriguing to you.

And that's the other thing that I really love about entrepreneurship programs, especially when we apply them to kids, is kids' interests are incredibly varied, right? And one of the reasons they struggle with engagement, and perhaps this was part of what was going on with your daughter, I don't know for sure, but that fit is, oftentimes, because I don't feel seen, I don't feel heard, I can't engage in something because I can't figure out what it has to do with me. I'm not happy, I'm not passionate, and I'm not inspired. So, when you shift the environment, so that the participants can in fact be inspired or they can find a thing, and entrepreneurship is for everyone, right? It doesn't matter if you want to actually one day own a business. There are elements of it that allow you to find the thing that you're interested in. Spend time, energy, and effort digging in on that thing, whatever that thing happens to be, and then putting forward ideas around it.

So, let's talk about the nuts and bolts a little bit, Krystal, about how the program works. So, walk me through. How do I get access to this? How do I find it? And then, once I do, what do I do when I'm there?

**Krystal Popov:**

Yeah, well, our website is [futurepreneur.com](http://futurepreneur.com). You can also go to [freakidbiz.com](http://freakidbiz.com) and I have a freebie actually. We use Lemonade Stand as a freebie because it's interesting when I first started, and I'm like, "I'm going to create these little businesses in a box for kids where they get it." And I'm like, "I'm not doing Lemonade Stand.." You know, everyone does Lemonade Stand.

**Annalies Corbin:**

Everybody does Lemonade Stand.

**Krystal Popov:**

I know! And I was at this homeschool unit and I was teaching entrepreneurship to this unit. There was 50 families in there. And I'm like, "What business do you want to start? What business do you want to start?" And kids were like, "Lemonade stand." And I'm

like, "What?" You know. But I'm like, "Okay, So, we'll do a freebie," but it's very different. So, typically, kid wants to start a business. Parents, you've probably been in this space, but you know that most of it's going to rely on you. Put money to buy the beads. They're going to make the bracelets, and they're going to go to the fair or the little craft market, and they're going to sell them, but they're made, you're going to have so much inventory, they're never going to do it. So, you've now lost \$150, but at least your kid learned a good lesson.

And I'm like, "Let's rewind that back." So, I wanted to say, let's take the kid through the business model and making sure that they're learning something, they're just not showing up to the lemonade stand selling as much as they sell and then walking away. So, every business plan, we have design and sell your own T-shirt. My oldest daughter is my beta tester on this. This is for those creative minds that love to create something. Man, as shy as she was last year, she made like \$270 on our t-shirt business because she was talking to everyone about her t-shirt.

But each of these businesses, we have open your own bakery. We have build. We went into trades for a little bit. So, build a dog house and sell it. We do send them a free birdhouse kit, so they can do a small version and a big version, but where we introduce some different trades.

So, the idea, as a parent or an educator, is to get your kids going through these plans. Now, each of these business plans that come with our kits, we'll take them through about five to seven entrepreneur activities. So, we start with some of them have branding and marketing. They all have a math concept. So, it might be start a dog walking business and you're going to look and see how much money you can make if you work X days a week, right? So, it's all a little bit of a puzzle in math. I'm like, "How much money can I make? What if I tweak it? How much more money can I make?"

So, with each financial, and then they go through a marketing. So, some of the businesses, if they're selling an item, we'll teach them how to create a promo video for it or a flyer. And what does a good marketing flyer look like? We're going to capture people's attention. We're going to do this. If you're going to a fair, make sure you call ahead of time, get 10 people that are committed to showing up at your fair. If you have a grand opening and no one comes, you've made \$0.

So, it's just cute, little fun concepts to go through a whole business plan. Now, some families who are very busy, this is a weekend project. So, I'm going to send... kids are going with grandma and grandpa for the weekend. I'm going to send them with the bakery kit. Comes with a cute apron, comes with a spatula, and a little bakery business plan.

**Annalies Corbin:**

All the stuff you need.

**Krystal Popov:**

Yep. And they go through the little... they take some pre-orders. You know, this is probably the neighbor, cousin, whoever. They're going to take some pre-orders. They're going to bake some, they're going to sell it. So, it can be a weekend activity or some parents will make it a whole summer project where they want it to go and make \$1,500. I have a kid that just reached out to me that's like, "I made \$720. I've done two of your kits, but I want to buy a dirt bike. My parents said they pay for half of it. So, I have to hit [crosstalk]." And I just want to say kudos to those parents that aren't just buying their kid a dirt bike. Whether you can afford it or not, make your kid earn something.

**Annalies Corbin:**

Well, and I just love the idea that you've really figured out a way to make this sort of all-inclusive. So, it's all in. It's the family, it's the grandparents, it's the community, it's the school. However, the kids or the programming are sort of collected, and then deployed back out, that's a really, really big thing. So, I really appreciate that because not only does it make it more fun, but it's more tangible. Kids are going to remember in a completely different way, right? Anytime I do something that's that inclusive, it sticks over the long haul.

I'm really curious, as you work with the students, and they start to grow this collective set of skills, what do you see? And not just the businesses themselves, but what do you see from a developmental standpoint with the participants?

**Krystal Popov:**

The craziest thing that we get, especially from parents, now I go into some maybe homeschool co-ops and do it. Most of this is just the parents order the kits, is they're so interested at one part where their kid shines. And then, there's almost another part where their kid always gets stuck. So, some kids, they just want to go sell. Like they're just out there. They're going to talk to everyone. They're so proud of their business. And you can tell that personality of where that kid shines, but when it comes down to building the dog house, they'll pick out the wood, and saw one thing, and then they're over it.

And so, really seeing that unless they have a big reward, this is what we've seen. So, the guy that's raising for the dirt bike, he wants our new handy helper, neighborhood

helper we called it, and it's not even on the website yet. But he's like, "I heard about your neighborhood helper," we sent a little teaser email out "and I wanna do this because I think it could finish my goal." This guy has an end goal. And in our neighborhood helper, I mean, it's not fun. It's cleaning out garbage cans or picking up dog poop.

And so, what I've seen with kids and the feedback parents has is you got to build grit in your kid and it's our job to do it. They have to have a goal that they want so bad, and they can't get it unless they complete. You can't let them quit throughout. And we're seeing a lot of parents like, "Oh, we got here, and then he got distracted," or "He didn't really want to finish it." So, if they don't make money in the Futurepreneur [inaudible] make money. And we're not shy about that. I mean, of course you're going to learn all these skills, but we want them profitable. But if your kids make money, they usually gave up. And usually the family's like, "Oh, we had a busy season." Like, "Okay." And I'm like, "Those excuses are not going to serve them well."

So, I feel like I need to educate the parents more. If I'm putting myself as a teacher role, which most of your audience, I think, I believe are educators, I get their pain. When the parents come in and say, "But why didn't you do it this way?" And you're like, "Well, you know." And because I wanna kind of shake some parents saying, "Are you buying this just for a fun activity? And it looks good on the website or you really want to instill these skills?"

So, the first quarter of this year, I'm doing two things. I'm really building up the parent or mentor guide, we call it on, "Listen, I want your kids. I'm not, I have other businesses like this is my passion. So I don't want you buying just to buy. Let's really raise up the next generation of leaders. And here, we're going to do it together. So, let's partner on this. And here's how you can do it. Here's some fun ways you can do it." Now, the kids usually have fun doing it, but there's the parents that let them give up or the parents give up and the kids still want to finish, but the parents aren't there to help, right?

And the second thing I'm doing is building more of an educator unit. So, here's a week one training, here's a week two training. It's maybe an hour training for like a six-week module that they can use to really teach these pieces of building a business. So, it's teaching the teacher how to teach it, or teaching homeschooler how to teach it. So, I'm building that up now because I realize that we've been shipping for a year. So, I realize now that those two things are really needed to make the program a bigger success.

**Annalies Corbin:**

You know, as you sort of then think about that progression of transitioning from just working with individual students or families and to really now think about more traditional educators tapping into the same knowledge base and the enthusiasm that the kids have and share, so as you think about what comes next with that then, I can only imagine that there's some mechanism by which you can sort of see this program and these sets of products, whether they're yours or even somebody else's in their local community, wherever you happen to be, the reality is there are lots of folks that are really great entrepreneurs.

But to your point, and I love this part, they're not all great teachers, right? And we've got this incredible teaching talent that can tap into this through these partnerships that allow them to understand what that looks like. So, reversing sort of the scenario here a little bit, when you talk with the educators and as you're building this program out, what are you hearing from them about the barriers to really doing entrepreneurship well in more traditional settings?

**Krystal Popov:**

Honestly, the teachers that I've reached out to, it's like we don't have enough time in the day. Like most of them are like, "We have this curricula. We have standards we have to follow." They have to be ready for their testing, they have to do this and it's hard for them to fit in. 'Cause I've wrestled with this. We have a big charter school in Tucson called Lehman Academy and Dr. Kevin Lehman, he writes a lot of... actually, he writes a really good book for educators, but he's most famous for birth order. Like he wrote a birth order book.

I just had breakfast with him. I mean, he's retired now. He has these charter schools, but he's pretty much retired. And I said, "How do we get this?" And he said, "Man, there's so much pressure on them anyway, that this would be a whole semester project." And I said, "Okay. So, it's a semester project." But then, he's like, "We do something similar in fifth grade." It might get a little touch of it, but unless you go to specialty schools, especially public schools, they don't have time for it.

They're also disciplining kids. I mean, I volunteered in classroom several times and I just feel like I almost... I would like to help the teachers teach this unit. And my first thought was to get these into schools, but I kind of had to step back and say, I think this has to be done outside of the school system.

**Annalies Corbin:**

It's an interesting quandary, right? And one of the things that we always advocate for is when you see these amazing new program opportunities, part of the journey is

trying to figure out how you crosswalk or cross map, if you will, the skills and the standards. Because the reality is teaching entrepreneurship is chocked full of standards that every educator is required to teach. No question whatsoever, right? So, part of it is just the exercise of crosswalking, so that instead of in addition to, it's in instead of, right?

So, yes, educators are incredibly busy. Yes, they have a lot on their plates and a lot that they need to be doing with and for their students. But if they are in a school or a district that will allow them to step away from the traditional curriculum as long as the standards are being met, and we're seeing more and more of our traditional schools making this shift away from very canned, if you will, curriculum. Educators don't wanna teach that way. That's not why they went to school, right? I mean, teachers become teachers because they love learning. They themselves loved to learn, and they love watching kids learn. And oftentimes, the best way to do that is through very tangible, hands-on, deeply applied opportunities.

So part of it is just being able to demonstrate how the switch happens. So, I'm not adding to your plate. I'm actually taking something off because when my kids are engaged in something like this, it's actually less work for the educator. But it's a stretch. So, that's just part of it and that's exactly what we see.

**Krystal Popov:**

Yeah. So, there's all kinds of different charter schools popping up. And my oldest is in a Montessori school, and it's very interesting for her, this is my little bit anxiety ridden kid, that she gets a work packet at the beginning of the week. And some kids take all five days to complete her work packet, but she's got an incentive to get this done by Thursday because then, it's free day Friday. And I mean, I'm an engineer, and I'm like, "Free-day Friday? What are you doing? You're going to school and you're having a whole day that's free? But it's not really free day. She's like, "I went into the third grade class and helped him with the reading assignment."

**Annalies Corbin:**

Lots of learning happening, yeah.

**Krystal Popov:**

Lots of learning. Oh yeah, we created a new game with the solar system and I'm like, "Yes, yes." And so, if the schools can adopt a little bit more of that mindset. Actually, instead of my other school that my kids are in is a very strict Christian school, which is like from 11:20 to 11:50, we do math, and from 12:00 to 12:15, we have snack. And I'm like, "Man, Liviana's is so fluid instead of so structured." And I'm like, "Even if we went down in those structured schools to three-fourths of the day, just 60% structured, and

then the other 40% let them create their own game, let them garden outside, how can we shift to that? And I hope that's the future of education because I'm watching it with my two different schools that we're in.

**Annalies Corbin:**

Yeah. Absolutely. Absolutely. And we are starting to see more and more of that. And the educators that are listening to Learning Unboxed, they tend to be those creative educators and they really love embracing that.

You know, I always like to sort of wrap the conversation by recognizing that our listeners do in fact come from all over the world, from different backgrounds and experiences. And oftentimes, the hardest thing that people report is just getting started. So, whether you're a parent that's listening to this and you're super interested in the program, or you're a formal or an informal educator in your community, part of your Boys and Girls Club, a Y program, you name it, these are all great places for programs like Futurepreneur to be just embedded within.

So, what advice would you have for folks that aren't sure about how to get started? Yes, we can send them to a website, and we'll provide all of that information, but I'm really more interested in the mechanics of rolling up your sleeve and saying, "Hey, let's do this thing."

**Krystal Popov:**

Yeah. I mean, for me, it's just blocking it off on your schedule, right? And if you're an educator, and you're thinking you could run a summer camp, you can charge, you can make extra money for it, we're putting together with that unit of teaching other people how to teach entrepreneurship or putting in deals where they have a bundle of business plans, right? So, they might have 10 kids in their summer camp or in their homeschool cohort or whatever, but it's really just scheduling the time.

And we've made it so easy opening the booklet, right? We even have video models of teens walking the kids through their activities. So, we've made it very affordable to get a business plan. You can download it, a digital copy. I think we charge 15 bucks for it. I mean, it's very affordable but the idea is just open the book, get your kid excited about a goal or an outcome. And I tell parents all the time that I've ordered a booklet and haven't started, because I've reached out to everybody that orders, "Oh, we haven't started yet," and I'm like, "It's been two months. Like the football game on Saturday can wait," right?

It's like, it takes eight hours about for an entire business. So, you do three hours on one Sunday, two hours on that. And within a month, your kid had just went through an

incredible, incredible opportunity to excel and to see where they shine, to make money, to get out there into the world and to really be innovative. So, you've got to schedule it, get the booklets and just take the time to go through it. We have the most amazing feedback from our parents that are completing these kits with their kids and they just want more. We have lots of reorders. So, I know it's working. We're very excited to grow it now.

**Annalies Corbin:**

That's fabulous. I'm super excited to sort of watch to see what it does. So, thank you so much, Krystal, for making time out of your day to chat with us and share about your experiences. And we will make sure in the show notes all the links and all of the opportunities for people to reach out and be part of bringing entrepreneurship into their kids' lives. So thank you so much.

**Krystal Popov:**

Thank you, Annalies. It's a pleasure being here with you.

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**Annalies Corbin:**

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 reimagine education.