

Introducing The Time Rebels

Ross Welcome to Renegade Inc. Most of us are trapped in the cult of busy - packed schedules, immediate gratification, wall-to-wall zoom calls and the incessant 'ding' of your so-called smart device. It's not making us happy. And all the associated consumption is trashing the planet for those who aren't here yet. So how do we free ourselves from this tyranny and become a time rebel?

Ross Roman, welcome. Renegade Inc. here at KAKAnomics, our partners. Earlier this year, we met and you'd written *The Good Ancestor*. And during the programme, which caused a bit of consternation, you said that the Norwegians, the good people of Norway, are international drug dealers. And we got emails for this - how dare you talk about our country in that way? Qualify it. Why are the Norwegian's, in your view, international drug dealers?

Roman Krznic I did say that, and I still believe it.

Ross That's more e-mails, by the way.

Roman Krznic Sorry about that. But, well, it's clear that the Norwegian's are international drug dealers. The drug, of course, fossil fuels.

Ross Right.

Roman Krznic OK, so we all know Norway is the eighth biggest fossil fuel producer-exporter in the world. It's the third biggest exporter of natural gas. And in my book, *The Good Ancestor*, I've got this index called the Intergenerational Solidarity Index, which rates countries on their long term public policy performance. And the Norwegians are nowhere near the top of the list because that measure penalizes countries for fossil fuel production because that is all about dumping ecological damage on future generations. For me, this is all about intergenerational solidarity and long-term thinking. And the phrase I like to use is the idea of being a time rebel, being someone who is committed to thinking not about the here and now, not addicted to seconds, minutes and hours, not constantly clicking the buy now button and checking your latest message, but about having a long term vision, about thinking and planning in your own life, but also in public life or the business you work in, or the college that you're at, thinking decades, centuries, even millennia into the future. Now, that sounds crazy, but if you think back to Jonas Salk, he was the guy who discovered the polio vaccine back in 1955. He said, the great challenge of our century is to be a good ancestor. And that's about thinking about, well, how are we going to be judged by all those generations to come? If you think about it, OK, there are 7.7 billion people alive today and over the last 50,000 years, an estimated 100 billion people have been born and died. But they are far outweighed by the nearly 7 trillion people who'll be born over the next 50,000 years, assuming current birth rates stabilise this century. And even in the next couple of centuries, tens of billions of people will be born - amongst them, all your grandchildren and their grandchildren and all the friends and communities on whom they depend. So there's a real question. Those future generations are looking at us and asking us, well, what did you do? How did you respond to what you knew about the ecological crisis, about technological risks being thrust on future generations, like the threats from bio weapons or artificial intelligence

powered lethal autonomous weapons, all sorts of things like that? And so this is really about, you know, when you're thinking to yourself, how can I be a good ancestor? How can I pivot away from the addiction to fossil fuels we've inherited from the 19th century, really? Well, it begins by wanting to describe yourself as a good ancestor or really as a time rebel, someone committed to something longer.

Ross That's really interesting, the time rebel bit, because when people think, well, I can't change the fossil fuel industry and they feel helpless, what you're actually doing is returning power to the individual so you can actually change something. You can rebel against the tyranny of time, because we live in an era which is called a cult of busy. Whenever you ask anyone, even during a pandemic, how are you? Busy. And if you're not busy, it looks as though you're not trying hard enough or you've not got enough in your life. What you're getting at here is if you become a time rebel, you get away from that tyrannous relationship with your watch?

Roman Krznaric Exactly. We need to pivot away exactly from the short termism which we are structured into by technologies which are keeping us clicking and swiping and, of course, by our public institutions, which are forcing us into the here and now. You know, everyone's focused on the next election, the next headline, the next tweet and so on. We've got to think bigger. Now, who are we? What arrogance is it to think that, you know, we can break the chain of life without ecological degradation and technological risk? And I think that kind of realization, a kind of at least for me and for my kids, it opens you to this idea, OK, let's try and think a little bit longer. When I'm going shopping and picking up some green beans which are flown from Kenya into my supermarket in England or in Norway or wherever you happen to live, you know, you can ask, am I being a good ancestor when I buy this stuff? And, you know, of course, Norway has this huge kind of contradiction going on. On the one hand, it is incredibly long termist on some fundamental level in terms of the investment for future generation that goes on within Norway's borders - investment in health, investment in education. Norway's sovereign wealth fund is what finances that amazing amount of renewables in the economy, people driving Tesla's and so on. Yet the dark side - flip that coin around - where has a lot of that wealth come from? Well, that sovereign wealth fund, of course, has come from the financial returns of the fossil fuel industry - over a trillion dollars, nearly 200,000 dollars for every single Norwegian. And if that sovereign wealth fund is really about caring about future generations, well, it's only really caring about Norway's future generations. Well, what about those outside the borders? And even Norway's own future citizens are going to have to deal with the problems created by that fossil fuel industry. In other words, climate change affects, biodiversity loss, air pollution, all sorts of things. So there's a real tension at the heart of it all. We can't think that whether the great politician taking the long view is going to do it for us. We can't think Greta Thunberg is going to do it for us. You know, we can't think. I can't think, well, it's all my kids problem, and they're going to have to deal with it and go on the streets. No, I think we all need to be playing a role in all of this.

Ross What do the countries Portugal, Wales and Sweden have in common?

Roman Krznaric Right. Let's start with Wales. Well, what they've all got in common is that in all three countries, there are moves to become time rebels in the political realm. There are new institutions and laws emerging to extend time horizons and political thinking and

economic thinking. So Wales has a future generations commissioner. It's a public position. And the commissioner's job is to look at the impact of legislation in health care, environment, transport, education - its impact going at least up to 30 years in the future. How is it going to affect the wellbeing of the next generation? Now as the Future Generations Commissioner's name is Sophie Howe. She'd admit herself she doesn't have enough power and she'd like more. But there are now movements around the world trying to copy the Welsh example. I mean, in the UK, for example, there is a bill in parliament now for the whole UK to have a future generations commissioner. They are talking about this in the Netherlands as well. So that's Wales. Sweden's really interesting because a few years ago they appointed what became known as a minister of the future to really embed foresight and long-term thinking into public policy. It was only a temporary position. But again, other countries have been picking up on this. In the UAE, there is a Ministry of the Future and Cabinet Affairs. In Japan, there are moves to have set up a ministry of the future. In Singapore, in fact, they've got very highly developed foresight capabilities built into decision making right at the heart of government. And then Portugal.

Ross Right.

Roman Krznaric So Portugal's really interesting because about half a dozen young people have been filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights claiming rights for future generations to a clean and healthy atmosphere. This is a revolution in the legal sphere, and it builds on the work of organisations, for example, in the US called Our Children's Trust, which is an amazing public interest law firm, which has filed a landmark case with the US government on behalf of 21 young people arguing for the legal right to a safe climate and healthy atmosphere for both current and future generations. Now, these are David versus Goliath struggles, but they are going on in Portugal now. In the US there was a successful case recently, also in the Netherlands. In Colombia, a successful case, also in Uganda. This is probably the biggest change in human rights since the French Revolution - the idea of giving rights to people who aren't even alive now. Now, that is a serious time rebellion happening. I'm not saying it's going to be quick, but every country could be supporting this, whether it's in Scandinavia or in other parts of Europe or in Latin America and Asia.

Ross One of the interesting things around the Welsh model is one of the aims is to challenge public sector culture, because I'd argue inertia is one of the most powerful forces on Earth, not gravity. And basically to try and change cultures, as you know, it's almost impossible because you have to think root and branch. But what they've called for is a call for bravery, broad thinking and collaboration. And people who've bumped into the public sector know that they're not famed for bravery, broad thinking collaboration. Is that the gauntlet laid down for other people thinking like this, that actually we have to stand up now within those organisations?

Roman Krznaric Well, there's a funny kind of tension or contradiction here, because in some level, public bodies are more likely to take the long view than your elected politicians, whether they are civil servants or in the judicial sphere and so on on some level. But at the same time, as you say, there is this incredible inertia. I'm a believer in cultural change. I founded a museum called the Empathy Museum because I thought it wasn't enough to try and lobby governments about how do we empathize with people living on the social margins today and empathize with future generations. We need to change the cultural conversation.

And I think around public bodies, there is this kind of stasis, an unwillingness to shift. For example, you know, one of the great shifts that we need now is to shift from the addiction to GDP growth, which has dominated politics since the end of the Second World War. Whether it's governments which are neo liberal or Keynesian or Marxist, whatever, they've all wanted the same thing - endless growth. And we need to shift now to more regenerative economies, to circular economies, to getting rid of waste by having big corporations, triple bottom line accounting, a whole load of different mechanisms. I mean, again, they're in that sphere. The Norwegians, you know, have got a lot of their own companies they can look towards, but they can also look towards Sweden as that famous company, Houdini, that makes ski wear and hiking gear. And their customers can eat their own clothes that they've bought. What they do, they've got completely organic wool materials for their hiking gear. And Houdini has set up a composting facility in Stockholm, I believe, where you can throw your old ski jacket, your old hiking jacket. It turns into soil and they have served meals to their customers made out of their old clothes, right? That is the kind of economic kickstart that we need in our minds, really, and, of course, in practise too, to really have a long-term vision. Because ultimately, if we can't learn to live within the boundaries of this one and only planet we know that sustains life, then we aren't going to go nowhere, unless you're Elon Musk and think we can just run across to Mars and that'll solve all our problems. I'm not with him on that.

Ross Bizarre. Bizarre. Is it the case, though, as a public philosopher, you talk about these concepts. The reason you founded the empathy machine is actually wanted to put something tangible in people's hands. The Houdini example, they're actually putting product in people's hands. They can touch and feel, recycle or break down and then create something else out of. Is it the case that we human beings have to be able to touch it first because we're not very good theoretically?

Roman Krznic That's a really interesting question. I'm not quite sure I know the answer to that. I know the answer for myself. You know, I'm a writer and a philosopher, self invented public philosopher. I invented that term myself. And I believe in the power of ideas, absolutely. That's why I write books about ideas. I believe ideas can change society.

Ross But you've been practical as well.

Roman Krznic Well, exactly. Over the years, I've learnt you can write the best book in the world that you want, but that ain't going to change nothing, necessarily. Maybe that works for some politicians or people in the economic field or activists. But actually, you've got to start putting these things into practise and get people to literally embody change. So when I wrote a book on empathy, I then founded this thing called The Empathy Museum, and one of our main exhibits is called A Mile in My Shoes. You walk inside, it's a gigantic shoe box. It looks like a shoe box. You can go inside. It's the world's first empathy shoe shop. You're fitted with the shoes of a stranger. It could be someone who's been in prison for 14 years or a Syrian refugee or a bored investment banker. And you can literally walk a mile in their shoes while listening to an audio narrative of them talking about their own life in their own words. So you're literally embodying another person. It's amazing how this changes people, even when people don't listen to, or they listen to a very extreme story of a refugee, but even just an everyday story of a florist. You start getting a little bit outside yourself. And I think we were going to get any kind of change in economics, in politics or other realms, we need to get

outside the boundary of the ego. This is the first thing we've got to go beyond. But you do it by experience, ultimately, not just reading books written by people like me.

Ross Let's talk about ego a little bit, because if you're going to be a time rebel, how do you marry that, if you like, with the sense of yourself or who you think you are because ultimately we're going to have to do is put down a lot of the things that you thought about yourself?

Roman Krznaric Yeah, I think we have to realize that who we are doesn't just end on the outside of my skin. You know, I'm much more than this.

Ross Describe that.

Roman Krznaric OK, so for example, let's do a little imaginative thought experiment, OK? If you're willing to do this with me, OK. Just close your eyes for a moment and just imagine a young person in your life who you really care about. It could be your own child or a nephew or a niece or some other young child. So just picture them in your mind's eye. Now, imagine them 30 years in the future, still with your eyes shut. So like a little meditation here. Imagine 30 years in the future. Picture their face. Think about the struggles they're facing and the joys in their life. Just picture that for a moment. And now send your mind forward to their 90th birthday party, and they're surrounded by family and friends and old work colleagues and neighbours. It's their birthday. Go and have a look outside the window. What's going on in that world there? And now imagine someone comes over to them and puts a tiny baby into their arms. It's their first great grandchild. And they look down to that baby's eyes and think of themselves, well, what would this baby need to survive and thrive for the years and decades ahead? Now open your eyes again. That was a little journey - where to? The 22nd century. If you think about it, that tiny baby could be alive well 200 years from now. Their future isn't science fiction, it's an intimate family fact. It's just a couple of steps away from your life, or my life, anybody's life, doing that kind of little thought experiment. So to answer the question about the ego, if we really think about who we are and what we care about, well we are beings that transcend just our own life or our own bodies. We transcend the generations because most of us care. We care about going back into the past, parents, grandparents. We care about children, grandchildren. And if you think about that little baby living at the end of the 22nd century, potentially, they are not alone. They are embedded in a web of relationships and community and the web of the living world - the air that they breathe, the water they drink, the food they eat. So if you care about that baby, then you care about something much bigger.

Ross Interestingly, you go through the heart, not the head, because the head often will say, well, no, I've made these assumptions about life and that's me and that's it. But actually, when you start to open the heart artistically, then you start to get traction. It's really interesting because we have two little ones. And I said to my wife about three months ago, imagine we're not going to be around when our youngest, or either of them, or it's unlikely that we're going to be around when they're still here. And she said, please don't say that and she really wells up.

Roman Krznaric It can be a little bit too much.

Ross Of course, but you can see the effect of it.

Roman Krznaric When what we know, of course, from the last 15 years of climate change campaigning is you can feed people with all the facts in the world and it doesn't do anything.

Ross In fact, it probably further entrenches their position.

Roman Krznaric Absolutely.

Ross Buy two Range Rovers and leave one running, right?

Roman Krznaric Exactly. And so that's why whether I am talking to top politicians or investors or radical activists on the ground, I tend to start talking about the heart, about legacy, about our connection across the generations, about the idea of being a good ancestor, the idea of being a time rebel because, you know, human beings are social creatures. Aristotle told us that two and a half thousand years ago, and in the end, you can have as many gourmet meals by yourself as you like, but in the end, you want somebody sitting with you. And let's also have someone from a future generation sitting with us. I'd love company board meetings to leave a chair for the child or the stakeholders from the future. Think of them as future holders.

Ross If you become a time rebel, is one of the side effects of doing that to begin to cure some of the loneliness that's around at the moment?

Roman Krznaric No. Funny thing is, I once listened to this talk by a New Zealand Maori activist, a children's rights activist. She was standing up talking. She said, I want to tell you something. Here in the room I am here. But so are the dead and the unborn. I am part of a great chain of life and I can see them all. And there's a Maori word for this. It's called fakaapaapa. It's the Maori idea of genealogy or lineage, the idea that we are all in the great chain that stretches far into the past and long into the future. And I think this is the kind of mentality that we need to embody and engender. And, you know, you can find this kind of mentality, for example, in Norse legends, the idea of tracing back the generations, knowing all of your forefathers and foremothers. And, you know, you can go to Japan where there's this kind of idea of ancestral worship and respect is very deep. We can build long term vision on that to recognize that the here and the now is not the only now. We can have a longer sense of now that stretches far back and far forward.

Ross Does that create a richer existence?

Roman Krznaric Yeah, that's what existential sustenance is all about. Well, that's a big statement. But let me tell you what I mean by that.

Ross Unpack that.

Roman Krznaric I'll unpack that slightly. If I think about what is it that gives human beings meaning, I think there's three things really.

Ross Buying stuff isn't it?

Roman Krznaric Buying stuff will get you only so far, but then you hit a plateau. And as you know, the more stuff you buy and more material wealth that you have, well then your happiness tends to level out. One thing we need is human relationships because we are relational creatures. We need relationships in today's world. But I think there is existential sustenance in connecting with past and future as well. That's why so many cultures still have deep inter-generational connection written into them. There's the Native American idea of seventh generation decision making, for example, a kind of ecological stewardship, thinking about the impacts of your actions seven generations, one hundred and fifty, two hundred years ahead.

Ross So these guys were time rebels?

Roman Krznaric They were time rebels before I even thought of that term time rebel, long before. This kind of long-term thinking being a time rebel is good for our existential sustenance. But it also does something really important for human beings if you do it the right way, is that human beings are biophilic creatures. We are drawn to nature and the living world. This is a term biophilia from the great biologist E.O. Wilson, who's still with us today. And what he pointed out was that human beings are naturally.... A child will see a flower and want to sort of sniff it. They can't help but pat a dog. And we find sustenance in connecting with the living world. And ultimately, if you want to be a real time rebel, here's the trick. Don't just think about lengthening time, but think about regenerating place. This is the idea that if we are only going to survive as a species for the long term, if we learn to live within the boundaries of this one and only planet. So it's about falling in love with ice sheets and with savannas, with rivers and with mountains, with reconnecting, with the long cycles of nature. There's a beautiful Mohawk blessing spoken when a child is born that goes like this: Thank you, earth, you know the way. And that is all about caring about place as much as time. And I think - and there is a lot of psychology research around this - if we can make that connection with the living world. It adds something to who we are.

Ross Have we got a bit wrong here insofar as we think linear terms, so we're born at zero and then we die at so as opposed to thinking depth? Have we sort of got the the equation wrong because we thought we start here and there but actually there's a way we can go which is within and that's far richer and far deeper?

Roman Krznaric Well it's interesting as you look back at the history of Christianity, one of the biggest problems of Christianity is that it played havoc with our conception of time because it introduced the idea of linear time that there was a beginning of the world, you know, and then there's sort of a midpoint and maybe there will be an end of the world. It wasn't only Christianity that did that, but what we lost was the idea, actually, of not so much deep time, but the idea of cyclical time. A lot of indigenous cultures have maintained that idea of staying in touch with the ecological choreography of the planet. Now we're worried about the fiscal year and not, you know, the lunar month. We've lost touch with the seasons. We're worried about the electoral cycles and so on. We've got all our cycles but they are ones that we have invented, we have imposed. So I think we need to get away from the idea of linear time where this is sort of, you know, past, present and the arrow of time goes into the future and do something slightly different. And in Bali, they have this idea of the Pawukon calendar, which is a calendar of circles and cycles. And basically, instead of people thinking, oh, I'm doing this next week or next month, time is lived more in pulses. There are days

which they call full days and empty days. Full days of days where you have lots of rituals, you see your family. Empty days are days where you kind of sit around and don't do very much. I thought, well, that's not a bad way to live. And in a sense, that does give a kind of depth to time.

Ross Give us the first step to becoming a time rebel.

Roman Krznaric The first step is literally a step and then another step. And go and visit an ancient tree. Find a tree that's over a thousand years old near where you live. There probably is one. Go there with your family. Have a picnic under it. Don't take a selfie. Go and follow the advice of the great Vietnamese Monk Nhat Hanh, who said, don't just sit there, do something. Sit under that tree. Connect with its age, with the depths of time.

Ross Don't just sit there, do something. There's also an adage which is don't just do something, sit there.

Roman Krznaric That's what I meant to say. Thank you very much for pointing that out.

Ross Right.

Roman Krznaric Don't just do something, sit there. That was Nhat Hanh.

Ross Right, because the other way around would be the management consultancy, right?

Roman Krznaric Exactly.

Ross Finally, how do we get Norway into the top three of the intergenerational solidarity league table? Because I tell you, Iceland are up there. Sweden are up there. Denmark are up there.

Roman Krznaric But also there are some non wealthy OECD countries there, too, like Costa Rica, Nepal, Uruguay. This index rates countries on ten different indicators - environmental, social and economic, from investment in health care to renewable energy. But if Norway wants to jump up the table.... The reason they're down at number 26 which is shocking really for such an advanced society that gets the top ratings, as you said, in indices of happiness, equality, wealth equality and so on. The problem with Norway is its fossil fuel production. That is what brings it down. That's what brings Saudi Arabia down. That's what brings Venezuela down. So this is a country that needs to wean itself off its fossil fuel addiction.

Ross Román Krznaric, thank you very much for your time.

Roman Krznaric Thank you very much.