



Episode 641: Can College Hold You Back?

Guest: Derek Magill

WOODS: All right, let's talk about your situation. It seems like lately I've been talking a lot about education in various ways, and I've been lashing out at the traditional school system and the sorts of things people are taught, and the money they spend, and all this. And you have a story that sort of fits into this. So let's start off with your academic career. You enrolled at the University of Michigan, and you were a classics major. So why do you not have a classics degree? Give us the story.

MAGILL: Yeah, so I mean, that story really begins in high school. I was traditionally public schooled, which I was miserable with most of my life. And in high school I discovered basically a kind of interest in ancient Greece and ancient Greek writings, and that sort of became an outlet for me. It became something where I could study that on my own, and I felt like everything that I was learning wasn't useless. And I went through that process, and classics was sort of like a light at the end of the tunnel, because I thought, okay, if I get through high school, I'll be able to go to college and I'll get to study something that is meaningful to me, and also I think that would challenge me intellectually.

So I went through the motions. I got pretty good grades in high school, went to University of Michigan to study classics, and it was very underwhelming, I would say. I felt like there was a lot of things that I was doing that I had already studied, that was scratching at the surface, I would say, and it all seemed to be coming from the perspective of teaching with a certain kind of agenda. And I went through that for about two years. It didn't get better. My peers were not interested in the courses. My professors were barely around.

And I realized, you know, why am I paying for this? I get more out of studying the classics on my own than I do going through the motions of a degree. And so there just kind of became a point where I realized that diminishing returns and the opportunity cost of college was just too high to continue along that course and —

WOODS: What, if anything, had you originally thought you might do with your classics studies? Did you think that you might go into academia, or were you thinking, this is what I'll do for four years, but then when I get out I'll do something completely different, or had you thought that far ahead?

MAGILL: I mean, yeah, all I really wanted out of it was to be mentally challenged, to be intellectually stimulated. I had gone through most of high school very unhappy with what I was being taught, felt like I was never really being challenged, that I was never really being exposed to something that lit me up in a way that classics did. And so I never went to college for a career. I wasn't studying classics for a career. I didn't want to go into academia. I really just wanted to get inside the heads of the ancient Greeks, because I was really interested in politics at the time, as well, and I was reading people like Ayn Rand, I was reading Milton Friedman, other libertarian thinkers, as well as some of the Founding Fathers, and I wanted to kind of understand what is it that made these people's minds so great. What are the foundations of their thought? And I saw ancient Greece as sort of the connection there, so that was really what sort of started that interest for me.

WOODS: So you dropped out of school at what age?

MAGILL: I dropped out at 20 years old – or 19, actually. I was about to turn 20. And I kind of went out with a bang, actually. The last thing I did on campus, I actually ended up suing the University of Michigan and won a case against them as I was leaving them.

WOODS: On what grounds?

MAGILL: So the short version is viewpoint discrimination. The university had a policy in place – and this goes back to one of the problems that I have with the university system is that it's actually very unwelcoming, I would say, and very stifling of free speech, and so I had –

WOODS: Nooo.

MAGILL: (laughing)

WOODS: No, I refuse to believe that.

MAGILL: Especially the University of Michigan. And so it had a policy in place that said they would not fund political events. And we got word that they had given a lot of money to a group to have an event on affirmative action, to basically protest a Supreme Court case down in Washington, D.C. that was looking to uphold the ban on affirmative action in Michigan.

WOODS: Wait a minute. Are you telling me that they both discriminate against certain points of view and there's a double standard at work in how they enforce various policies? This is two things that it's hard for me to believe.

MAGILL: (laughing)

WOODS: You're telling me they were both happening?

MAGILL: Yeah, I mean, that's really the story of my time at University of Michigan. And so we held an event. We decided we were going to hold an event that was against affirmative action, basically the opposite of what they did. And we brought a speaker in to discuss affirmative action, and then we asked the university to fund her travel. And they refused on the grounds that it was a political event. When we challenged them and said, well, you funded a viewpoint of the opposite side, they said that it was a multicultural event. And so we filed a lawsuit and won a large sum from the university to go towards our club and fund future events.

WOODS: How about that? Yeah, because we all know that multicultural events have no political dimension to them whatsoever.

MAGILL: No, none at all.

WOODS: (laughing)

MAGILL: It was fun to take — I think the best part about it was the opportunity to take all of the tributes that they pay to diversity — and their version of diversity is very skin-deep — but all the tribute that they pay to that, and then turn it back on them and say, well, here's how you're not being very diverse right now, and you know, to make them squirm a little bit over that was a lot of fun. And so that case was settled as I was leaving the university.

WOODS: Now, so you left and you said to yourself that studying the classics here is not really the rewarding experience that I thought it would be, for the reasons that you mentioned, and there's no reason I couldn't apparently just study the classics on my own and then do something else in terms of my profession. So do you in fact as a professional person who works a full schedule, do you actually have time for academic study or to read academic stuff in your spare time, or is it just so long to Herodotus at this point?

MAGILL: (laughing) So there's plenty of time, actually. I think the myth of college is that students are there spending all of their time studying and learning a lot, they're always busy. I mean, we always hear those stories of students staying up all night long studying for tests, and I think the reality is that you can get a very rigorous liberal arts education studying one to two hours a day without having to stress about it, just fit it in to your normal schedule. It's not that hard. And that's what I've been able to do. I found that I get much more out of studying the liberal arts when I'm not stuck in a classroom for eight hours a day, which is what it was like in college.

WOODS: Yeah, I get that, and I actually, though, was one of those people who was extremely busy, because I just worked like crazy and I was doing extracurricular stuff. I wanted to get everything I possibly could out of that time, and I have to say, I have no college regrets whatsoever. If only I'd done this, if only I'd done that — I had no extra time. I had just enough time for a good social life, and I really, I had a great — but I made a mistake. Sophomore year, one semester I took all history courses. You know, they're assigning per course 250 to 300 dense pages a week, so it was easily

1,000 pages a week, and that's just the reading part of it. It was killing me. Like that's just not normal. I couldn't have done that in an hour or two. There's no way. So in a way I'm glad that I was put through something that was totally inhuman, because it did give me something that I was able to use later.

Now, I do want to talk about what you wound up doing once you got out of there, but I want to just clarify something, because we've had so much anti-college stuff on the show, whether it's Peter Schiff or Doug Casey or Isaac Morehouse or Zachary Slayback or Brett Veinotte or all these, a lot of people, I can understand, there are some fields that if you can afford it, it makes sense for you to go to college. Certainly to do engineering, you could study that on your own, but why? I'd rather just go to college and study engineering. Or if I want to practice law, I'm going to have to go to law school. So I don't think we can take a dogmatic position that college is no good for anybody, and that's probably not your position.

MAGILL: No, no, not at all. I mean, even myself, I got some value out of college as well. What I would say to people who respond that way is that, yes, you can absolutely get tremendous value out of college. I don't doubt the value that you got out of college. What I doubt is the idea that most young people are getting that same experience. I think —

WOODS: Yeah, that is the — I'm so glad you said that. That's the key thing, because if you walk along, just look around at a typical college, go to the library — go to the library 99 days out of 100. There's nobody there. There's nobody there studying. Then like one day maybe there'll be like a few people there studying, but honest to goodness, you do not come across people who are just absorbed by their studies, and they're so intellectually curious. I've had many, many experiences as an academic and as an observer and as a college lecturer and whatever on both sides of this, as a student and as a faculty member and as a lecturer, and I can tell you that 98% of them just want that piece of paper and they want to get out of there. They are not at all interested in any of this stuff. And professors have office hours. No one ever comes. No one comes to office hours except to complain about a grade. Nobody says, oh, that paper that you referenced in your lecture, I'd love to see it; what's the citation? That exists only in fantasies and in movies. That does not happen on real campuses.

MAGILL: Absolutely, and I mean, I think that was the biggest disappointment that I had, because I wanted that experience. I truly wanted to be challenged, and it just wasn't there. It wasn't there in the coursework, it wasn't there in the tests, it wasn't there in my peers, and it wasn't there in my professors, who, frankly, didn't seem to care that much about their students very much. And in a way, I understand that. I get that, because you're dealing with kids who are taking the class because they have to take the class or because they've been told it's an easy class to take. And after a while, I imagine that it just sort of wears on you, and you stop paying as much attention to the few in the class who might actually be really interested in your subject.

WOODS: I don't know anything about your family, and in fact, you and I are just talking for the first time today, but I'm going to take a wild guess that when you announced that you were dropping out of school, that the consensus in your family probably wasn't, good for you, you know, there's this crazy tyranny of college in our country today, where it's presumed that that's the only way you can be successful, but I know that you'll be successful in whatever you do. Not that you need to give us this personal information, but I have to say I'm curious as to what the response was.

MAGILL: Yeah, so I was actually fortunate. Now, most young people, that is the response, the standard response, and one of the biggest reasons kids are scared of taking alternative paths in their education. For me it was more of a middle ground, of a wariness about what I was going to be doing, but at the same time, actually, both of my parents did not graduate college either, and so there was this understanding that — they got what I felt, I think, at the end of the day, even though they were worried about the necessity of a degree.

WOODS: As you were contemplating the decision to leave, I assume you were simultaneously answering the question, "What am I going to do now?"

MAGILL: Yes, that's certainly an important one. I was never too worried. I mean, like I said, I didn't go to college for a job in the first place. I never really tied the value of degree towards the value in a career, especially one like classics. I never thought, oh, I'm going to show this piece of paper to a company, and they're going to be thrilled that I have a degree in classics. So for me, it wasn't very stressful to leave, as far as worrying about what I was going to do next, but there was certainly that need to quickly find a source of income.

WOODS: So what did you do? What skills did you have, other than your knowledge of classical languages, that you thought you could put to profitable use?

MAGILL: So in college I had spent a lot of time, one of the few valuable things that I got out of college was being involved in student groups. I ran the libertarian club on campus and put on a lot of fun events, and during that time I, just sort of by virtue of osmosis, learned social media marketing, quite a bit of graphic design even, while I was making banners and flyers and graphics online and running ads for my events that I was holding on campus and just promoting the club. I learned quite a bit about how the Facebook advertising system works, and from there I was able to take just that one skill and land myself a couple clients outside of school who were willing to pay a little bit of money, and some of them I worked for free for, as well, which is something I absolutely recommend young people consider when they're getting started out, is work for free. And each step in the way kind of turned into another opportunity, and eventually I was getting referrals to other people to work on different projects with them, and it sort of spun itself into a career of sorts, where I ended up registering a C corporation, and that's essentially where I am today.

WOODS: So are you working full time, then, for Praxis?

MAGILL: I work full time for Praxis. We're fortunate that we have sort of a remote team, and I'm able to do some work outside of Praxis, as well. They're very open about the idea of us, as long as we're doing great work with Praxis, that we can take on other projects and create value elsewhere, because we recognize that a lot of stuff we're all doing on the side connects back to what we're doing in Praxis.

WOODS: I've had two of your colleagues from Praxis on the show, Isaac Morehouse and Zachary Slayback, and it was great discussions with both of them. I'm going to have those episodes linked on today's show notes page, which is TomWoods.com/641. But I don't want to assume that everybody has listened to every single episode, although a shocking number of listeners have listened to every single one. So take just a minute to explain to people what the point of Praxis is.

MAGILL: Yeah, so Praxis is a one-year entrepreneurial apprenticeship for young people who want more than the standing menu of options that are offered to them today. And the standing menu is essentially go to college, get good grades, maybe go to grad school, take an internship, and potentially rack up a lot of debt, and then go get an entry-level job somewhere. We say we can sidestep all the bureaucracy, we can sidestep the time, and we can get you a great job day one, so that way you're building a portfolio of skills and experiences while you're young. Instead of waiting four years to start that process, you're building them right away, and you're learning on the job, and you're building a professional network that will allow you to take advantage of other opportunities when you're 22 and 23 that you just wouldn't have open to you if you spent your four years in school.

WOODS: I'm sure that it varies by individual and by company that you guys work with, but I am curious, you did say that there's a lot to be gained by working for free when you're young, because you'll learn a lot on the job, and you can let people see what you're made of and so on. But is that what's going on in Praxis? Are these people working for free for a year?

MAGILL: No, so the students actually get paid. The participants get paid a minimum of \$10 an hour, and a lot of them actually make more than that, but we guarantee that they'll make at least \$10 an hour on the job, working at least 30 hours a week, and really they're getting a custom tailored work experience that we work with their business partner to create for them. So they get to shadow the CEO, they get to potentially go to trade shows, learn directly from the various executives at the different departments and really experience hands on the ins and outs of running a successful business.

WOODS: What's your role in Praxis specifically?

MAGILL: So I'm the Director of Marketing, and the way I — one of the reasons I got involved with Praxis is because I had some experience in social media marketing, and I was able to come to them and say, hey, I know you're not hiring right now, but let me do some work for you, pro bono essentially, and in exchange for that you'll let me participate in the team.

WOODS: Nice. Okay, so how long have you been doing that?

MAGILL: So I've been working with Praxis in an unofficial capacity for more than a year now, but I'm actually officially on salary now as a team member. So I transitioned out of that free work. This is why I say free work is so valuable. You can very quickly transition out of free work and move into something more financially secure.

WOODS: Do you have either a personal website or a business-related website?

MAGILL: Yeah, so my website is DerekMagill.com.

WOODS: Okay, and that's M-A-G-I-L-L. It's not like Jimmy McGill on *Better Call Saul*. That's M-C-G-I-L-L. Are you telling me you don't watch *Better Call Saul*? Am I talking to someone who doesn't own a TV here?

MAGILL: (laughing) I don't watch the show, no. I'm sorry.

WOODS: (laughing) Ugh, come on. Did you watch *Breaking Bad*? You were too young to watch it, probably.

MAGILL: I did not. No, I mean, I don't —

WOODS: Oh my God —

MAGILL: I will say —

WOODS: I think we have to just terminate the conversation — ooh, you've been too busy being an entrepreneur? Come on.

MAGILL: You know, I don't watch that much television.

WOODS: Ugh, ahh, all right.

MAGILL: I've heard they're good shows.

WOODS: The thing is I know I should be complimenting you, and that is great that you spend your time more wisely, but, doggone it, you're killing me here. These are just tremendous. All right, don't try and watch *Better Call Saul* without watching the original *Breaking Bad* show. But anyway, the main character is Jimmy McGill. That was the joke.

MAGILL: Yeah, well, I get that all the time, and it's probably why it fell on deaf ears; people spell my name wrong all the time. But on that website, for your audience, you'll find quite a few things that if they're interested in downloading they'll be able to get access to. There is an eBook that I've written with my colleagues on how to get any job you want. It's kind of a cheesy title —

WOODS: Whoa, we should have —

MAGILL: — but has some good advice in there for young people.

WOODS: Yeah, there it is down there.

MAGILL: I'll link you to some other articles I've written. There's obviously still an opportunity for people, if they're really interested in Praxis, if they sign up they'll be able to get a \$2,000 scholarship for themselves or their friends or their children or family members. And there are a couple other things as well, so I would just encourage you to check it out if you're interested in alternative education and —

WOODS: Yeah, oh, this is good. I'm looking at it right now; I'm looking at it right now, and let me tell you why this website is great. You already know why it's great —

MAGILL: (laughing)

WOODS: — but everybody who's listening might not totally get — and I wouldn't have gotten even two years ago why this website is great. All right, first of all it's direct. Like, that homepage is right in your face. It's not cluttered with a million possibilities. It's, boom, this is me, and now read on. Then the second thing is, front and center is getting people on your email list. Now, you already know. I mean, you're into Internet marketing. You know the value of that.

MAGILL: Yes.

WOODS: You've got to — in fact, the guy I had on a few weeks ago to teach email marketing to my listeners is a guy named Ben Settle, and he recently said somewhat controversially, he said, the only purpose of your website is to build your email list. Now, that's going a little bit far, but he defends that absolutely. It is to build that email list. It's not to get likes; it's not to get shares. It's to build that list. And right here you give tremendous reasons to get on that list. I mean, it makes me want to get on the list, and I don't generally get on people's lists unless I just want to study — and in fact, in a way I kind of do want to study how you do your lists, so maybe I'll get on there. Now you'll be all self conscious that I'll be critiquing all your emails.

But look, you get — I mean, the benefits you get signing up for this email list — and then I like "\$2,000 Praxis scholarship (for Tom Woods audience)." Very sweet. I appreciate that. You get this eBook, *How to Get Any Job You Want*. It's tremendous. I mean, there are six benefits to — so you know what? While we're on the show right now, right now I'm signing up. I'm going to get on this list, because you've given me a reason to do it. There are so many sites I go to where it just says, "Sign up for our newsletter!" You know, just for that, I won't. Just for that, the fact that you have nothing to offer me other than some nondescript newsletter, I refuse to do it. (laughing) So anyway, that's really well done.

MAGILL: Tom, you made a good point there when you said you sign up for email lists just to see how other people do it —

WOODS: Yeah.

MAGILL: And I completely agree. I think that alone right there is one of the most underrated and maybe misunderstood, people just don't really realize that you can do this. Just to look at other websites, look at how other people do business and to actually sign up for their free stuff just so you can learn how it works, just so you can learn the process. And I'll tell you, that website right there was created essentially by a year or so of just studying how other people did their lists, how other people set up their websites and the kind of offers successful online marketers and successful bloggers made to their audience. And I'll tell you, it didn't start out like that day one. It really started out, like you said, it was a little small newsletter capture form that never worked and, you know, as a young person if you're able to just keep your eyes open and just look around the world outside of you, I mean, you can piece together the truth without ever having to spend a dime for it.

WOODS: Ugh, now I want to talk about email marketing.

MAGILL: (laughing)

WOODS: I'm sorry, we're going to lose everybody. No, no, no, people, this is the meat of the show right here. This is the meat, because this is stuff it took me years, *years* to figure out, and now I'm getting the hang of it. First of all, I'm going to tell you about a few people I do follow. I follow this guy Ben Settle —

MAGILL: Okay.

WOODS: — at BenSettle.com. And if I were you, I would jump on his list.

MAGILL: Yeah, I will.

WOODS: Because he emails every single day, and his method of how he emails is the subject of his monthly newsletter. It's an expensive monthly newsletter, and you can kind of get a feel for how he does email without subscribing to that newsletter, just by getting on his list and looking at his daily email. And you see the way he promotes and promotes and sells and sells every day, and you don't mind it, because it's infotainment. You know, you get something entertaining, and then at the end he makes his pitch.

Now, freebie-seekers on his list complain, hey, you're always selling something. Then get off my list. You're bothering me. Get off my list. It's like a — you know, you listen to radio talk shows all the time. And what does that consist of? A little entertainment, and then they break for an ad, and nobody says, oh, I'm never listening to Rush Limbaugh again; he had an ad on this show. Nobody's like that. So I do Ben Settle.

But then basically every, the major affiliate marketers out there, I'm not their list, because I want to know, first of all, what products are they promoting.

MAGILL: Yep.

WOODS: What are they — because I promote affiliate products, and I want to know what I'm up against, and I want to know are they just using the emails that the product creator gave them, or are they putting their own spin on it? I want to watch how they promote. I want to look at the subject lines they use. I want to follow the tactics that they use. And I'm on all different — I follow a guy named Mike from Maine. Mike from Maine violates every rule there is. He emails every day. He gives you no entertainment at all, and he pitches you a product every day. Now, I don't want to do that, but the fact is he earns 30 grand a month —

MAGILL: Yep.

WOODS: — 20 to 30 grand a month doing that, so who am I to say he's doing it wrong? But I still want to know, what's he promoting, because there are a million products he could promote. Why did he pick this one? And I learn something from being on their lists, and once in a while I buy something through these people. So anyway, that's what I do. Because I'm in affiliate marketing, I want to see what these other SOB's are up to.

MAGILL: I do the same thing, and I'll tell you, as someone who's in to marketing, I think you can learn so much more about marketing as a young person just doing what you said. Sign up for email lists. Look at — if there's any industry you want to go into, learn their sales funnel and just participate as the potential customer throughout their entire sales funnel, and you will learn so much more than you will in like a college marketing course.

WOODS: Oh, you know, I totally agree. There's a — the master of Facebook advertising — and by the way, advertising on Facebook is like a marketer's dream. You can pinpoint an audience. I've told people on the show before, I can pitch the Ron Paul Curriculum to people who have expressed an interest in both Ron Paul and homeschooling.

MAGILL: Yes, sir.

WOODS: I mean, this is — that shouldn't be possible. This is a miracle that I can do this.

Well, the key guy, and one of these days for a bonus episode just for my entrepreneur people, I'm going to get Rick Mulready on the show. He is the expert on Facebook ads, and what he shows you how to do is to build an automated sales funnel, where you — I mean, it's easy for me to pitch my products to people who have already heard of me. I get a good conversion rate with my Liberty Classroom for people who've already heard of me. But if they hadn't heard of me, they don't buy. It's only people who have heard

of me who buy. So these are cold leads. They have no idea who Tom Woods is. It's very flattering, people who know who Tom Woods is, they buy a Tom Woods product, it's very nice. But most of the world doesn't know, so up to now I've written off the rest of the world. (laughing) You know, I've written them off; they're never going to buy my product.

But Rick Mulready says, no, Tom, don't be an idiot. Now, he's never met me. He's never put it quite that way. But what he says is for your cold leads, you get a freebie, a giveaway. You get the eBook, you get the free course, whatever, and then you do relentless email follow up until you coax them into becoming a customer, and then you rinse and repeat, and you do this through well placed Facebook ads and good audiences and retargeting and so on.

And I am going to hire him. I'm going to work with him in his coaching program. I'm going to purchase the highest end coaching he offers, because I want him to help me to set up this automated funnel. That's exactly how I want to do it. Now, I'm 43 years old finally figuring this out. You're 22 years old. Think of the prospects you have when, you know, by the time you get to be my age, you're going to have like three houses and a yacht —

MAGILL: (laughing) I hope so.

WOODS: (laughing) All right, that was much too long. I mean, after all, you're the guest and I'm the host here, so now I'm just —

MAGILL: No, this is interesting stuff.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So you think about this stuff too, and you have your stuff on the side. So tell me, with your email on that website, DerekMagill.com, am I just going to be getting Praxis stuff, or am I going to be getting Derek Magill stuff, or is it both?

MAGILL: So you're going to get a couple things from Praxis, because I really like to tie everything that I do back to Praxis. But you're also going to get a lot of stuff that I've written elsewhere. So I have a QA that I do with young people regularly on both Quora and on my website, where I answer questions ranging from, "Should I drop out of college?" to "What should I do once I've left college?" to "I'm unhappy in college; what are some steps I can take to make that better?" So you'll get a lot of those things as well. I'm going to send you a link to 10 or so of the best ones that I've written, my favorite ones, and yeah, that's really what you get as well. So you get a lot of stuff from me, you get a lot of stuff from Praxis, and I try to curate the best from both.

WOODS: Okay, all right, good. Well, the opening goodies I get just for giving you my email address were good and attractive enough that I felt like you earned my email address, so I plugged it in there. All right, what else do you want to say before we say goodbye? Well, first I'll tell people, DiscoverPraxis.com is of course — so we've got

DerekMagill.com, and then we have DiscoverPraxis.com. These'll both be at TomWoods.com/641. But what else should we say that hasn't been said?

MAGILL: Oh, wow, putting the pressure on me.

WOODS: Oh, okay. But actually that makes me feel good. It feels like maybe we did cover what we wanted to say.

MAGILL: Yeah, I mean, I think we certainly scratched the surface, and I would say I guess as a message to young people out there, really consider your options before you jump on the university bandwagon. Like I said earlier, I'm not anti-college. I'm not telling you not to go to school. I think it's valuable to just take a step back, though, and even just spend some time off of the school conveyor belt. Maybe take a gap year and just take some time out of the system, so that you can really explore who you are. I find that, you know, whether school is valuable or not, you can discover much more about yourself outside of school in a different environment, and so I think if you take a year off before school, take a year off midway through school, and you'll be much better off when you do decide to go to school.

WOODS: All right, that sounds like reasonable advice, good advice. Another good piece of advice is to go to DerekMagill.com and sign up for your email list there. Well, thanks so much, Derek. Best of luck, and I wish you good luck and Praxis good luck as well. You're doing very important stuff.

MAGILL: Thanks, Tom.