



Transcript: bigQUEST Podcast | S1, Ep 04

Andy Murray on Calling Out Your Biggest Barrier

Ben Ortlip: You're listening to the big quest podcast with Andy Murray in a high stakes unpredictable world. Every day is ripe with blue ocean adventures. Just waiting to be discovered you need the mindset. The methods and the motivation to lead with confidence into the unknown. Come along. We talk to today's top leaders known for complicating challenges, outsmarting variables, and inspiring groups.

Andy, welcome. Good to see you.

Andy Murray: Hi, Ben. Good to be back for another episode, bigQUEST. I'm excited.

Ben Ortlip: I'm looking forward to talking about this. Recap for us, what we've talked about in terms of the [5 Big Questions](#) so far.

Andy Murray: We have covered the problem, which is the most important thing to get started on, asking *What problem you're actually trying to solve and is that a problem worth solving?*

We've clocked down on the outcome, which is asking *Are you sure the problem is going to give you the desired outcome for the customer?* which is super important. And today we get to talk about the single biggest barrier and why that barrier is important.

Ben Ortlip: I remember one thing that we did last time that we'll probably do today too, is to harmonize the single biggest problem with the single biggest outcome. And then are we going to do the same thing with the single barrier, the biggest barrier that we must overcome?

Andy Murray: Definitely.

We'll definitely make sure that the barrier is there. I've had the question before, *Why are you just picking one barrier? Because aren't all new challenges loaded with barriers?*

And typical three-year planning and strategy work or business planning, you do tend to try to list out all the barriers and then come up with plans to solve them.

But in truth, when you're going through uncertainty, you don't really have that luxury because you're not going to get solutions to the barriers. And the importance of coming up with a single biggest barrier is to find that one thing that is the elephant in the room and if you can take that elephant down with some sense of a direction of how you're going to do it, that single biggest barrier, there's a very good chance you'll be very successful in any other barrier you're going to encounter. And as you get into that, being able to take down barriers actually becomes one of the core skill sets that enables you to be very successful, not only on the Quest you're on, but further Quests that you might want to take on.

Ben Ortlip: Like ninja skills.

Andy Murray: Exactly. I was reading a book last week, Ben, that I thought was quite interesting and a completely different domain. It's called *The Biggest Bluff*. And it's just come out by Maria Konnikova. Maria is a psychologist and journalist and she had this crazy idea to get into the space of poker, and her ambition was to play at the big table for the World Series of Poker and she gave herself a year to do it. Now you gotta realize that Maria doesn't have any knowledge of poker, she didn't know how many cards were in the deck, and she's going to do that in one year.

Can you imagine that? So the barriers that she had is she had to learn the game and, what was the single biggest barrier is for her -- she had to find somebody that was at that level that would take her on and spend a year of their life helping her out. She knew there were a lot of things she didn't know. She didn't know strategy. But she sorted it out, knowing that was the biggest barrier. And she was very successful getting Erik Seidel, one of the top World Series of Poker player champions, to be her mentor for a whole year. And I still don't understand why he did that, but he did. And he was fascinated, I think, by how psychology might be in the card game.

But it's worth a read because what I learned is that playing poker parallels very well with the levels of uncertainty and skill combined that you actually see in most areas of life and work. And so if you can think about that you don't have perfect information, somebody is holding some cards and you need to, you, you need to have some skill and understanding of strategy.

What was really interesting in this book is they make the case that most of the guys running the tables at the top in the circuit today are very left-brained -- they've got the mathematics worked out and it's really turned into a science. There's card counting, algorithms, and apps that tell you the right probabilities.

And yet Eric doesn't really do that. He wins with a different approach. And she asked him, "What's the secret? What's the most important to do that would help me win and learn this game?" And he said two words: "Pay attention."

As she learned over time, it was the power of observation that trumped the left brain mathematicians every time. Strategies are always dynamic. In a world of uncertainty the people that can pay attention to the moment the most are actually going to be the ones that will be able to pivot and sort and adjust and adapt their strategies to the moment at hand. So it's, not suggesting everybody should go out and play poker and gamble, but it's definitely worth the read of *The Biggest Bluff*.

I'd highly recommend it. Maybe we put a link into it in the show notes.

Ben Ortlip: Yes, we'll do that. The Biggest Bluff. There's such a trend toward science, towards quantification. How much uncertainty really is there in cards. It's just 52 cards, right?

I don't even understand how this is a sport on ESPN, by the way.

Andy Murray: I don't understand why many things are our sports, quite honestly, especially with what we see happening in the Olympics.

I may have told you this story, but, what fascinated me about cards is yeah, it's 52 cards. You've seen 13 cards in a suit, 4 suits in a deck, and that's not changed since the game began. Think of the millions of hands played.

What you might not know about variability and how variability plays into it: it's 52 variables, that's all you've got. But 52 factored is six quintillion, and six quintillion is a very big number. It's so big that if you were to lay a dollar bill down on the earth and cover the earth completely and do that enough times to reach the height of Mount Everest, and start over and do it again, you've made a dent in the six quintillion. So the odds that anybody's holding the same deck of cards that had ever been played or ever will be played after three random shuffles is six quintillion. So it's the **variability** of that. It's not necessarily the **variables**. It's 52 variables.

When I was working at Walmart in retail, we were tracking over 200 variables every single day. When you look at weather and postcodes, looking at stores, competitors, and all the different factors that go into that, you have over 200 variables that you're working on.

It's an enormous amount of variability, which makes every single day a day that's never been like any other. And that gets to a bit about the problem we're talking about. If you look at all the problems and try to just pull from the past of what's worked, the variables are too many for that. You're not gonna find where you can say *Hey, let me just study this pattern and then I've got it.*

Figure out what is the single biggest one that you're looking at and then go after that and solve it, or at least know how you're going to solve it when you start going into a bigQUEST. The rest of them will take care of themselves and there'll be more barriers come up along the way that you didn't even think of.

Ben Ortlip: That's interesting because we do tend to try and put problems into the categories. We try to distill it down so we have to think less. And I think a lot of what we do that for is training: training other people how to do a job, we have to standardize positions and things like that.

Andy Murray: Great point.

Ben Ortlip: But you never see the same situation twice. If 52 cards have that many variables, how many does the workplace bring us? I remember a story that you told about building a house and how this relates to the idea that once you decide what the biggest barrier is.

You remember that?

Andy Murray: Yes. We had moved back to Cincinnati from Jackson, Tennessee, and I grew up around construction development and such.

Ben Ortlip: How old were you at the time?

Andy Murray: At that time I was 29 so I was pretty young. And we'd gotten a piece of land and was going to build a house on it. To save money, because we didn't have a lot of money, I decided I'll be the builder and do it myself while still working at Procter & Gamble in the daytime.

So I had a little pickup truck and I'd drive from Cincinnati downtown out to the East Side, and I'd be changing into work boots on the way out to go work and help build this house. And it was quite a challenge. If I'd known and mapped out all the realistic problems I was going to run into before we set out on that journey, I'm quite sure I would not have done it. It would have felt overwhelming -- a bit too scary, a bit too much.

But the way the whole thing unfolds: you get those problems in and you solve them, and you get to the next, if you get better at solving them. It's the thing that would have stopped me for sure doing it.

I'm so glad we did it. It was quite a learning experience and I'm not sure I'd do it again, but I did learn quite a bit and became quite good at solving difficult problems that had to get worked through.

And that's how it is with anything, I think, when starting out. It's why I really encourage people to not try to list all the problems. Just get the one you're going to solve and then, as time works out, you want the right brain to kick in and look for solutions you don't have. And when you try to solve too many problems before you build it out in your plan, you're only accessing your left brain because you're only seeing things that you've solved before in your brain.

And that's why it's good not to try and go down that path. Get some confidence -- if you can solve a big one, you're going to be able to solve the rest of them. There will be many barriers. I think they're like dragons: you get good at slaying the dragons in some kind of video game, then at the end of every single level, there's this one hairy big monster dragon that you've got to solve. And then once you solve it, you go on up to the next level and you get good at that.

In our world, very seldom do you see problems arise that are brand new problems you've never seen before. They typically have some patterns and recognition against them: *Are we going to have enough resources? Does my team have all the capabilities they need to do it? Am I going to get support from senior managers?* I could list six or seven problems that feel like barriers to overcome.

And when you do enough of these, you start to realize that these barriers have their own hangout in the Dragon's Hall of Fame if you will. They have their own little spot and you can look at it and say, *Yeah, I've seen all those before*, the more difficult ones we're slaying. And you get techniques and tricks on how to overcome those and realize that every single barrier has a solution to it, to overcome.

We're going to hear from Tom Muccio and we talk about the enormous number of barriers he had when he started a Quest to build this new partnership between Procter & Gamble and Walmart. There were

quite a few barriers and many came up after he got into it -- he didn't know. Most of them came up after he started the journey. *How do you get talent?* So we had to go and create some solutions to get talent to want to come down and take an unknown assignment that didn't have a history of producing great leaders because they didn't exist before.

He'll talk quite a bit about the importance of not trying to solve them all before you get there, but one of the things he said that has always struck me is: There wasn't a single barrier they didn't have a solution to, or they couldn't find a solution to, eventually.

Most of them they didn't see before they got started. They just took the one that was the single biggest one they could see at the time and they had a plan to solve that and then they began the journey.

Ben Ortlip: I'm curious, when you were building a house, when you were 29, did you have a single biggest barrier or were you just blowing through all of them at the same time when they came up?

Andy Murray: My single biggest barrier at that point and starting out was time. Because I'm working a full-time job and so I had to work out a way that I could manage time differently to be able to go after it. I knew that if I could get time, I could do just about anything with it.

And so I did several things. Every sub I talked to, I said, "I'm going to be calling you at 7:00 AM. I hope that's okay, if you take this job," or "We're going to go, from eight to nine o'clock at night is when I'm going to call and we'll talk." It was setting up parameters on how I was going to do that, in order to manage a full-time job and then still be able to deal with all of the people that I needed to talk to as a project leader, a builder, on a job and managing time became my real strong focus. I was very disciplined on how to do that. And that would have been my very barrier as I got into it.

Down into the road, the biggest barrier was getting green permits from the building department to pass the inspections, and I did get quite a few reds that I had to go back and redo. But if you can get the green permit that you did a good job and you're ready to go, then that's a real nice reward as a milestone.

Ben Ortlip: I see a difference between the biggest barrier and the biggest problem, but there's also some similarities in there and it's almost like the level of focus. Again, it's simplifying everything down to, identifying the thing that's going to keep me from solving this problem.

Andy Murray: Yes, absolutely. To be clear: The problem is the customer's problem. The barrier is your barrier.

And so it's, who's owning that is really the difference, Ben, in the definitions. And so you're trying to solve a problem for the customer. Your problem is going to be, I use the word barrier just to have some clean space between the two, but it's really the biggest problem that *you're going to have to solve*.

And you're absolutely right. And that in that case, it's yours, but there's a lot of similarities on how you solve them, and it's the same tools and approaches underneath to do it.

Ben Ortlip: And the similarity, too, that the result of identifying that as at such a simple level is that it allows a level of commitment. It sort of throws you out of just doing a side hustle.

Andy Murray: Yes. Great point and, as you talked about at the very beginning, the point on harmonizing. If your outcome is not compelling enough, that really moves you and creates that emotion we talked about, and the barriers are too high and they're not harmonized, the outcomes won't be powerful enough to get you to stick to the challenge, to get through the barrier. So that's why those two are connected. You've got to have an outcome that makes it worth solving the problems you're going to get. And that's probably a really simple human truth for anything you endeavor to go do.

There's a lot of hobbies I've had, dreams of side hustles, like *Hey, I want to be a great painter*. The problems I ran into of not having skill or patience or time and any abilities were more insurmountable than the dream -- the outcome wasn't that compelling enough for me to stick with it. I think you could pick that out pretty easily.

Ben Ortlip: It reminds me of Cortés, famous for burning the ships to create a level of commitment and focus for everybody.

Hey, let's take a quick show break and when we come back, we'll talk a little bit more about some tools and I want to get to the [5 Big Questions Checklist & 5-Part Video Series](#) that we have for people to download.

So we'll be right back after this.

Today, more than ever. We need leaders who lead with the values of excellence, professionalism, innovation, and collegiality, which stand for EPIC. These are the values the Walton College of Business consistently demonstrate. I've worked with the Walton College as a business owner or executive for over 25 years and I can tell you with certainty, the students we've hired, the exec ed programs, and the insights from the research have made an EPIC impact and continue to inspire me with new ways of thinking. Their vision to bring thought leadership to the challenges businesses face today, such as business integrity, or how to be a customer centric organization, that adds real value by creating conversations that connect people with organizations, faculty, industry, and practice. I put a link in the show notes to Dean Matt Waller's BeEPIC podcast where you'll hear stories and get break content that will inspire you to be EPIC.

Ben Ortlip: So we're talking about the single biggest barrier on your quest and, we're talking about the level of commitment and how the role that commitment plays in this.

Andy Murray: This is an important one for me personally. We often have these dreams and desires to do something different and what happens is they get sequestered and put into a side hustle and everybody says, "You need to have a side hustle."

You can, but these side hustles tend to get a low level of commitment. I'm a huge believer in putting yourself in a position where you've crossed that rubicon and it really means something. You've got to

cross this line of commitment for you to have the energy and focus. A commitment where going back is going to cost you something really focuses the mind.

I've had a dream for years and years, I wanted to start a company. I had that and didn't do anything with it, it kind of stood there on the side. But when I left a perfectly good job, sold the house, sold the furniture, and put ourselves out there, cash in the 401k for cash to live on, that level of crossing the rubicon for me and that level of commitment created an enormous amount of new energy that focused the mind.

The problems you get into -- any entrepreneur will tell you -- starting a company as, you started your company, you have to learn how to eat problems for breakfast. That's just the nature of it. And if you don't, and if you're hanging out with a plan B, because it's just a side hustle, it's often really difficult to have the will to push through that without a level of commitment.

You want a certain level of commitment for those on your team, too, to feel like they're making a choice and are really committed to that choice. How do you test for commitment? How do you get people to make a commitment? Part of that is you've got to have hearts and minds and an outcome worth pursuing.

Ben Ortlip: That's interesting. A lot of people would say that the reason the greatest generation was so great is because of the obstacles that they learned to face, they became obstacle facers. Barrier overcomers, between the Great Depression and World Wars and all of that, it really puts you into a state of mind that is indomitable.

Andy Murray: I couldn't agree more. There's a great book out called *The Obstacle is the Way*, and I'm trying to pull up who the author was in my head. We can put a link to it in the show notes. It's all about how overcoming barriers actually does something to you to increase your skill set and how our skills actually grow through overcoming obstacles.

And we hate obstacles, right? We hate getting involved in doing all of that at times, but that is how skill development happens. Again, one more reason why putting yourself out there and going after something uncertain is such an accelerator to skill development.

Ben Ortlip: All right. And just for clarity, we're not telling people to quit their jobs and sell their houses. Please consult a professional before you do.

Andy Murray: I think the world is ripe for big corporations to take on challenge. Matter of fact, if you sit on most senior leadership teams, the biggest desire that I hear -- and IBM did a study recently of CEOs surveyed -- who said creativity was the number one thing they worry about and feel they have a scarcity of.

I think you'll find a warm welcome by most companies in today's environment, for people that have that courage and willingness to try to create and do something new. And there's still a gap between the very top and the middle in terms of how do you unlock that so that people can be encouraged to go forward and try.

Ben Ortlip: I'm compelled as we're talking about this. There's a sense of urgency building in me for people to start applying what we've been talking about here:

- Go to the website
- Get the [5 Big Questions Checklist & 5-Part Video Series](#)
- Work through the 5 Big Questions

And I'd love to hear you talk about the process they'll experience as they work through these questions and when they get to the barrier, how it all ties together, because there's a moment when everything clicks.

Andy Murray: We put into practice and have tested with multiple leaders and through experience, these [5 Big Questions](#) that we're walking through and how they work together into a sequence. We'd love for you to download the checklist and work through the questions. It's free; it's something that I think everyone should have. If you're starting out something new the questions will give you a tremendous amount of focus and clarity and some more confidence.

It starts really by looking at the problem. When you download the workshop I've got a video describing each question, a little more in depth, and then some questions asked about creating the answer to that question. There's also a simple outline on how you build that into a paragraph that's harmonized and hangs together so that your team can really take off.

I've used it with teams. It's a fabulous tool as a conversation starter around a leadership team to work through it together, and it's through the togetherness of that you get a storyline built that's a narrative that will serve your purposes for creating a visual value proposition down the road, it will keep you on track.

In my mind, the [5 Big Questions](#) and the answers to those questions is the compass. That's the compass to move through a journey from A to B that you'll constantly be referencing.

When you look at scope creep, you're going to be looking back at the outcome.

When you look at, *Do I pivot or not?*, you're going to be looking at how to solve the problem for the customer.

Those [5 Big Questions](#) really do serve the whole journey from A to B the, from getting buy-in, to also getting team alignment, to engaging and how others can co-create, to be part of it.

Ben Ortlip: And that [5 Big Questions](#) checklist is not the whole bigQUEST journey.

Andy Murray: It's just the compass.

Ben Ortlip: But it's a great place to start if you're curious about the things that Andy has been saying. It's a great way to explore it a little bit, get your head around it and test the waters, and it's completely free. Go to the bigQUEST website, download the file you'll see prominently there, the invitation to download that. Start your quest.

Thanks for listening to the big quest podcast with Andy Murray. Make sure to head over to bigquest.com to download our free checklist, to launch your own big quest on the website, you'll find resources and ideas around the method, mindset and motivation concepts behind the big quest framework. If you like this episode, make sure to subscribe and leave a comment.

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