

Paul: [00:01](#) Ladies and gentlemen, angry Americans around the country and around the world, welcome to another very important, insightful, inspiring conversation with an American that I think is really at the forefront of one of the most important, and maybe most underreported, portions of our global war against the coronavirus.

Paul: [00:37](#) We need to talk about education. We need to talk about the future of education. We need to talk about our children, other people's children, the children of the world, and there is nobody better than I could think of to talk to than the great and powerful Anya Kamenetz. I am so grateful to have you on the show. Thank you for joining us.

Anya Kamenetz: [00:56](#) Thank you so much for having me, Paul.

Paul: [00:58](#) How are you? I've been asking every guest since the pandemic started. How are you and where are you and what is it like where you are for you and the people close to you?

Anya Kamenetz: [01:10](#) I'm quarantined in Brooklyn, in a townhouse, with my two daughters and my husband and our cat. My husband and I are working from home. We're all healthy. We're all safe. It's incredibly sad. We passed the peak now, and so there's less ambulances in the streets, but a lot more time to reflect on what happened and where we're going. So I'm anticipating gearing up for the next phase of this.

Paul: [01:43](#) I want to dig into that. We talked to Jeffrey Wright a couple episodes ago, who was in Brooklyn. He was in Fort Greene. For those of us that are in and around New York, it's definitely different, more intense. Can you shape maybe what's happening outside your walls? Like my apartment had for a while sirens coming by it every hour. Jeffrey, while we were talking, sirens were coming by. Can you shape maybe the experience around the bubble that is your family right now for people who maybe are in another neighborhood or in another part of the world?

Anya Kamenetz: [02:16](#) Yeah. I mean, well, we're in Greenpoint, which has got a fair number of elderly people. It's a Polish neighborhood traditionally. It's bordered very closely by Bushwick, which is a very high Hispanic population, a lot of undocumented folks, so a lot of folks that are having trouble accessing food and basic needs. Then also bordered by some of the most affluent parts of Brooklyn, Williamsburg and all of that.

Anya Kamenetz: [02:41](#) So it's really varied. I mean there is everything from ... We go to like the bougie butcher shop that's become the general store, and they deliver groceries to people that need them. Everybody goes out in their block and applauds for the essential workers at 7:00. But we also know that there's so much need going on. I think that's really ...

Anya Kamenetz: [03:06](#) It's been a great time to be in my neighborhood, to be honest with you. I feel like we've become closer as a neighborhood. People see each other in the street acknowledging each other more. Does it feel that way for you?

Paul: [03:16](#) It does, yeah. I mean I was thinking about the last ... It feels like another fight for the city. For me, maybe the most significant one was 9/11. But then there was Sandy, then there were some ... I was deployed in the army when the blackout happened. But there are different moments that bind everyone together, and I think New York's great about that. You can feel that really strong connected tissue flex.

Paul: [03:43](#) I feel like that's happening now. I think, thankfully, it's happening in other places, too. But I've described it as a war. I feel like there are some places that are frontlines on the war, some that are emerging or starting, some that are just distant and watching it from afar. That's how it's felt for me.

Paul: [04:00](#) But part of this show is also about taking a minute to reflect. We're all looking for escapes. One question I can't let you pass on, because you're also a super interesting person, that's why I wanted to talk to you in a while: what is your adult beverage or cocktail of choice, Anya?

Anya Kamenetz: [04:18](#) It's got to be bourbon because I'm from the South. We like to spiff it up with different things. Last weekend, we made something with fresh ginger and some lemon and a simple syrup.

Paul: [04:31](#) Nice. Do you have a brand of choice?

Anya Kamenetz: [04:36](#) I'll go Bulleit, but then sometimes I'll go rye. I'll go Old Overholt if it's a rye. So it depends on my mood.

Paul: [04:46](#) So welcome to Studio D, by the way. You are the Delta. You're the first guest ever. For folks who are listening, I'll describe it for you. For folks, who are watching, you can see it behind me, but we have unleashed Righteous Media Studio D. We've got the '69 Camaro behind me that still needs a name. We've got the

New York state flag, we've got the American flag. But over here, over my shoulder, Anya, is a lot of bourbon and whiskey, all American-made. There is an old Bulleit's rye up there, too.

- Anya Kamenetz: [05:17](#) Awesome.
- Paul: [05:17](#) So rye is making a comeback-
- Anya Kamenetz: [05:20](#) Oh, yeah.
- Paul: [05:20](#) ... and I think this show is going to do all we can to try to support that. But another question we ask of all guests, when you were growing up, can you tell us, Anya, what was your first car?
- Anya Kamenetz: [05:32](#) Well, I didn't ever really have a car to my name, but I drove my parents' Camry hatchback, and I definitely crashed it.
- Paul: [05:43](#) You did?
- Anya Kamenetz: [05:43](#) I did, I did. I crashed it. I had had a fight with my boyfriend. In New Orleans, we have the neutral ground, so there was a lane of traffic. Then there's a midpoint and another lane of traffic. I'd pulled out. I just did not look at all. I mean there's no mitigating anything. I was stressed out. Don't drive the car when you're stressed out. That's just the ... Yeah.
- Paul: [06:06](#) What year was the Camry? What color was it?
- Anya Kamenetz: [06:07](#) It was white. It was kind of a blurby, dented, white hatchback, very sensible type of car. If that was 1996, then that car was probably in 1989
- Paul: [06:23](#) Wow! Excellent.
- Anya Kamenetz: [06:25](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [06:25](#) So this is why we ask the car story. There's never a disappointing answer to the car story no matter who the guest is or what background they come from.
- Anya Kamenetz: [06:35](#) [inaudible 00:06:35] something better. I mean I had a friend in high school who had a Mercedes, and he used to keep a log of everybody he gave rides to, because Brian would drive ... And he loved to have a new person in the Mercedes. So if you needed a ride, you'd call Brian, he'd come get you in the Mercedes.

Paul: [06:50](#) Wow! All right. We might need to have Brian on the show and see what the log looks like.

Anya Kamenetz: [06:54](#) Totally.

Paul: [06:56](#) So, Anya, I was trying to figure out, when we were talking before the interview started, the conversation started, when we first met. But I feel like I've known you forever like post-9/11. But you've been [inaudible 00:07:06] company at NPR, you've done Ted Talks. You've been everywhere. But I've been so eager to talk to you because I feel like you have evolved with the times and you consistently stay ahead of the national conversation on whatever it is, whether it's technology, education, the pandemic, and your reporting and your books continue to do that. But you said you wanted to save it when we're recording. Where did we meet first?

Anya Kamenetz: [07:29](#) Well, I could say I feel the same way about you, Paul. It's been amazing to see your evolution and the leadership that you've shown for the communities that you are a part of and the success that you've had. I just think it's really, really awesome, sincerely.

Anya Kamenetz: [07:42](#) But we first met at a book fair. It was some kind of political related thing. You had just come out with a Hungry Ghosts and I had just come out with Generation Debt. And so, I think we were placed almost side-by-side at this book signing situation that had something to do with some political conference.

Paul: [08:03](#) Wow!

Anya Kamenetz: [08:04](#) So we met as fellow authors, which is really [crosstalk 00:08:06].

Paul: [08:07](#) Yeah. You've written many books since. I have not.

Anya Kamenetz: [08:11](#) But that book was so good, Paul.

Paul: [08:13](#) Thanks.

Anya Kamenetz: [08:14](#) It was such a good book.

Paul: [08:16](#) Well, I think the same about all of your work and all of your books. So I want to kick off the conversation about what the future of all of this looks like. I think I read one of your bio descriptions where it's saying you talk about the future and education, right?

Anya Kamenetz: [08:29](#) Yes, totally.

Paul: [08:30](#) And those are what you're passionate about, and I want to dig deep into that. But can you set the stage for us? This is, I think, maybe more important to the future of our country and our world than anything else. It's not something that I'm hearing the president talk about, not hearing many leaders talk about.

Paul: [08:46](#) But just as a starting point, we talked to Tom Colicchio about how the restaurant industry has been hit. We've talked to Jeffrey Wright about how the entertainment has been hit. We talked to David Aldridge about how sports has been hit. So can you frame it up for us, please, Anya? How has education been impacted by the pandemic in your view so far?

Anya Kamenetz: [09:06](#) So at the height of this pandemic, 95% of children around the world were out of school. We'll just start there. That has never happened before in the history of formal education. It's never happened in a rich country, unless you count London during the Blitz. And that was pretty abbreviated and it was just London and they sent a lot of those kids out of London. So in terms of every rich country, every city, every place, this has not happened before.

Anya Kamenetz: [09:36](#) The interruption, we do know from looking at smaller scale disruptions like Katrina, I'm a New Orleans native, so we know that it has an enormous impact. So even just a few weeks of being out of school can lead to months down the road. It can take years for kids to make up the learning that they lose, not just because school is closed, but because it's a society-wide disaster and there's economic disruption, there's political disruption, sometimes social unrest.

Anya Kamenetz: [10:02](#) So, yeah, it's massive, and we are not talking about it as much as we need to because education serves so many important functions in our society and for our kids.

Paul: [10:16](#) In America, is there anything that's particularly acute or unique or underreported? I want to talk to you about what the future could look like, but right now can you answer that and then talk about what's unique about America right now? But also where do you see the most urgent need? Is it PPE? Is it structural? Is it technology? Is it funding? Where do you see the most urgent on-fire hotspots in education right now?

Anya Kamenetz: [10:49](#) Gosh, I mean it's hard to know where to start because the first consideration that stopped people from shutting down schools,

and here in New York City, for example, probably we waited longer than we should have, because people were worried about what are kids going to eat. So we had the shameful situation where we have 30 million children that rely on federal food assistance through the school lunch program. Now school lunch workers and lunch ladies have been turned into frontline workers giving out food.

- Anya Kamenetz: [11:18](#) And so, that's been an incredible pivot by an organization that nobody thought was capable of that kind of innovation in such a short period of time. But it's not enough. We know that kids aren't getting the food that they need because their parents were afraid to leave the house or they're worried because they're undocumented or a million other reasons.
- Anya Kamenetz: [11:35](#) I think probably the thing that hits home the most for me ... Because I think every reporter gets used to the idea that there's people like me and there's people not like me. As a responsible reporter, you want to tell the stories of the people not like me, but then you go home and everything's safe and great.
- Anya Kamenetz: [11:52](#) That's not how it is right now because every single child, including your children, if you have them, my child, my children, we are all going through what's called an adverse childhood experience. It's a traumatic experience in the lives of our kids. No matter how good we are at mitigating that, it's a collective trauma that our kids are going through.
- Anya Kamenetz: [12:11](#) And so, coming to terms with what that means and also the fact that it's just so wide across the entire society, it should take time and resources and energy. But that is coming up against what's likely to be a terrible funding environment as our schools start to go back into session. So that's something that worries me a lot.
- Paul: [12:35](#) So we focus a lot on this show, Anya, about leadership. I've been extremely critical of the Secretary of Defense Esper and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs Wilkie for being invisible, for being reactive. I don't think that they have a national strategy to fall under from the president.
- Paul: [12:49](#) But as I have this discussion in preparation for this discussion with you, the person who seems even more invisible is the secretary of education. I don't see Betsy DeVos up there. I see the MyPillow CEO and I see the CEO of CVS. For a long time, we didn't see the secretary of defense and the secretary of veterans affairs. We see them once in a while now, but I don't

think I've seen Betsy DeVos a single time at the lectern in the White House. Maybe I missed it.

Paul: [13:16](#) But can you talk about this is a defining moment for her. She's been under fire from all sides. In my view, she's really ripped toward veterans and underprivileged community around defending bad actors in the for-profit space at the expense of the GI Bill, for example. But what's your view? Where is she and how do you think she's doing and what could she be doing or what could she be asked to do by the president that maybe she's not being even directed or asked to do right now?

Anya Kamenetz: [13:50](#) So the unique situation with this secretary is that her entire career has been about alternatives to public education. She does not believe in public education. She believes in charter schools, private schools, religious schools, vouchers ...

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:14:04]

Anya: [14:03](#) She believes in charter schools, private schools, religious schools, vouchers and homeschooling. That is what she cares about. That is what she talks about. That is what she funds with her own money. And so the paradox of having someone in charge of public schools, who doesn't like public schools or believe in public schools, I mean it's kind of like putting an oil executive in charge of the EPA, right?

Paul: [14:23](#) Right.

Anya: [14:25](#) It's not unprecedented for this administration. But now at this moment, you see that her voice is very muted. And when she does come out with things ... she had a pet policy that she put out last weekend. Very small amount of money out of the very small amount of money that was allocated to schools in the rescue package. And it's for micro schooling, which is money to parents to basically encourage them to continue homeschooling.

Anya: [14:52](#) Now, I would love a cash grant to buy more blocks and more science stuff. And I'm sure this is a popular idea, but our schools need hundreds of billions of dollars to be able to operate and to take what they're taking on now, is this remote learning project out of nowhere, getting kids the devices that they need, getting them the connectivity that they need, planning for the teachers, training for the teachers. Now they're looking at potentially summer school. Now they're looking at extending the school day so that they can have two shifts of schools so that they can

make class sizes smaller to stop the spread of the pandemic. So this is a major, major undertaking. And what we're missing is a champion of public schools who could get out there and say, "This is the money that we need and I will fight for that."

Paul:

[15:38](#)

Yeah, I mean, I was a fan of Arne Duncan and I'm an independent. But I loved how Arne Duncan always seemed to be a champion for students, or at least made you think about it. Right? The saying in the veteran's affairs department was always that the secretary of VA, VA was supposed to stand for Veterans Advocate. And you were supposed to advocate for all veterans in the whole world, not just the ones that use your hospitals. And I feel like Arne Duncan ... I remember him playing in the celebrity NBA game, and during All Star weekend. He was out doing the talk shows. He was making you think about education. And the [Vos 00:16:11] has been one of those quiet, behind the scenes slashers in my view. And really experimenting and/or damaging many of our critical components of government that now we need so much.

Paul:

[16:24](#)

But what she hasn't been doing in my view is just making us think about it, right? We're thinking about if you have kids or you care about kids, but there's not that forced conversation. But the piece that has emerged is Trump always finds a populous thing to slash at, and he picks Harvard. He says, "Okay, Harvard got too much money." But we are now functioning in an environment whether you believe in them or not, where private schools of all kinds seem like they're under pressure. If you don't have a big endowment, if you're dependent upon revenue from housing and room and board. So on in your view, what does the future of colleges look like, private colleges in America? And all the way cascading down to the elite private schools in New York city. Are we going to see a wave of collapses and bankruptcies among private institutions? One that I know about that was near my alma mater, Hampshire College, one of many others that may shut their doors because they can't sustain themselves anymore at a time when the education costs is going higher and higher and higher. So what does the future of college and private education look like in your view?

Anya:

[17:32](#)

It's a little funny for me to be in this position because I wrote a book about the changing face of higher education 10 years ago. And I went out as an advocate, really just trying to explain to people what I saw as the huge pressures on the sector. And here we are 10 years later. It kind of took a while for the iceberg to hit. But this really is such an incredible convergence of ... it's not only the financial pressures on colleges, it's not only the uncertainty of whether and when they can return to offer that

in person experience, but it's they forcibly driven the entire higher education system online. And how many students are going to decide that that's where they want to be or that's where they want to stay? Whether it's out of choice or necessity or a combination of both, the colleges that are going to come out of this looking really good are the ones that already know how to educate students at scale online, give them a relatively good experience.

Anya: [18:24](#) And there's a handful of institutions that fit that bill. I mean, I'm thinking about Southern New Hampshire University, Arizona State University, Western Governors University, all of which come at it from different angles. You have a state university that pivoted. You have a startup nonprofit, and you have a brick and mortar private campus that was really totally transformed by a visionary president into this behemoth online. And so, they can scale and scale and scale. They don't have any physical limitations, and so why wouldn't students go to those online situations if they don't know whether and when they can safely return to their campuses? So I think that it's going to be extremely detrimental and it will be a real cold winter for these universities.

Anya: [19:05](#) If I were looking at it from a leadership standpoint, I would say what do we need out of this sector? What do we really need to be able to do and be able to provide? Obviously we need healthcare workers. We need to be able to train an incredible number of healthcare workers in the next year, year and a half. Probably it's community colleges that have the capacity to do that. There's a huge clinical hands on component to a lot of healthcare work. So you can't do it all online. You can do some of the coursework online, but you have to have a practicum and be there in person. So those relationships are really strong.

Anya: [19:36](#) Then obviously there's a research component. The medical research, basic scientific research. A lot of times that needs to go on in person. So how do we continue to fund those basic, basic efforts? And paradoxically, one of the articles I was reading recently compared this time in terms of its stress and pressure and the existing system to the GI bill, because the GI bill exploded the number of students and completely overwhelmed the existing structure and you had to build huge numbers of new campuses to accommodate it. Well, this is a disruptive force. But it's still a disruptive change and they're going to be definitely institutions that adapt and expand as well as ones that drop out.

Paul: [20:17](#) Anya, do you think it's going to deepen the cleavage that exists between the rich and the poor in that ... When I went to college, it was an entirely intimate experience. A small liberal arts school where we played on the football team and you had club sports and you had a central dining hall and cultural houses when everybody was on top of each other? And those schools like Amherst and Harvard and all the others are going to have to adjust. But is it going to be a situation where it's going to be more expensive for them, and the only ones who are going to be able to have that kind of white glove opportunity are going to be the wealthiest and the ones that can get admission, that sort of thing, and many other folks are going to end up at University of Phoenix? How do you see that unfolding?

Paul: [21:02](#) And I'm also wondering, are we going to see, see a wave of bankruptcies in your opinion? It feels like we're starting to see retail giants go down. Neiman Marcus just went down. Virgin Airways went down. Are we going to wake up and find out that Colgate is gone or or that Brown University is gone? Is there going to be somebody that is going to surprise us that you think could collapse in the next year or two?

Anya: [21:25](#) So I do think there's going to be financial collapses. I think there going to be mergers and closures within state systems. I think one of the biggest places where there's authority to close is these kinds of state systems where you have two or three regional college systems and they're overlapping and there's another college 50 miles down the road. So I wouldn't be surprised if some of those start to collapse a little bit or merge. Merge/close down. Colleges tend to be the largest employers in their regions and in their small towns. And so, they have a huge base of support for that reason, as well as being part of the tax space. Although it depends, because they're nonprofits. So people have been wrong before in predicting confidently the collapse of hundreds of institutions on the order of hundreds. But I wouldn't be surprised if we see quite a few bankruptcies And closures, and maybe some that we wouldn't expect to see.

Paul: [22:23](#) Anya, we ask this of all our guests. I mean, you are an incredibly objective journalist. You're a thought leader, but you're also a parent. You're a New Yorker. You're surrounded by the pandemic, and I think you're also positively influencing their response. But everybody's had a different emotional response. And we ask every guest, and I'll ask you, Anya ... your last name is so tough. I know you know this. But Kamenetz, right? Am I getting that right? Anya Kamenetz, what makes you angry?

- Anya: [22:58](#) I'm getting really angry now at the way that people try to adjust their view of what's happening in order to wall themselves off from the humanity of other people, including the people that are literally keeping us alive from day to day. I think that the way people cope, and I understand this, is they close their circle of empathy and they say, "Well, these are the people I care about. These are people like me and these are the people I don't care about, the people that are not like me." But the more I hear people talking about reopening and talking about, "What about the economy?" The more I'm like, "You have eliminated from your mind the possibility that you might be one of the people that's vulnerable and you want to psychologically cut yourself off from vulnerability." And that's a fear based reaction. So I get angry at it. I also just wish that people could talk about it and think about it a little bit more.
- Paul: [23:49](#) Anya, you wrote a fabulous piece about what schools may look like in the future. I think it was a nine point plan, right?
- Anya: [23:59](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [24:00](#) We don't even know. Maybe some states will reopen in the next week or so and push kids back into school and they may have to draw back on that later. But it's a new normal. It's a totally new landscape on everything from class size to scheduling. But you had a really thoughtful summary of what you think the future of education will look like in America. Can you summarize that for folks and give us a sense of what the future could look like?
- Anya: [24:25](#) I mean, the basic principle from a pandemic control situation is that you need to have smaller groups of students interacting with fewer other people. So if you want to get class sizes down to 10 to 12 with just one teacher, and that's reasonable given the space in a lot of schools, that means a radical restructuring of the school day and the school year. So you might have some students attending on a Monday, Wednesday, Friday, others on a Tuesday, Thursday, kind of a block schedule. You might have morning and afternoon shifts. There are different ways of doing that. You also might want to extend the school calendar to make up for some of the time that students are losing with that limited class time. Then if you're doing all of that, this is a cascading set of effects. If you're doing all of that, you're probably also continuing remote learning because the students that are home Tuesday, Thursday, they're working on the projects that they were assigned Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and vice versa.

Anya: [25:19](#) And the remote learning is also going to continue because we're going to continue to have shutdowns. There's going to be future waves of the pandemic leading to school closures. That'll be a leading edge thing that people will do when infections start rising again. So just like we have snow days or we have tornadoes, we're going to have a pandemic closure, and that'll be part of the school routine. And the online learning will then continue and be expected to continue as an alternative.

Anya: [25:44](#) And also just if parents don't feel like sending their kids to school because they're worried or they're scared, they're going to want to have that online alternative as well. And then the other really important point, and I mentioned this before, Paul, but just that schools are really realizing right now what their core function and mission is. I know a lot of educators already knew this, but everyone needs to understand that their role is social and emotional as much as it is educational. And so, helping students cope, wraparound services, connect to the things that they need. And that emotional help is going to be paramount in this recovery process.

Paul: [26:19](#) Also, I think paramount, Anya, is the role that we're asking the teachers to play. And yeah, I feel like after school shootings, we had this new appreciation for teachers. But now it seems to almost have waned a little bit. Maybe it's all over the place. Some people are having fantastic online learning experiences, some aren't. But I keep thinking about my son is four and a half. He's in a pre K program. They've done a great job of adjusting. But I keep looking at his teachers in the morning and thinking about how, for me and my wife, we're kind of like 60% capacity on ... we're at 60% productivity on parenting and maybe 50% on our business. And it's this balancing act that we're all trying to do. But I'm really worried about teacher burnout and the emotional toll.

Paul: [27:07](#) You tweeted about a teacher that died from COVID-19. These people are frontline essential workers, too. But I feel like that's not a part of everyone's consideration. When they're outside cheering at 7:00 AM, 7:00 PM, they're not cheering for teachers. So can you talk about what kind of pressures you see them facing right now? How we can support them, and also is there a silver lining here? Like with forcing innovation, it seems like some levels we're getting back to basic. We have a greater appreciation with teachers, but structurally within the education system is there, a positive aspect TO this that can emerge?

Anya: [27:43](#) So that part is always really tricky for me, and I think because I do have a track record of kind of espousing innovation. But it always comes with a human cost and with trade offs. This is not an opportunity. It's an emergency. Right? That's the number one. And nobody asks for this. Nobody wants this. At the same time, I do-

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:28:04]

Anya: [28:03](#) ... nobody wants this. At the same time, I do hear and see teachers and educators every day making meaning out of this disaster, and the meaning that they're making out of it is, I can learn new ways of teaching. I can operate in different ways. I can offer therapies to kids over the internet that I couldn't do before. And forming these relationships frankly ... Like the head of the AFT in New York City, Michael Mulgrew told me, "My teachers, they now see their kids pets and their siblings and they see inside their homes and this strength of the relationship is being forged in that way is really unique and it's a strength that can be leveraged when we start to knit the whole thing back together."

Anya: [28:44](#) I think a lot more parents are caring about who teachers are and what they do. I see it in my work at NPR that there's a lot more appetite for these kinds of stories because all of a sudden the people that make the news as well as everyone who listens to it understand just how freaking hard it is to keep our kids focused and engaged for a seven hour school day. The fact that they manage to do it at all, it is a miracle. I don't want to be Pollyanna about it because it's all heading into these headwinds of these crazy state budgets. These same teachers might be facing pay cuts when they get back to work. This is a battle. It's not something that's going to automatically translate into accolades for teachers.

Paul: [29:24](#) Right. I don't want to exaggerate it, but I think it feels like a battle for parents every day now, a different kind of battle.

Anya: [29:33](#) Oh, yeah.

Paul: [29:34](#) Even if you have kids, this is very different. If you have little kids, this is very different. That's where I find myself with a four year old and a one year old and we both have startup businesses for me and my wife. So I don't know if I've ever gotten less sleep in my life. I don't know if I've ever been more exhausted in my ... and that's not an exaggeration by any means. We're spent. At the same time we spent four and a half years teaching my son to be social, to look people in the eye, to shake hands, and

fighting the screen. Not getting him on screen time and now screen time is up.

Paul: [30:09](#) I don't know. You can tell us probably, 500% 600%. You're also an expert on screen time, so can you break down for, not just for parents, but for grandparents, for anyone who cares about children, maybe you can give an insight on how much more screen time kids are getting and your thoughts on it.

Paul: [30:29](#) Should we be worried about it? Should we not be worried about it? Just overall, I think you've been a real voice of reason in understanding this. What are your thoughts on all that, Anya?

Anya: [30:40](#) We have seen a 70% jump in the first few weeks in children's screen time in traffic to children's sites and apps. That's very real and it's probably much more in some circumstances. I have a three year old, so I definitely sympathize. And an eight year old who's been playing too much ROBLOX. In my book, The Art of Screen Time, I really asked parents to focus not on time limits per se, but on the circumstances of their consumption. What we want to be vigilant about for ourselves and our kids is the relationship to the media that we're using. That means, is media source of conflict in the home? Is it a source of tantrums? Is it the only thing my kid wants? Is my kid totally devoid of the ability to amuse themselves for 10, for 20 minutes, on their own?

Anya: [31:26](#) Now, sometimes they're going to be needy and clingy and let's not forget, again, this is a stressful situation. They need you. They need your presence. But what I ask parents to kind of strive for is the rhythm where you try to fill up their cup with a little bit of attention and then you try to get them to work on their own. And you keep the screen time for when you really need it and sometimes we really need it. But build that rhythm into your day and build that rhythm and that balance.

Anya: [31:51](#) Also to understand that screens are different things at different times. Right now our screens are everything right? A live chat with a grandparent or a Zoom play date or even something interactive like a dance class or a music class or lesson is all better than the passive consumption screen time. It's getting them a little more alive, a little more engaged.

Anya: [32:15](#) The more that you can tilt toward that live engagement, the better it's going to be. But give yourselves a break. This is harm reduction time. This is not time to be a perfect picture of anything. Our kids also forgive us when we screw up, when we are distracted, when we on our phones, we can have a family

conversation about it and say, "Mom's going to put her phone down and you put your tablet down and we're going to try to connect with each other." Just do that, you know, it's five minutes at the end of the day. Your kids know that you're there for them and that's what's important.

Paul: [32:47](#) Thank you for that, Anya. I heard you talk about how to recognize burnout. Can you talk about that? What do you look for? And once I heard you say it, it kind of set off a light in my head in watching for it. But can you describe how you can look for when it's too much?

Anya: [33:06](#) Yeah. Doctors talk about problematic media use. They have a nine-point scale problematic media use measure. It basically is, screens are the only thing my kid cares about. They have a threshold effect where they want more and more of it. They're sneaking around to use it. They're lying to use it. Staying up late, getting up early. They are fighting and yelling and screaming when it's taken away. Everything else is falling by the wayside. They're not interested in friends or family or schoolwork. These are pretty basic behavioral addiction things.

Anya: [33:44](#) Again, we're in a time where we need a self-soother and we need a coping mechanism. Kids are going to work with what they've got. Younger kids might be thumb suckers or they might be regressing in other ways, and a screen can be in that role as well. So just looking for that pattern and thinking, it's not the emotional neediness that's the problem, we all have tough emotions, especially now. The problem is what kind of coping mechanisms do we use? What are the tools in our toolbox?

Paul: [34:10](#) Hmm. One of the things I've tried really hard to do and I'm not perfect at it, is to actually watch what they're watching.

Anya: [34:16](#) Yeah.

Paul: [34:17](#) Right? It makes a big difference. My wife and I have had discussions about Thomas the Train versus Tumble Leaf. I watch some shows and I say, "Wow."

Paul: [34:26](#) I love Tumble Leaf. Tumble Leaf is positive and it's diverse and the music's great. It doesn't make me want to bang my head against the wall. There are things like PJ Masks, which feels like an explosion in my brain. But I'm trying to watch it and think about it with him and talk about it with him, but is there content that you recommend? One like Khan Academy for Kids, the smaller kids, I've really been impressed by. There's a

gamification of the education. Are there any resources or even content that you would recommend that you think is high quality or premium?

Anya: [35:05](#) Common Sense Media has put together a website called Wide Open School, which is a really nice curated selection of everything from science videos to math exercises and games. It's really nicely curated, which is the key because it's so overwhelming right now.

Anya: [35:20](#) A resource that I recommend is GoNoodle, Which is a lot of physical activities for kids. It's just really good to shake things up. Also they have meditation videos, which are really nice. In the realm of apps, I'm a fan of Toca Boca, because they do these non-linear apps that aren't gamified. They're more exploratory. And Tinybop as well has a similar kind of explore worlds type of app.

Anya: [35:48](#) The other thing that is overlooked is going on a little YouTube journey with your kids. If there's a particular animal that they're interested in, or a vehicle, or anything from the natural world, you have to be with them to do this because YouTube's algorithm is evil. But if you are and you can look together at videos and have a little nature walk, I think that can be really fun thing to do.

Paul: [36:11](#) Awesome. Thank you for sharing that. Folks who are listening are going to be looking them all up afterward I'm sure. I like the part about being on a guided tour together. My son and I are both kids now. We did an experiment where we basically found a new sport each day and found out about the history of cricket. Then we watched some cricket, then we built a cricket bat, then we played cricket and tried to take it URL to IRL, into real life as best as possible. It was hard as hell, but being on that journey, but at the same time, it's really hard ... One of the things I've tried to do is block my son from commercials. I will pay a little more, I will go a little farther to get content that isn't infiltrated with commercials.

Paul: [36:58](#) But then the other thing I did, and again I don't have shit figured out, but I'm trying to help him make sense of this, is when he does see an ad, I ask him, "What are they selling you?" And it's become a game. Where he says, "Oh, they're selling me shirts." And I'm like, "No, it's a vacation." Or you know, "They're trying to sell me a car." I'm like, "No, it's erectile dysfunction." There's all these different elements, right?

- Paul: [37:21](#) But it's a really dicey time, so is there any advice you have to protect ourselves against the infiltration of the advertising? Not just for kids but for everyone who's spending more time on screens now?
- Anya: [37:33](#) I think that's a great question. I hear about this in terms of advertising also in terms of like misinformation and disinformation, which can be problem with teenagers as well as adults. I really think starting that process of self inquiry like you're doing with your kid is really important. Figuring out what are the values that are being put across here, whether it's consumerist thing or whether it's a message that we don't agree with. Poking at that and helping them understand like, let's get curious about this. What are they asking us to do?
- Anya: [38:08](#) That's on the consumption side. I think critically speaking, I do tell my kids I prefer that they're watching scripted media and subscription-based media because we had the budget for that, rather than ... Which is ad-free, whether it's Netflix or something else, rather than just YouTube videos because they're always constantly interspersed with ads. I also prefer to pay for apps online because of the same reason.
- Paul: [38:33](#) You seem to have a solidarity with your kids. You changed your hair color. I don't know if that was ... Can you talk about that? And also, the other question I want to ask you is, the thing that I'm wrestling with and I know many parents are wrestling with, is maybe the most disturbing content that I see on a regular basis is the president. He is everywhere. My son now has opinions about Donald Trump. He knows his voice. He recognizes his face.
- Paul: [39:05](#) I grew up under Ronald Reagan and then with Bill Clinton and they were everywhere. The president is everywhere. But now, maybe even more so and maybe even more disturbing. I'll give you the easy question and then the hard one. Talk about your hair color change if you would please, because I am by no means any expert on hair. Then what are your thoughts on how do you talk to your kids about a president who is nasty and is mean and is vindictive and curses and all these other things. I've tried to make him the anti-example. I say, "Don't be like him."
- Anya: [39:40](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [39:40](#) I say, "The bad kid in class, don't be that guy." But what are your thoughts on that very wandering and difficult question?

Anya: [39:49](#) It's rough. That's rough. Okay. Hair is much easier. So listen, all the salons are closed, I don't have to do any keynote addresses. All my travel this spring was canceled, so I decided to have the hair that I wanted when I was 13. I did do my daughter's hair too. So that was really fun.

Paul: [40:04](#) Folks who are listening. Can you describe the color?

Anya: [40:07](#) Oh yeah, sorry, sorry. It's a little bit of a mermaid, My Little Pony situation with some teal and some purple, a little bit of lavender.

Paul: [40:15](#) It's awesome. That's exactly what it is. It's like the My Little Pony, lavender and blue. Yeah. And you have a unicorn also on the wall behind you.

Anya: [40:22](#) I do. My unicorn on the wall there.

Paul: [40:24](#) I saw that when we were getting ready, which I've never seen on the wall. Which I think is really cool.

Anya: [40:29](#) Well they're illegal now. This was before the hunting regulations came in.

Paul: [40:33](#) Okay. Who knows what the president is going to make illegal tomorrow, but how do you deal with him being everywhere?

Anya: [40:43](#) The research has shown that there is a change in bullying patterns since the president came into office. As far as people parroting, children in school parroting his rhetoric, his racist rhetoric and anti-immigrant rhetoric, and using that to bully other kids in schools. This is a very real thing. Very influential.

Anya: [41:06](#) The way that I talk to my kids about the news, first of all, I don't play the news in the background. I don't play the radio or the television in the background. We don't have a television. I try to filter and I still have young kids so I can do that. But it doesn't mean they don't know about it because they do see The New York Times and they see things around. I do talk to them about ... we're going to look for the helpers in every situation and we don't really talk about bad guys.

Anya: [41:32](#) There's bad guys on TV, but bad guys is not a real thing in the real world. You have people who make bad choices. They make bad choices for lots of reasons. One of the reasons we talked about last night was stereotypes. Stereotypes being beliefs that people have about other groups of people. Again, this goes back

to dehumanizing and not understanding that everybody's a human being. Some of this comes from my kid's Sunday school, some of it comes from their grandparents, some of it comes from us. This is moral instruction, and moral instruction, there's a level of-

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [00:42:04]

- Anya Kamenetz: [42:03](#) This is moral instruction, and moral instruction there's a level of moral development where whatever is the person in charge is doing is okay, right? That's an authoritarian world development. And I believe, and I think philosophers say that a higher level of moral development is I read and I think and I listen and I decide for myself what is right and what is true, regardless of what the people in power say, you know?
- Paul: [42:25](#) Yeah.
- Anya Kamenetz: [42:26](#) And so pushing our kids along into that level of moral development is where we all want to be one day, which is everybody's connected, everybody's a human being, everybody has an equal right to exist in this planet, and people who don't think that they're mistaken.
- Paul: [42:46](#) I love that. That's one of the many things I'm going to take with me in my backpack after this conversation, because I remember on the playground when the teachers told us that superheroes were not allowed because it created the good guy-bad guy division, right? And nobody wanted to be the bad guy, or the person who didn't want to get the bad guy was ganged up on so it created... I've really tried to resist superheroes because that's such a delineation and there is such a world of gray. But that's a really, really thoughtful approach and I really, really appreciate it.
- Paul: [43:18](#) I want to ask you one last question that's deep in the education world. Graduations are happening now or not happening now. The president in my view has recklessly decided to bring the entire senior class of West Point back to New York in the middle of a pandemic, risking not just their health, but I think our national security. Like ISIS would love to have a thousand of our future officers in one place at risk and he's doing it voluntarily, which is really disruptive. I think the Air Force and the Coast Guard did distance graduations where they were spread out. I think the Naval Academy has done it virtually.

- Paul: [43:57](#) Can you talk just about what this time is like? This is a time when people had been thinking for their entire lives that they were going to walk down an aisle and that grandpa was going to hug them afterward and that's all blown up now. So your thoughts on... I mean, humanity has a great way of evolving and adapting, but it's also traumatic, right? And I think a real sense of loss in the same way funerals are. I remember somebody saying to me when I graduated from college and I was not that excited at the time. They said, "It's not for you, it's for everybody who helped you." And they don't have that shared experience right now, so what are your thoughts on graduation right now?
- Anya Kamenetz: [44:31](#) Yeah, it's a great question. I mean, I've been spending some time talking to teenagers all over the country about their experiences and so it's about the high school graduation experience. But being denied that milestone is incredibly heart-wrenching and just deflating, especially when you think about the kids that worked so hard for those degrees and maybe it took them several years or they're off the regular path and being denied that it's so, so hard.
- Anya Kamenetz: [44:56](#) But I'm also just hearing an incredible amount of maturity and acceptance from these young people. We have to realize that for millions of young people who have been taking the advice to self-quarantine, not because they think they're going to be personally at risk and statistically they're not, they're doing it for others, and it's this incredible act of selflessness and national service and they're not being recognized enough for it. Not only are we stealing their dreams, stomping on their futures, but we're not even honoring what they're doing in the moment to help their parents and their grandparents. And if there's one thing I hope Paul, is that... And I've been out there speaking for and on behalf of young people since I was a young person myself with generations out, like 14 years ago, and are we finally done trashing kids for what they're not doing, instead of recognizing what we're doing to them?
- Paul: [45:51](#) Yeah. There's been this Fox News dismissal of millennials, right? And oh, millennials-
- Anya Kamenetz: [45:58](#) By the way, we're 40 years old now so you can put that away.
- Paul: [46:02](#) Right. And I mean, the way it appears most effectively in my world it's like, hey, there's a lot of millennials in Afghanistan right now on their fifth tour, right? And many of them responded after 9/11 and after Katrina, and again now. Somebody once told me that the World War II generation built

this country, the Vietnam generation fucked it up, and it was on our generation to save it. But I feel like it's even passed over us and our kids have this opportunity to rebuild this new world. And I think they're so inspiring and they have this sense of service that's so much greater than I think when we were in high school in past times. But you are always a source of positivity and of inspiration. So, Anya, I want to ask you a question I also ask of all of our guests. What makes you happy?

- Anya Kamenetz: [46:48](#) I mean, being with my kids makes me happy, seeing the joy that they take in the smallest things around them and just in being together.
- Paul: [46:57](#) I have now issued a mandatory follow-up because I love that everyone always responds with that. But in addition to family, you've got unicorns, your interest in a lot of things, but what's something else that brings you joy and makes you happy?
- Anya Kamenetz: [47:15](#) So since the pandemic started I've been rediscovering the daily run, and I did a virtual half-marathon last weekend. I could say that it brings me joy, but what I really am saying is that if I skip a day I am crushed and my whole day is ruined. So I'm just addicted to running, that's how it is right now.
- Paul: [47:36](#) Can you explain to folks who maybe don't pre... Running in New York City is like literally like I envisioned the movie 1917 when the guy's running through a battlefield, right? Because you're watching out for other people, you maybe got a mask or you don't, but like, you're a social scientist, you understand the human experience. What's it like running in New York City right now?
- Anya Kamenetz: [48:02](#) Well, you have to be careful about where you go. Green points on the Industrial Border of Brooklyn, so I have a route that takes me like over around construction sites and cemeteries and over the Polasky Bridge and in some very like not very frequented areas. So in the exchange we are inhaling little diesel fumes, I get my roads myself.
- Paul: [48:26](#) I love it. Last question in this space I just want to ask, what should folks look for or look to? We always ask the folks in our community to stay vigilant. Where would you direct their attention to in the next couple of weeks and next couple of months that your expertise gives you unique insight into?
- Anya Kamenetz: [48:48](#) Well, what I would like to see happen and what I think is as a condition of America getting back to work, something has to be

done with our children. And so then the question becomes how is that going to be done? Is it going to be done under the table and in cash and with a lot of gig workers and people whose safety is not taken care of? Or is there going to be some push to adequately retain and keep people safe that are taking care of our kids because we were not going to get back to work without childcare. So somehow we got a square that circle.

Paul: [49:22](#) Yeah. I think that that's really important, everybody saying get back to work, and that's easy if you don't think about the kids, because the schools, I mean I don't even know how a public high school in New York City would do 10 kids in a classroom. I mean, you've thoughtfully work that through, but just it's just another element of the incomplete plan that's coming from this White House and at a national level. Are there any international examples that seem to be working well or show signs of hope? I mean New Zealand is now claiming that they've beaten the virus and they've won, but any international examples that you think are particularly noteworthy?

Anya Kamenetz: [50:00](#) I mean Denmark as I noted in my piece has been opening back up with their schools, starting with the younger kids first. Israel started with the special education classrooms, which are already smaller classrooms, and those are kids who need specialized attention. So I thought that was a smart way to go about it. We do see that Chinese classrooms are starting to open up again, getting students in to study for the all important high-stakes exam that they take, which was postponed this year. And so they're doing the basics, they're doing masks, they are doing temperature checks, they're doing hand washing and guidelines. I think the really unanswered question in all these cases is what is the social realm of school look like? Can kids play six feet apart? What do those relationships look like? But so it's going to be a watch and learn type of situation for sure.

Paul: [50:52](#) Anya you have been such a powerful voice of insight and inspiration, I think especially in times like this. I mean I was telling my wife that we were having this conversation and she's was like, "I can't wait to hear what she has to say." I really feel like you're a leader of the moment in all of these contributing factors, and books you've written are coming together in a position where you can really powerfully lead and guide and even sooth this country. So I want to really just thank you for that. And we can't do it in real life, but it is time for the presentation of the gift. So I'm going to virtually present to you some gifts.

Paul: [51:30](#) So first off, you've got some schwag coming your way made by the Veterans of Oscar Mike. So I'm going to do this virtual thing and throw it to you, there you go, all right? And it's coming over. And then we're going to also send you the sponsors of the show, Bravo Sierra Made in the USA, they support veterans as well. We've got antibacterial wipes. Get a shower in after your run you can use those. If you're juggling little kids like I know you are. And then since you said you're a fan of bourbon, we always pick a unique American made whiskey for-

Anya Kamenetz: [52:07](#) No way. Oh my God, awesome.

Paul: [52:10](#) So this is my paying it forward. This is Jeffrey Wright's Whiskey Company, Uncle Nearest. And if folks are listening, you know this story, Jeffrey Wright has hooked up with the amazing story of Uncle Nearest who's basically the unrecognized former slave who taught Jack Daniels how to make whiskey.

Anya Kamenetz: [52:30](#) Oh my God.

Paul: [52:31](#) Jack Daniels didn't just magically come up with whiskey. The Uncle Nearest story tells it. So we got a bottle of their 1884 small batch coming your way because Uncle Nearest was an educator and you are an educator, so I feel like there is a connection there. And then lastly, the Great Rorschach Test of Angry Americans. We have three colors of peeps; yellow, pink and blue. Which color would you pick and why Anya?

Anya Kamenetz: [53:00](#) So my husband's the peep eater in the family. He likes to burp them open and let them get a little stale and chewy before he eats them. So I think I'm going to go for pink because I think he just needs to like tweak himself a little bit.

Paul: [53:14](#) I've got a bonus for you, because it is Easter and I found these in my Sundays. But a lot of folks who come into the show have been telling me about the special ones. There's like jalapeno and red hot. Apparently there's also party cake. So I'm going to send it, it might take six months to get there-

Anya Kamenetz: [53:30](#) Perfect. They'll be perfectly stale by then. I'm serious, he's going to be so happy. He loves a stale peep, that's his favorite to have.

Paul: [53:37](#) Well, he's gotten now over 50 episodes of interesting people talking about peeps. But you have been a tremendous educator for this country about education. I don't think there's anything that's more important and arguably underreported. So Anya, it's a real privilege to have had you on the show as my guest and to

just know you and to root for you. We want to always have inspiring, important Americans who are shaping what the country's been, what it is and what it will be, and I thought of nobody that's more appropriate for this time than you. So thank you for all of your leadership and vision.

Anya Kamenetz: [54:12](#) Thank you so much, Paul. It's been a real pleasure and it's been-

Paul: [54:14](#) I just wanted to go over. We can jump in that Camaro, we'll get some whiskey and go unicorn hunting.

Anya Kamenetz: [54:19](#) Sounds good. Okay.

Paul: [54:22](#) Ladies and gentlemen, the great and powerful Anya Kamenetz live from Brooklyn. Follow her on Twitter, read all her books and consume every piece of educational information that she is producing. Thank you so much for joining us.

Anya Kamenetz: [54:34](#) Thanks Paul. Take care.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [00:54:39]