



FuturePod

Q&A with Peter Hayward: Lessons Learned from 117 Episodes of FuturePod

Q: What's your story Peter? What's the story behind FuturePod and how it all started?

Peter Hayward: I taught futures and foresight for 15 years at Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia. That was a program established by Richard Slaughter, who was my professor, and was also my Ph.D. supervisor. Around the end of 2018, I fell out of love with the university system – actually, the industrial complex of higher education. I disagreed violently with the notion of putting kids into debt for them to get qualifications that supposedly were going to get them jobs. So, I decided to walk away from that system.

I believe that if you if you closed the university system, ended all the classes and sent everyone home then the process of learning foresight would stop for around 24 hours. And then it would restart with conversations. This is how foresight was spread. You would read a

book or meet someone who would say “you should go and talk to ...” While formal training is super helpful I think the conversations are key. So why don't we start having the conversations and put them in a place that people can get to and teach themselves foresight. So that's when I got interested in podcasts. I had a couple of my graduates, Rebecca Mijat, and Mendy Urie, who were also interested in doing podcasts and so we started.

In creating FuturePod, we focused on three purposes – honor the past, especially the people who established the field; give a shout out to the present – the people who are adding to the field right now – support them, amplify them and promote them; and third, inspire the next generation to join us.

Q. So, as of this interview, you've recorded 117 episodes over three years?

Peter Hayward: That's right. As of December 2021, we will be three years old. I want to stress that this is a complete team effort. It's not just me. There's

Q&A: Peter Hayward, cont'd.

Rebecca, Amanda, Reanna and Josh. Mendy, who helped to create FuturePod with me and Rebecca recently decided to step back to pursue some other life goals, but all in all, it's because of this team that we've been able to accomplish so much in just three years.

Q. Knowing what you know – three years and 117 episodes later -- what advice would you give yourself and your team?

Peter Hayward: It's the same advice that I'd give anyone who wants to make a change – just start. We've had to teach ourselves a number of things along the way – how to do a podcast, how to edit a broadcast, how to build and maintain a website, how to promote ourselves, how to find funding. You just need to start.

We've always said the internet's changed a lot of things. One of the things that fundamentally changed is this notion of content. Individuals now can be content producers. More importantly, it's so simple, and it's so accessible – anybody, anywhere in the world can become a content producer.

In the field of foresight, we've always been content producers – we write, we give keynotes, we consult, we run workshops, we write books and journal articles. That's been our content. That essentially is what has built the field.

If I was starting out today as a burgeoning futurist, I'd be asking questions such as: "Why aren't we doing video? Why aren't we producing audio-video content? Why are we not producing game-based content? What about app-based foresight?" I mean, the whole notion of content now is anybody can produce content. You don't have to wait to be taught how to do it, you can just teach yourself to do it. The tools are out there as open-source tools. Just start and work it out. I mean, there's no doubt you have to work out what you want to say how you want to say it. There's many, many ways to do podcasts. There's many, many ways to do interviews. There's no pressure to be different. It's finding a way that suits you and suits what you do. So, the advice I'd give myself is just start.

Q. At the very heart of what FuturePod is all about is having authentic conversations, right?

Peter Hayward: Conversations are at the core of what we do. We are storytellers; human beings are storytellers. We are committed to telling a story that we think other people should be involved in, storytelling their future. I don't care if you're a policy person, a businessperson, or a family person -- having a conversation about your possible futures, your preferable futures, the futures you want, or the futures you want to prevent is at the core of what FuturePod is all about.

As futurists, we have some distinctive ways that we have conversations. I'm not saying we're unique, but we have a particular way of talking about the future. That is part of what we do. It's also how we learn ourselves. It's also how we are inspired by others. So, it's both the action of conversation, and it's also the ability, as you said, to listen to conversation -- to be the fly on the wall to be able to listen to two people having an entertaining, challenging, provocative conversation. And then you have your own conversation with yourself, and you have your own conversation with your future self.

Q. What makes the storytelling of a futurist different or unique than, say, a CEO trying to convey a vision, or a science fiction writer writing a book about the future? What is unique about the art of storytelling as a futurist?

Peter Hayward: Futurists have been around for a long time. There have always been people who have foretold the future. If you look at our discipline, and you listen to our conversations on FuturePod, we're trying to have better conversations about the future.

There's a paradox with the future story. I can tell you Once-Upon-a-Time stories that make you feel comfortable about the future. But that might not be the most useful story to tell you. Maybe I

Q&A: Peter Hayward, cont'd.

need to tell you a story that shakes you up and challenges you. Maybe I've got to tell you a story about the future that doesn't settle it, but actually opens it up and makes it problematic and makes it uncertain. What we're trying to do is tell more powerful stories to help people in the present. We need to tell stories with a particular purpose, which is -- it's got to be interesting enough, it's got to be motivational enough. It's got to mobilize human energy, it's got to create direction and bring people together. There's nothing inherently unique in our conversations except the way that we try to match the type of conversation to the need.

Q. You and the FuturePod team have interviewed all kinds of futurists from all over the world. Futurists representing different generations, different geographies, from different cultures, from different political systems, of different races and gender. FuturePod offers a fair amount of diversity of thought. Within that, have you noticed any patterns in how futurists think or communicate futures?



Peter Hayward, co-founder of the FuturePod podcast

Peter Hayward: First, let me say this, the field is much, much, much more diverse than we imagined it is. I'm meeting people at different points in their lives, from different generations, from different cultural backgrounds, from different, you know, technical interests. I'm in the field, and I'm constantly amazed at how people find a way to make futures and foresight helpful and useful for others.

What I think is remarkable is this field is more imaginative, marvelous, and creative than anyone could imagine. I can't imagine many professional disciplines that the more you go into it, the broader it gets.

Even though we have interviewed well over 100 people by now, I feel we are just scratching the surface. One thing I've noticed is the number of people in this field who work as solo practitioners, and a number of people who've worked in organizations who have chosen to leave them. Why's that? I think if you're a bit of a contrarian thinker, or a provocateur bomb thrower, which I think a lot of us are, organizations are uncomfortable places to be.

They don't like you if you don't get along, and it's not that we don't get along, but we like percussion. We like provocation, I think it comes with our personality, that's kind of what we like, to some extent, or we all we take it on as a responsibility.

Q. If we had more foresight consulting firms like accounting firms, law firms or PR firms, do you think the field of foresight would be different than what it is today?

Peter Hayward: Yes, I think we would be a different field if we built futures-based organizations that people could work their way through and move on. You could imagine you'd be able to offer internships, which would allow people new to the field to learn the basic stuff. I'm not saying we should have more foresight consulting firms. I just wonder if futurists are predisposed to work solo. Because we find it difficult to share our thinking with another person? Or because that's just the nature of the discipline itself or the market.

Q&A: Peter Hayward, cont'd.

Q. What about the geographic diversity of futures? Do you see that changing over time?

Peter Hayward: I think it's important to acknowledge that the bulk of our current knowledge -- our framing of the intellectual basis of futures -- is grounded in the Western philosophical tradition. So effectively, Europe, Australia, America, produce the bulk of what Richard Slaughter would say, is the knowledge base of future studies.

And yet, any futurist would say, if you look at where the world's going, the future is going to be, if not completely defined, but it is going to be hugely influenced, by East Asia. China, India, Indonesia for example are enormous countries that are going to have more and more influence on the world, not just on the field of futures. Our field has a number of questions to ask. Do East Asian futurists have the same philosophical understandings as Western-trained futurists? Do they have the same views of how time works? Do our concepts, precepts and axioms apply to them? Or, do they have different frames and different epistemologies? Are our establishments willing to learn from them? To better understand how the bulk of the world thinks, we must realize that the bulk of the world is not Europe, America, and Australia.

Q. Of the 117 interviews you've done so far, are there one or two interviews that stand out as extraordinary, must-listen-to FuturePod episodes?

Peter Hayward: That's hard for me to answer. So I'm going to give you the cop-out answer, which is to say, that when I do a recording, I hear the recording two or three times. I hear the interview as it's happening, and as I'm doing so, I'm trying to think of something intelligent to say to the person. Plus, I'm also trying to keep up with them. Because if you've heard any of the interviews, some of the people that I speak to, they can get a head of steam up and I just need to hang on for a lot of conversations.

The next time I listen to that interview, I listen to it as an editor. And as you know, if you've done any editing, you listen quite differently when you're editing. You're listening to streamline, simplify, clean up, and improve the interview. So, what that means is I actually don't listen to podcasts in the way that you might listen to our podcast, if I've recorded them.



EP 61: Evocative and Vivid Futures - Wendy Schultz

But, if I had to choose one, the one interview that did blow me away -- and I didn't do the interview -- was the conversation that Rebecca Mijat had with [Wendy Schultz](#). It's episode 61 called [Evocative and Vivid Futures](#). It's an amazing podcast.

Wendy is amazing. I knew how good she was but in 45 minutes, she packs just so much into that conversation. It was like trying to get a glass of water from a firehose. It was fantastic. It was gobsmackingly awesome.

Q&A: Peter Hayward, cont'd.

Q. What do you think will be the long-term impact of FuturePod?

Peter Hayward: I'm a great believer in emergence and complexity. I think you need intention and openness to possibility. This means you simply put your energy into something and see what develops from it. And that's really, in essence, what FuturePod is -- there were three of us; now there's five of us. We're putting our energy into it. We really don't know where it goes. We really don't know how or why people are going to use it. The main thing is it has to be accessible for it to be used. We don't know what FuturePod needs to be, we just know that we have make sure that it's accessible and that it continues to grow. The mesh with the future comes about because it's there.

We also see it supporting futures education. We know that in a number of programs around the world, they use FuturePod. It's working as a kind of signal to people that the futures field exists. And, we believe that FuturePod is helping the field become better.

Q. Do you feel that FuturePod is bringing people in the field from around the world together as a community?

Peter Hayward: I think one of the most important things we're trying to do is just try and make it so that the community can reach out to people in ways that they can make connections and build something from connection. And that sounds very ephemeral and uncertain, but I kind of think your intentions are nice to a point. Why not just simply put it out there and see what happens?

The FuturePod crew.



Q&A: Peter Hayward, cont'd.

Q. Do you want FuturePod available to everyone interested in futures – not just those in the futures field?

Peter Hayward: One of the reasons we are keen to put transcripts on the podcasts is that the transcript means the words of the interview can become searchable online through search engines. It also means that someone can translate the page. If someone's got your conversation in transcript form, they press the translate button, and they can read it in French, Hindu, or whatever they want. So, my answer is yes -- we do think that the more people -- the broader the church -- if you want to use that term, the better.

Is there a risk with that? I suppose the answer is yes. Because we could get so far away from the core of what the field that someone could say, well, that's not futures and foresight. I fully understand why we need to professionalize the field. What FuturePod is doing, it's trying to both support professionalization by improving the quality of the practice, but at the same time, we're trying to make the field broader, deeper, and wider. Some might say you can't do both, but at the moment, we're giving it a shot.

Q. What do you think will be the future of the foresight field, based on the many conversations you've had so far?

Peter Hayward: The field is going to change. I personally think the content side of it is going to be huge. And if I were starting out, I'd be looking at the content that futures can produce as both public education awareness-raising and as a commercial opportunity. FuturePod was so obvious. It's only three years old, but why wasn't it being done by someone 10 years ago?

We've been having conversations about the future for more than 5,000 years. But now, it's obvious. So to me, the whole digital content,





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Q&A: Peter Hayward, cont'd.

creation stuff is going to be a huge part of the futures field, alongside the academic journals and everything else. Looking forward, there will be generations of practitioners that don't go anywhere near a journal, a book, or a keynote. And they will be the best-known futures thinkers in their respective space because of the content they have. We are going to be on the lookout for that because we want to talk to them.

I've already said to you that clearly the influence of East Asia on futures is going to be huge. Another area I would watch is the intersection of spirituality and consciousness in futures. I've touched on it with a couple of the people that we've spoken with. If somebody wants to discuss their philosophical beliefs, principles, ethics, I run towards them just because those are things I don't think we talk about enough. The notion of the belief of what people are here for, or what gives life purpose? Where does one person's life fit into the greater scheme of things? Those are futures conversations we don't have very often and need more of.

If you're wondering when political systems will take futures seriously, I'm not holding my breath for politicians coming to us saying "Boy, we need better futures in Australian or American politics."

Q. How would you encourage a person visiting FuturePod for the first time to use it?

Peter Hayward: We're getting to the point where it feels at times like we have almost too many podcasts. If you don't know anyone and you don't know where to start, I would use the Search tool on the podcast page and type in what you need. If you're an educator and you'd like to know more about teaching futures, type that in, and most likely, you'll get the interview with Peter Bishop or someone else. If you're into consulting, you'll probably get the interview with Patricia Lustig or someone else. I encourage people to use the podcasts to match their need.

Q&A: Peter Hayward, cont'd.

Recently, I was talking to some people in Germany because I'm always interested how people use FuturePod. And one of the people said if they come across someone through a journal or something else, they go to FuturePod to see if they've been interviewed. Now, they might listen to the interview, but they'll also go to their reference pages and see what the person we've interviewed has written. It's all great. So, yes, there's the conversation, but there's also the reference list that can help you on your journey.

Q. Do you foresee a day when FuturePod is on the metaverse?

Peter Hayward: I don't know where FuturePod is going to be in X number of years times. What I'm hoping to see is there are many, many, many more podcasters but also video presenters and people running platforms and creating content. If we want to keep extending our reach, then we're crazy if we don't fully embrace this whole digital content process, whether it's gamification or video digital or what, whatever that is. It'd be fun to find it. It'll be fun to find out.

Q. Having conversations means asking questions. How do you come up with your questions for each interview?

Peter Hayward: I provoke guests. Not because I want to challenge them, or I want to have an argument, but I want to see what they say. I'm looking for profound thoughts and that's what my questions are there for. And in some situations, I think when I push a person or push them a bit further, that's where I find gold. I genuinely want to listen to the person and see where they are. There are times when you have an interview, and then the other person is going full flight. And the last thing you want to do when a person is in full flight is inject yourself. Right? Just let him or her go.

Q. Do you find it personally rewarding when a person you're interviewing shares something really profound?

Peter Hayward: It'll always be something "they said." When you boil it down, it's those two words. I think another element to our interviews is this notion of the story we tell ourselves. And I think for a number of the guests, I don't think they've *heard* themselves tell their story. You might have written who you are, and you've told people who you are, but then, to actually listen to what you've said – that's a fairly unusual thing. Each of our questions fit together. The first question – what's your story. Question two – the philosophy epistemology question. Question three – the methodology question. You can see how the dots join up.

I think that process of who you are, your background, how you think about the future and how you do futures -- to me, it lines up when I used to teach methods. To me, who we are, tells a lot about the craft of what we do and how we do it. But people don't often hear it put together that way. The beauty is hearing yourself tell your story.

Q. FuturePod relies upon funding, just like any other not-for-profit organization. How can one become a sponsor of FuturePod?

Peter Hayward: Follow the link on the website to our [Patreon](#) page. We ask for at least \$2 a month. Our patrons are people we talk to on a regular basis. We like to ask them for their ideas about the podcast and for their opinions and feedback.

Q. Is there a question I should have asked you, that I didn't?

Peter Hayward: I've been a heart and soul supporter and contributor to the field. I just want it to be easier for the next generation coming through. I have found the field is generous; really incredible generous. People want to collaborate. And we're here to help make it more accessible, provide more resources, and make it easier for people. At FuturePod, we have a clear purpose - - we are for open, better futures.