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ACCELERATING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS PODCAST

EPIISODE  
**81**

**Theodore Modis**

Show Notes at: <http://www.aesnation.com/81>

John Bowen and Theodore Modis

**AESNATION.COM**

Episode #81



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Best of success,



John Bowen  
Co-founder, AES Nation

**John Bowen:** As entrepreneurs, we want to see the future. We want to be able to predict the future. We want to be able to as Wayne Gretzky's stated is skate to where the puck is going. We want to understand what the future is going to present so we can deliver tremendous value to our clients. Here's the challenge, it's hard to predict the future. I've got a special treat for you. I've got a best-selling author, a futurist who's going to share with you not only his thoughts about predicting the future but more importantly the tools so that you can do it as well. Stay tuned, you're going to be extremely glad you did and your clients will too.

Theodore Modis, I really appreciate you coming from Switzerland here by the magic of Skype and joining us and sharing with us, you've really done some amazing work over the last 20 years between books and so on. First of all, let me just greet you here. Thank you for joining us.

**Theodore Modis:** Thank you for inviting me. It's my pleasure.

**John:** Let's dive in, before we go into, it's a pretty big setup to be able to foretell the future. As entrepreneurs, this is one of our dreams. What I'd love to do is really get an understanding from you of your background. How did you get to this point? This is something that we all dreamed of and don't think is possible. You've got a very distinct background that led you to this.

**Theodore:** I was a physicist in a previous life. I was trained as a physicist and I worked in big laboratories like Brookhaver Labs in Europe for over 10 years, 15 years almost doing experiments in physics and then I mutated. I went to the industry to work for digital equipment corporation in a special section, they had management science. I was in charge of a group of scientists in the service of this company which gave us a blind check of saying study anything that can be of help to the company. In particular, they like to know more about competition and market dynamics.

Not knowing much about competition myself, I went to the library as I used to do all my life to look up competition and I found much literature both quantitative and otherwise but done my biologist, colleges, social scientists with formulations which I was able to take and apply to the world of business to the marketplace. The understanding is competition is the same in the marketplace as it is in nature. It's survival of the fittest. Knowing the mathematics that governed this, I was able to use it to digital products. The computer, if I may go to the, to this, what you see behind me is the way rabbits multiply. You put two rabbits on a range and the two grow four, the four have eight, 16, etc.

In the beginning, you have an exponential growth of the population but later to the extent that the rabbit population is so big, there's not enough grass around, the population will slow, the growth of the population slows down to a maximum number of rabbits that could be fed by

the available grass. This form is S shaped. This one we call it the S curve. It's like a figure, the letter S. There's mathematics behind it. When I talk to my digital colleagues about rabbits, they all said, we make computers here. Why are you talking with us about rabbits? What do computers and rabbits have in common?

I develop the job which I like very much which is they can multiply but what's more, they multiply in exactly the same way because if you take the way their computer with the time mini computer was selling, the cumulative sales, they follow exactly an S-shaped curve. When I did the study, it was three-quarters down. This is the total number of sales, the sales per quarter is the life cycle of the product, the bell-shaped curve. I want to tell them, the marketers, to be aware that it's beginning to phase out. They didn't want to hear anything, certainly not from a physicist.

They said, you don't know this business. We have plans to advertise. We have plans to throw in for free the software. We know about the big life kicker, this one who last five more times as the previous products. I didn't do anything. I just waited, sit and wait for three years and along the hole, the data came exactly on the predicted trajectory. The S-curve was complete three years later and the product phased out. Three years later, I went back to those marketers, the ones who has survived because many of them have left by that time and I told them, what happened? Didn't you do all the things you said you're going to do?

Yes, they said, we did them but we brought a new product too soon and it was cheaper and it was the same performance, it would cannibalize our own stuff. I said, wait a minute, this product, Microbox2 was introduced on 87, fiscal 87. By that time, the previous product had practically finished. When you brought the other product, it was just enough time to save your market niche so a competitor doesn't squeeze in. You did the right thing. It wasn't you who killed the product. It was the fact that this niche was completed in a natural way, in the way rabbits complete their ecological niche.

**John:** This is powerful. Let me jump in just for a second and let everyone know to, if you're on the audio podcast and you're listening to this but not viewing it, you can go to the website, [aesnation.com](http://aesnation.com) and download the slides. Theodore is making them all available in there. There's some really great insights that's going to help you really understand this concept of S curves. If you're on the video podcast and a little hard to read on the screen but you get a good picture but again, you can get those at [aesnation.com](http://aesnation.com). Anything we refer to, you'll be able to get the links. You definitely want to go there.

Theodore, when I look at that, how do I know where I am? You're talking with your associates here. How do you know where to plot on the S curve? As a business person, one of the big things, I'm looking for trends and I've read your material and I really agree totally on this S-

curve concept but sometimes I don't know where I am in that whole process which makes it hard as a business person to decide what actions I should be taking.

**Theodore:** In this particular case, when I took the data and I plotted them, plotted the total number of products, I saw the population grow exponentially and then starts slowing down. I interrupt it, my data stopped right three-quarters down the curve. I try to shape an S curve on all these points. An S curve doesn't have too many parameters. It's a very simple function with three parameters. Once you determine the parameters, you know them forever. From then on, we can go at time infinity or time minus infinity. We can go anywhere on the time axis and find out the value you want. That's why you can do forecast and backcast. That's why the title of the book was forecast the future but also understand the past because you can go backwards and figure out what should have happened if the beginning is not known.

**John:** You have some other examples too because if it's one, rabbits, not a big interest. I can see the scenario. When I get into computers, I'm in Silicon Valley and I've watched so often this happen exactly the way you're illustrating it, are we just picking some cherry? Picking some examples?

**Theodore:** No. It's ubiquitous. It happens across the board, in all kinds of phenomena. I have the curve here which is the number of cars, you see the number of cars circulating in America it followed an S curve from the late 30's when it became a dominant means of transportation to the beginning with the 90's. There curve is complete. There's no more room for cars in America. The number of circulating cars in America is not going to grow anymore. As you see it's quite accurate but not only cars, more fascinating car accidents.

Car accidents start growing together with cars but they stopped growing when they reached the magical number of about 24 per 100,000 per year. The deaths from car accidents grew along an S curve as you see and then it stopped and became flat with big fluctuations like the rabbits fluctuates, the population fluctuates, starts to grow above the niche capacity and then dying away because they don't have enough food. The same thing here, the accidents were trying to grow faster but society would keep a tight lid on that total number of accidents. We have an equilibrium, what they call in biology, homeostasis where opposing forces find equilibrium on this level here.

This level of 24 per 100,000 per year is what society wants to have for accidents. If you didn't want any accidents, you can abolish cars from the streets but it doesn't pay. It pays to the point of having this level. If it goes above, they become upset. Ralph Nader wrote a best seller, calling cars murderous weapons and it had an impact. A seatbelt became mandatory and speed limits would drop but all these because this directed from 24 to 27 when Ralph Nader blew the whistle. Once it goes down, people go away. They don't think about car accidents anymore.

The S curve of the car accident is complete. Here, accidents must be thought of as a species which is growing in competition because society doesn't allow all the accidents would become realized. They have a cap on it.

**John:** This is very powerful. It's one of those things that when you share it like you're sharing it, it becomes self-evident. It's one of those blindingly obvious things only after the fact that. What I love though is you're showing us how to use it as a tool because we can then look toward the future as well. Whether we're talking about rabbits, cars or car accidents ...

**Theodore:** One of that. Yeah, we talked about what this is like. Mozart was a musician, he wrote compositions but if you track them down, the way his compositions grew over time, it's almost an S curve and it stopped, when Mozart dies, this S curve is practically complete which throws a new life of the death of Mozart. In my book I call it Mozart dies of old age because by the time he died, his potential, creative potential had been exhausted. It's a learning curve. People call it a learning curve because that's how you accumulate learning. It cannot go forever. The key thing behind the S curve is that growth in competition cannot go forever. It would grow, it will grow exponentially in the beginning but then it will flatten out.

The only way to sustain growth is to one from S curve to the other. No, to keep jumping S curves as new niches open or you find the niches you take possibly but in one growth, you cannot have constant growth, you cannot have constant percentage growth some hasty CEOs do that. They'll say, we'll grow 20% a year and in five years we'll be so big but 20% per year is exponential. Nothing is exponential. Explosions are exponential but natural growth fall S-curves. It may look exponential in the very beginning but then it will slow down. You can anticipate the slow down and that's what my job has been most of the time, trying to anticipate where and when this curve will be completed and possibly what is the next curve we should be looking for to go on.

**John:** Theodore, let me jump in because I think this is such an important point that you're making is that as entrepreneurs, what we want to do is understand the natural flow of, really everything, S curve of business and competition and recognize, all of us have put together Excel spreadsheets of our business plans and we run it out linear. It is not that. How even some of us will be overly aggressive in Silicon Valley and do exponential and we'll just keep it growing. There's a recognition here that we can really get the life cycle of that solution, that product whatever we're doing.

What we have to do is have that innovation so that we can develop that next solution, I want you to comment on whether I'm understanding it correctly so we can then have that next S curve. We can keep growing but we're not going to grow with the same solution endlessly, is that correct?

**Theodore:** No. It is not in between S curves. It's like for holy winter. If I can jump, perhaps, already to the, this curve here where we have energy consumption worldwide per capita, energy consumption worldwide and we see two clearly defined S curves. One started in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and it grew up very fast around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but then you'd hit the ceiling and we see here how it slows down around 1920. For about 20 years, it's flat with big fluctuations. There's not growth around the depression. Before and after the depression, there was zero growth in the energy consumption.

It picked up again on a second S shape and it grew very rapidly in the 60s, those boom years, you remember, that again when it reached the 80s, it started, I'll show you like this, the way it was published on my first book. It's fluctuating again. In my first book I said, we're going to have another stagnation period now. There should be another S curve that will follow. This dotted line, I don't know if this is visible, it was my forecast at that time that they should be picking up of this variable worldwide, energy consumption which correlates very much in the economy because if you consume a lot of energy, you are doing something with it, the economy grows good.

The economy was stagnating in the 20s and the 30s and it was stagnating in the 90s, late 80s and 90s but it go very fast from the turn of the century and on the 60s and the 50s and now, in fact, in my new book, here's the data. You see the little points here that came exactly, this is one of my success stories, I have many of those but this is my favorite one. Because I was able to predict a rising trend from a flat trend, the data came exactly with that. This is 22 years of work with data, we are growing again on another S curve and you see the pattern, growth, flattening, growth, flattening. We're on a growth trajectory again.

In fact, if you zoom back a little bit and you say, I suppose I take a macro look here, this, I try to put a big S curve here, a huge S curve ignoring the deviations around the 30s and the 90s. Suppose you get a big S-curve like that, you see that there's a wiggle. It doesn't fit. This big S curve doesn't fit, there's wiggles around it. Those wiggles go up and down. I can extract them quantitatively to get the cycle. This cycle is the so-called Kondratiev cycle. Kondratiev was a Russian mathematician of the 20s and 30s who by economics theorist said there must be a cycle over 50 and 60 years that governs economy.

People didn't believed him. Even some people, even today, they doubt his, but here, I don't have with economic theory, here, I have it with units of energy consumed. There's no subjective element whatever here. We count the number of watts consumed and we see that it oscillates with a 56-year period. Here is the crisis of the 30s, the depression of the 30s. Here is the depression of the early 90s. There was an earlier depression in the 70s, 90s when this cycle times many phenomena including stock market crashes. I'll jump and show it right

now because you see, on this cycle, the mix stock market price of the 30s was right they were coming out of the book.

In 87, another crash in New York was, again, were coming out of the book. There was a crash earlier in Vienna, New York did not, Dow Jones did not exist. The stock market, New York City did not exist in that time in 1973 but the Vienna stock market has crashed, again as we're coming out of the cycle. My forecast for next serious crash of the market is right here, that is 56 years from the previous one. It must have been around the 30s, later 30s, not earlier. There may be big fluctuations but a serious crash like 29 or the 87 should be expected around the 30s are going through this cycle.

There's a whole chapter in my first book which times many phenomena on this clock, the price of oil for example. I don't know whether we're going to talk about it now or later.

**John:** Let's do this, let me stop you just for a second. This is all really interesting. As entrepreneurs, what we struggle with is how can we use this? I can see the S curve. I understand how I can really, that's going to be very helpful for better understanding in business that you're product life cycles and business cycles. I go, we're looking at energy consumption. We know, as we're doing the recording on this podcast, we've seen oil drop tremendously, a 150 a barrel to below 50 at the time of the recording. We've also seen technologies improve, fracking and so on.

All these factors, how do they help contribute to this cycle? What can we learn as business people to, now, I have some friends in the oil industry, they are all very well aware of the cycles but they don't seem to be able to predict. They overinvest at times and underinvest at other times and it's hard on them.

**Theodore:** Let's talk about energy price. Here is the price of primary energy over the last 200 years. Of course it fluctuates a lot. It's normalized for inflation. What we have here is for the first three cycles, besides from the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century, we have 200 years of data. For the first three, for the first hundred years, I have fuel and lighting, the price of fuel and lighting which was mostly carbon fed, maybe some wood in the early days. On this price, the price index of fuel and lighting, we see three significant spikes and they are exactly three to six years apart.

The first one was tremendous here in 1820 and 23, the other one was at the 1870 and in 1920 but again, if I put the Kondratiev clock, I use as a clock here, the cycle that derives from the energy consumption underneath the idea. We see that the spikes coincide again with the moment it reached, we're coming out of the boom and beginning of a recession, at that moment, energy price spikes here fivefold, here at twofold, here at threefold, not factors of 20% or 50%. There's another spike in 1980, 79, 81 for oil price. That also is 56 years apart



from the previous one on this part of the graph, on the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century using the price of oil because the primary energy society was using was oil during this period.

The price of oil spiked in 79, 81 and then there was a big rise of the price in 2008, in July 2008. People thought it was a record high. If you correct for inflation, it wasn't a record high. It was somewhat less. If you take the average over the year, it was even lower. You see this is, the red dot is where we are today. I say, if this, if the first oil peak was comparable to the 1870 peak then what we see now is a background fluctuation. The background fluctuation may go from a 100 and 250 dollars but is not going to go three or four times the price which is what my scenario here says for the ventral oil price hike. The ventral price should be 56 years from 1970, 71 and on and on spike of the 1980 and maybe three or four times, \$300 a barrel or 350, that kind of magnitude.

That one you're not going to see for another 20, 25 years. In the meantime, there will be fluctuations whether it fluctuates around 90 or whether it fluctuates around 50, I say it's a background that can change significantly. Over the 200 years, this background price was going up and down. As for the study is that the big price hike of the order or three or four times the value would only be in the, not before 2030, 2035, 2040. We get some insight of big spikes of the oil price. The smaller fluctuations should be understood closer with the reduction of oil. Let me show you this curve which shows the oil production.

Look how smooth this curve is. It's an accurately, it's a theoretical S curve. The purple line, the two price line and the black line on top of it is the actual production. The agreement is tremendous. One would think that we're cheating to make it look so good. Of course it shows that the production of oil over the last 150 years was reaching a ceiling, was almost complete as a species. I was very confident of this forecast. I could put my hand on fire. If you look at the life cycle, it went up. From the 1970 onward, the production of oil has been coming down in America. I will say that this a very good forecast.

What happened is, my new book, is that the production change and it starts growing. After 2008, oil production start jumping up with a completely different graph which, to me, indicate that these species in quotation mark underwent a mutation. It wasn't the issues anymore after 2008. You know what I'm talking about. I'm talking about fracking. Fracking took off seriously around 2008. That sure pick up tremendously. There's no way to reconcile that production with this forecast. It proves my forecast to be wrong but it was an excellent forecast. It's the species that mutated.

We have to worry about, we're talking about competition. We have to worry about mutations which, by the way, the marketplace are more frequent and easier to do than in nature. In nature, the hare will always be prey to the fox. In nature, the roles, the competitive roles can change by reorganizations, by mergers, acquisitions so the competitive dynamics, one can

go from a predator to a prey by a mutation. Here, a mutation took place and we are in a new S curve now. That has to do with fracking. From the rate of growth, I haven't done the S curve for fracking yet but from the rate of growth that's so rapid, I can tell that it's not going to be a very long lasting phenomenon.

It's not going to be anything like what we've seen before with the conventional oil drilling techniques but for the moment, it's going very fast. A quick look, I did get of the order of 10 years of fracking exploitation, 10, 15 years rather than 150 years there was the oil drilling. We may even come back to drilling at some point if fracking conclude its cycle.

**John:** This is really very powerful. I'm taking it in and I'm thinking we've got some ability to predict the traditional your S curve and natural growth to competition. What we're seeing, the survival of the fittest both in nature and in business. That's allowing us to really start planning out our product cycles, our solutions that we're delivering to our clients but then we have to be really careful though that there can be unseen events coming. Fracking would be an example. I think most people didn't expect it to be this big where it didn't see the US, your prediction and many others, the US was never going to be a net exporter or energy.

**Theodore:** It's not yet happened.

**John:** I know.

**Theodore:** US is still importing but importing less.

**John:** I think what the new S curve with fracking, you haven't done that but I would expect that to show that probably we'll be a net exporter but we're not going to, it doesn't continue endlessly this technology boom.

**Theodore:** That's for sure. It's not going to be endlessly particularly because fracking involves drilling deeper and changing drills very often. It is becoming expensive and exhausting in terms of procedures.

**John:** Let me ask you Theodore, I'm going to change the subject. I didn't bring this up before but I should have. I don't know if you know Peter Diamandis. I know you do know because I tell you right something on Ray Carswell. They, Peter, was on an earlier podcast. He wrote a book called Abundance 360.

**Theodore:** I know Peter. I don't know, he's another Greek, that man.

**John:** Yes. He, as a matter of fact, I met him with Ariana Huffington, another Greek. You guys are driving a lot of the business. One of the things that Peter talks about with Ray and Ray has written tremendously about and they started a University called Singularity University.

This unforeseen events and actually going so far that artificial intelligence will be as something that is becoming more and more out there ... I remember talking about artificial intelligence for the last 34 years but that the exponential growth and this, that's going to just change everything. How do you feel about that?

**Theodore:** I feel very strongly and I don't agree with internal exponential growth. You will stop being exponential but so far in the future you don't do worry about it. He is a little sloppy. That's not right. Many of the exponential graph he has in his book, if you look at them more carefully have already started deviating from exponential patterns and going towards S curves. I don't agree with the fact. We never stop progress. Progress will always go on. We'll never become guinea pigs to machine. That idea of a superhuman, I think, it's naïve.

In his book, he's using my data to show that the things are exponential but while I go farther saying that we are at the midpoint of the exponential and pretty soon, things will start calming down in terms of this blowing out of technology. It doesn't go that way. Diamandis is taking another angle. At least he's making it positive. I go along with that. Positive is good. What I don't like particularly is that machines will take over and we'll become guinea pigs. This is absurd.

**John:** I think, actually, Peter because I know Peter for really well. He's modifying it now and it's going to be, the winning formula will be the combination of both. We're seeing it over and over again like Watson on jeopardy, the IBM computer. Yes it won but IBM hasn't been able to really make a business out of it and what businesses that have worked have been using and combining that human element with it in console and applications and so on. What I'd like to do, Theodore, this is so interesting, you've spent really a vast amount of time and you published hundreds of articles on this but if somebody wants or a fellow entrepreneur as they should, they care about the future, they want to understand better about how to predict that, what of your books should they go to?

**Theodore:** The book to read is the first one, Predictions - Society's Telltale Signature Reveals the Past and Forecasts the Future. I don't know whether you can see.

**John:** We'll put the link on Amazon, Predictions - Society's Telltale Signature Reveals the Past and Forecasts. This is 20 years ago. You've now done an update or two.

**Theodore:** I came up with another version of 10 years ago which was Predictions - 10 Years Later. Now, I have a new work which is Predictions 20 Years Later. This sequence of books is the foundation of my work. People would get a best idea if they get even the first or the second because the third one, I changed into many new topics. I update all the forecast of the previous once but I introduced many new topics on the latest one. I left out some of the juicy stories on the first ones.

**John:** Yeah, Theodore, it's one of the things, I've read a number of books along the way of futurists and articles and they seem to disappear as the future happen, we get to the present.

**Theodore:** Forecast is from confronting their own forecast. The real exception is I go back 10 years, I go back 20 years and I check all my forecast and I have many success stories but what fascinates me more is the deviations because they reveal some secrets. Why? The fracking for example, when I saw this deviation, I was going out of my mind. How can such a nice forecast be wrong? I realized, what happened 2008? It was obvious that it was happening. I didn't know fracking had the zip right until I looked at the data.

**John:** Theodore, this is so great. Let me go one more step on, I do a segment, the smart app or smartphone application of the day. Is there something that you would recommend to your fellow entrepreneurs?

**Theodore:** Shall I turn on the light here? Would it help?

**John:** Yeah, it would, actually. One of the things during podcast is every once in a while technology gets in the way of things. Yeah, that's a lot better. Thank you.

**Theodore:** Yeah. I have the tools in my website to do your own S curve, how to find, where are you in the curve to catch where it is. Is your company appropriately dressed for the season it is traversing? The life cycle has growth seasons, flat seasons, winters and summers. There is a software there people could use professionally in business to deduce life cycles and position themselves on the curve but from the stock market, I have, we just released last year with a young man who knew how to do this complicated Apple programming which I couldn't do.

A little iPhone, iPad application that does the forecast stock prices by treating stocks like species and the stock market like an ecosystem, all the stocks in the stock market compete between them and the best fit stock will win the investors money. We go back into the survival of the fittest in the stock market. Of course, the stock market is very sensitive to mutations. Stock companies and stocks go very often through convergence by reorganization by changing CEO by mergers and acquisitions. One has to be careful. It does better than normal forecasting techniques particularly for the longer term because for the near term, there's many stock price forecasting tools but for the long term, I don't know of any which claim reliability.

The reason I claim reliability is because I exploit a natural law. Natural laws, as we remember, all taken into account that there may be mutations of the species in the process. There's an iPad, iPhone application. You can find this, there's a little demo on YouTube.

**John:** Let me give your website first and you can go and there's some great information at [www.growth-dynamics.com](http://www.growth-dynamics.com) and we'll, again, have that on the show link. In the iPhone where, Theodore, would they find that the name of the app is?

**Theodore:** Under my name, you can go to Theodore Modis. There's a link to my app on the website. There's a little YouTube video, if you go to YouTube and you can type Theodore Modis, you'll see a video called Stocks' Future. That's the name of the forecast Stocks' Future. Stocks is in the plural, in the genitive plural, the future of stocks. That little demo gives a full picture of what this application does.

**John:** This has been great. Let me go over my key takeaways that I'm doing as we wrap everything up. Really, the number one, as entrepreneurs, we're charged with, maybe not predicting the future but certainly understanding the future so that we can deliver value to our clients and our customers. Very first takeaway is that understand the natural growth of competition. We've talked about natural species we've talked about in the business side. Your whole concept of this S curve being very predictive, we've got a look at where we are now in that cycle.

Second is that we have to recognize that as these competitive forces are coming in, we have that natural, the client, we can't just do the exponential growth or linear growth in a spreadsheet and count on that because it doesn't happen. We're going to have to introduce new products or solutions that are going to create that next S curve. Third, we're going to be always be careful of mutations that there are outside forces sometimes come in to change these but given that, it's so much more effective and predicting that we have this understanding so we can deal with our ability to predict the future, act on that and then also be aware of changes going on. This has been extremely enlightening, valuable, Theodore. I want to thank you for joining.

**Theodore:** Thank you.

**John:** I appreciate it very much. I know all the viewers and listeners as well. With that, take this information, the insights that Theodore shared with us and go out and apply it in your business. Pick up the books. Really make sure you got a clear understanding of the future. This is so important for your current clients, your future clients. They're all counting on you. Don't let them down. Wish you the best of success.

**Theodore:** Thank you.

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John Bowen  
Founder and CEO  
Financial Advisor Select