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Get To Know Our Guest

**MARTIN
KOEK**

Martin Koek studied law at the university of Leiden. In 1991 he obtained his master's degree in tax law. In the same year he started his career as tax advisor with Arthur Andersen. Within Arthur Andersen and later Deloitte he climbed the ranks and **in 2002 he became responsible for the corporate income tax compliance practices in the Netherlands**. In 2013 Martin relocated to Deloitte in Hyderabad (India) where he managed the compliance practices for Deloitte Netherlands and Deloitte United Kingdom. In 2017 he returned to Deloitte in The Netherlands taking up his role in the Netherlands compliance practice.

After his career as tax advisor in 2022, Martin decided to take a break from professional life and focus more on his private life and his hobbies reading and travelling. **In 2025 he started his coaching education that he finished in 2026. Currently he is starting up his coaching practice, mainly focusing on career coaching.**

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HIGHLIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

- **KG:** *You've had such an incredible international career as a corporate leader, advisor, mentor, just to name a few. Is there a red thread that ties all of this together for you? I wanted to know what's the driving force behind all that you do?*
- **MARTIN:** *One thing is that I like to solve puzzles and find my way or other people's way out of difficult situations. And I like to help people and perhaps not in the altruistic way, but at least in a professional way.*
- **MARTIN:** *In the beginning of my career, it was about helping clients manage their tax burden. Later on, it became also mentoring of younger colleagues. It became the development of the organization as a whole. And then it's rather difficult to find the right thread but it always focused around helping people solving problems or helping organizations solving problems.*
- **KG:** *Knowing that you have a compliance ethics taxation background yourself, what are the terms ethics and integrity mean to you?*
- **MARTIN:** *I think ethics and integrity are the greatest assets that a leader can have. And the difficulty is how to apply those things in the real everyday life of a leader.*



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HIGHLIGHTS & TAKEAWAYS

- **MARTIN:** As a starting leader, where I realized at one time that I was focusing way too much on reliability and responsibility. And I realized that in my vacation, where I received lots of telephone calls from team members who were trying to solve problems but didn't think that they have the authority themselves to solve the problem. So they always came back to me. I sat down with a consultant *to make a SWOT analysis and from that SWOT analysis an action plan had to follow. Okay this is the direction that we are taking and the necessary steps that we had to take the practical steps to make that change. We came up with the solution that we should involve the entire team.*
- **MARTIN:** *The action plan that the team made was the same as the plan I made with the consultant. But the action steps that we had to take were much more complete than I had made together with the consultant. So what I learned from that exercise is that by being transparent and honest about the future of the team. The team was actually thinking about solutions and action steps to take together with me. But it made the team less reliable from me. And it also created a much more open atmosphere where everybody could share their ideas, could share their doubts, their concerns. And we solved everything together.*
- **KG:** *What was it do you think that helped the team make that change when you recommended it?*
- **MARTIN:** *Involving the team and knowing that their views and their recommendations are also appreciated and that I by myself also do not know anything creates an atmosphere that we really we're really going together to make the change to make everything happen.*



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- **KG:** *In Asia, where I know some of the talent you worked with was, it is very hierarchical. So did you face any resistance or hurdles from others in the environment? who are used to hierarchy and couldn't understand why you're going against the grain and trying to do something different.*
- **MARTIN:** *I learned quite soon that although the society and also lot of corporations in Asia are hierarchical, hierarchy is very important in those countries and those organizations, people hate it. When I came in and started asking input from the team and involving them in the day to day basis, other than just doing their regular job, but also give them an insight in why we were doing things and that we also needed to make changes. They were all quite happy to give me their input.*
- **MARTIN:** *I've learned that integrity from a leader leads also to integrity from the team. and the same for ethics. If you are an ethical leader, you also get ethical team members. And there are always exceptions, but the broader line is that it is a vice versa thing. Ethical leaders lead to ethical teams. Integrity leads to integrity.*
- **KG:** *Is there a need that you feel comfortable sharing so we can learn from what lessons you took away from it? I'm assuming you're referring to mistakes that help you clarify and fine tune what your ethics are, what your values are.*



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- **MARTIN:** *In the evaluation process, there's nothing easier than doing an evaluation conversation with a good performer. You always have a nice open atmosphere. But then you have the conversation with the bad performer. And since most leaders are nice people, or at least want to be perceived as a nice person, the evaluation conversations with bad performers are often of a very bad quality.*
- **MARTIN:** *The evaluator wants to soften the blow and the evaluator is certainly not telling the bad performer that the performance is really bad. We try to hide it a little bit and say this is not the end of the world. If you do this and this you can perform better. But what we are actually doing is hiding the message, leave the bad performer hanging, leaving the bad performer with a feeling of uncertainty. So along the way, I've learned that it is much better to not soften the blow and just tell at the beginning of the conversation, your performance is not up to standards.*
- **MARTIN:** *By listening, you can also determine, okay, there is room for growth. And when you listen to the needs of the other person and really help the person taking the next step, the conversation is suddenly not closed and tense anymore, but it's open and you're trying to build on something. And I think that's also a part of ethics. It's morally wrong to soften the blow. It's ethically right to start with the bad message, but also being open to the input of the person in front.*
- **KG:** *What are some of the real world ethical problems that are most relevant to business leaders today? What are your observations around that?*



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- **MARTIN:** *I want to focus on one thing. And it has again to do with the people aspect of business. We started measuring a lot of things like output. We started measuring the number of hours spent on the project compared with the projected number. We started modelling a lot, standardising a lot. And although I am the first to recognize that modelling and that standardization and measuring output brought us a lot, it also harms us. And I feel that we focus too much on the standardized models. And we focus too much on output and we focus too little on the uniqueness that every employee brings to the organization.*
- **KG:** *How can we begin to persuade organizations? What's the business case for it?*
- **MARTIN:** *If we listen more to each other about what works on the models and what doesn't work on the models, we eventually get to a situation that the models are not set in stone anymore. Because quite often we design something and that works, but circumstances change. So if circumstances change, you should also redesign the model and then people feel much more at home.*
- **KG:** *There is a Martin Luther King quote that I recently came across, Martin, that I think is appropriate. He advises that "Faith is about taking the first step, even if the staircase is not clear to you yet."*



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- **MARTIN:** In my time in Asia, we also designed. We implemented it. We think it's a success. But every three months, the project team is coming together and gets input from the team on is it still working or do we need to tweak so that this is not all set in stone. And in that way it becomes much more durable to keep working in that way because everybody feels hurt and when change is needed we make the change.
- **KG:** *What is your advice to professionals on how to build these cultures of integrity in their teams and organizations as they grapple with competing priorities?*
- **MARTIN:** *First, as a team you have to do is make sure that everybody is included. And that means that you must have open communication lines where people really listen and understand each other's expectations and needs and wishes. And if there is a clear understanding of expectations and wishes, especially on things that work very well but also on things that do not work, then there is an understanding of what needs to change and what can stay the same. And it's also openness leads to openness.*
- **MARTIN:** *Secondly, the team needs to make sure that everybody has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and actually pick up their roles and responsibilities. And that it is clear that everybody knows what they are doing and also monitor that everybody is picking up their roles and responsibilities. Because they understand a disbalance will occur when someone is not picking up their respective roles and responsibilities.*

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- **MARTIN:** *Lastly, there should be a balance in the give and take. So by saying that, mean that employees give their time and capabilities to the employer and they want to have something in return, which is basically a salary and some vacation date. Employers may want from time to time, have an increase in productivity because it's a busy season. And as long as there is some reward for the employees, it's okay.*
- **MARTIN:** *If everybody is included, everybody feels included, if everybody takes up their roles and responsibilities, and when there is a balance, a long-term balance in the give and take. Those are excellent ingredients to build team culture that is both ethical as well as that it has integrity.*
- **KG:** *Do you have any advice for professionals, either mid-career or senior, who are now fearing what is the future of their career paths with AI coming in so extensively? Or advice for people who are going to graduate and are looking to joining the workforce soon on how to navigate this age of AI?*
- **MARTIN:** *Alternatives will come up and I don't know yet what kind of alternatives that will be but they will come up and perhaps in areas where we do not know about right now and I think that all those companies laying off people should also think really think about what they're doing.*
- **MARTIN:** *There was a piece about one of the big four companies that issued the report to a government and apparently they relied too much on AI. And although the overall conclusion of the report didn't change, there were a lot of mistakes in the report that apparently was generated by AI. We should also train our people on at least for the foreseeable future on how to check the report that AI made.*

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- **MARTIN:** When I started my career, there was a saying that *trust is good, but checking is better.*
- **MARTIN:** *We should keep hiring people for the foreseeable future at least to check the outcome of the AI report and checking something is much more difficult than creating something. But still jobs will go lost because of AI. But although I do not have the answer right now, I am certain that alternatives will come up.*
- **KG:** *In face of uncertainty, sometimes we can refer back to similar occurrences in history where the hurdles were overcome and solutions did emerge. And those are always great prototypes to refer back to.*
- **KG:** Organizations seeking to accelerate and amplify their results by real heavy reliance of technology and human beings similarly placing very high value and projecting great trust on technology. *Do you have a take on that? Because I know the field that you actually specialized in was very interesting. Do you see, for example, taxation, the careers in taxation, changing from human to more technology-fueled?*
- **MARTIN:** Because of the shortage of people, we started investing in technology quite early, in the beginning, just to get a more coherent product. But nowadays also get the technology should help us in with the simple tasks like repairing tax returns, 50 % of the work is not tax related, it's just transferring data from from one software product to the other software product. And if you have to do that manually, it's taking up a lot of time for the people you actually want to do more high-end work. So making an automatic transfer from the one data carrier to the carrier that we need to file tax returns on saves a lot of time.

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- **KG:** *What excites you these days in terms of your professional pursuits?*
- **MARTIN:** *When I was thinking about what is the common denominator of what I've done in my career. I found out that it was helping people.*
- **MARTIN:** *I decided to take up a course to become a coach. And enjoying that a lot because I'm learning so much about myself. Things I knew, actually I can put in a new perspective right now, but also a lot of things about myself I don't know. Or I didn't know, I know now.*
- **MARTIN:** *I enjoy having the coaching conversations quite a lot. It's more or less the same as the mentoring conversations and coaching conversation I had with my junior colleagues within Deloitte. It's also quite different because where I was actively helping people solving their problems, at the moment I'm learning on how to, not how to solve other people's problems, but how to bring other people to their own solution. And that's difficult, it's challenging. I get a lot of joy from it.*
- **KG:** *I know you're also a great reader. Would you like to leave our listeners with a favorite book or quote that has been inspiring you lately?*



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- **MARTIN: *The almond tree* written by Michelle Cohen Corasanti.** It's just a beautiful story which gives you a lot of background on the situation in the Middle East. It starts back in 1955 and it brings you up almost up to present day. It's an incredible moving book and it really gives an insight in what is going on. And it's especially non-judgmental. And that's what I like about it. No one is judged for the way they act. But it is an objective, more or less objective story.
- **KG: *Is there a quote or a sentence that pops out at you from this book that you wanted to share?***
- **MARTIN:** It's a quote from a rabbi. And it mentions *what you hate, don't do this to others*. And that's a sentence that is with me now for about a year. And still makes a deep impression on me.

REFERENCES & LINKS

- **MARTIN's Social Media Platforms/Resources**
[LINKEDIN](#)
- **MARTIN's Suggested Book**
[THE ALMOND TREE](#) by [Michelle Corasanti](#)
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