

[Transcript] My First Million / #13 - He Made Millions From... Blankets, Bean Bags & Candles?

All right.

Quick break to tell you about another podcast that we're interested in right now, HubSpot just launched a Shark Tank rewatch podcast called Another Bite.

Every week, the hosts relive the latest and greatest pitches from Shark Tank, from Squatty Potty to the Mench on a Bench to Ring Doorbell, and they break down why these pitches were winners or losers.

And each company's go-to-market strategy, branding, pricing, valuation, everything.

Basically all the things you want to know about how to survive the tank and scale your company on your own.

If you want to give it a listen, you can find Another Bite on whatever podcast app you listen to, like Apple or Spotify or whatever you're using right now.

All right.

Back to the show.

This is the secret.

Everyone focuses.

Other shit, it doesn't matter.

What's your conversion rate or this or like this?

It's like, wait, what are you selling?

And whenever I sit down, I always talk about the product because that shit is the most exciting.

That's why we're here.

That's what we're selling.

We're selling some arbitrage on Facebook or like access to an email list or some sale.

It's like, no, no, no.

It's so fucking simple.

I make the best beanbag ever.

That's it.

That's why we're here.

Thank you for coming.

I appreciate it.

Yeah.

No, thanks for having me.

I got a message from my friend Zach, who's over at Founders Fund.

And the good thing is when I started the podcast, it was just my friends.

So I was like, okay, I know I can have like these 10 guests on.

These are my friends.

I know they have good stories.

And I was like, I don't know what I'll do after that.

But the good thing was that Zach and others basically, once they heard a few episodes, they're like, oh, you've got to have this person on the podcast.

And so he sent me one of those emails, oh, you've got to have John on the podcast.

So you are the founder of, I don't know what the company's actually called, but the product I've seen for years called the Gravity Blanket.

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What's the actual company called?

Yeah.

So basically there's Gravity Blankets, Moon Pod, and then this new one called Birthdate Candle.

So I guess I have my John Holdco thing and I'll spin up these companies and kind of do it product by product and put a team around them and then sort of walk away or grow it or whatever.

So Gravity is its own beast and monster with a partner, Moon Pod.

I have a team running that one.

And then this new one, Birthdate Candle, also a team on that one.

And it's all of these little things and they're spinning them up, running them, doubling down on what's working, and then continuing to iterate and launch and double down.

Awesome.

So I'm excited because I have a few different business fantasies.

People have sexual fantasies, they, you know, they want to role play, they want to do whatever.

I have these business fantasies.

One of my business fantasies is to do a mega successful Kickstarter, which you've done.

So you've did a Kickstarter, I think raised almost 5 million bucks.

Is that right?

5?

It was close to 5.

Gravity was 4.7 and then Moon Pod was like 1.4.

Okay, so even higher than 5 total.

But one of my fantasies is to do a super successful Kickstarter.

The other is to create this like, like a viral product, like basically when I saw the Snuggie, I was like, wow, this is genius.

This guy, you know, somebody made a comfortable blanket, essentially.

I remember having several brainstorms with friends being like, what's another Snuggie?

And that's funny.

You kind of, not to make a joke of it, but you kind of did another Snuggie.

That was the joke.

That was the joke with the team that we were doing this, we would take breaks and I would walk around with my partner and we would be like, how hysterical is this going to be if we actually make the next Snuggie?

And you know, because one of our manufacturers, their big claim to fame was that they made the Snuggie and we were like, oh shit, like, what if, wouldn't it be crazy if this thing caught on and like, you know, and now it's like, you know, you hear weighted blankets and gravity blankets all over the place and it's like, I caught up with my partner in LA a couple of weeks ago and we kind of were just like, yeah, like, I'm not, we're not going to say it's on the level of Snuggie, but it was like, yeah, we kind of, kind of did.

Yeah.

It smells a little bit like it.

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It tastes a little bit like it.

Well, we joked about, yeah.

Okay.

So for those who don't know, what is the gravity blanket in sort of a couple of sentences?

Yeah.

So these sentences that is basically a weighted heavy blanket, we have a 25 pound blanket, we have a 20 pound blanket and a 15 pound blanket.

And basically the line is that sleeping with 10% of your body weight on top of you is an incredible anti-anxiety relief tool.

So you have better sleep, de-stress, and it sort of feels like this hugging sensation on your body that has like some pretty real effects on your body and mind.

Amazing.

And so we're going to talk about how you guys came up with the idea, how you guys brought it to market, how you did this Kickstarter and raised all this money and really built the momentum.

But I want to know just initially, what's the origin story?

Where were you when you had the idea, you said you guys were walking around or kind of joking at some point?

Yeah, that was after that was after.

The starting point of this is like in a very short sentence, I started a tech company.

I was putting tablets and Ubers.

And by the way, he put air quotes on tech.

I like that.

Yes.

Yeah.

I mean, I have to give a crow where in San Francisco, I have to be careful.

So it was, I had this whole idea of advertising in Ubers, which is I guess now like a really big thing.

I was a little early and it wasn't really the company that I wanted to build.

So you know, raised a bunch of money before I spent it all, gave it back to all the investors and went back to zero.

So yeah, it was like kind of like months of sleeping on the couch, started this company, shut it down, back on couches.

So I was like back on couches, kind of freaking out.

And I really had.

What was the freak out?

Is like, what am I going to do?

Yeah.

I mean, you know, I gave myself probably like a two year window where I was like, all right, I'm going to go from having nothing to try to create something out of thin air.

And if it doesn't happen, then like maybe I'll have to go and get that job at like JP Morgan or something.

And you know, the podcast is called My First Million and it's called that because for a

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long time I was like, I want to be a millionaire.

I thought people who had a million bucks, I was like, wow, they got all the, all the bucks.

Not what it's cracked up to be.

Yeah.

But like at the time I felt that, and I think still for a lot of people in a lot of places, definitely not San Francisco, but a million bucks still is this like amazing milestone. Same thing like a million downloads.

Totally.

So if you guys get to million downloads, you know, I'll pop up LaCroix.

Right.

Right.

When you say I was trying to create something out of thin air, was it more like, are you wired like me where I'm like, I just want to make successful businesses.

I kind of don't care about which field it's in, but I just wanted to build a successful business.

I don't know why.

I just really want to do it.

What was your thought process around I want to create something out of thin air?

What was something?

After months of sleeping on coaches, I started to get like pretty desperate and was like, I don't really care what it is.

Like I'll sell bags of ice.

I'll like have a lemonade stand.

Like I don't give a shit.

I just need something that it's going to create this like positive feedback loop where I can go and get off my friend's coaches.

But even that being said, there's like five or six ideas that I had where it was like, it didn't hit me in the chest as much as something like a weighted blanket.

Like to me, like when I had that idea, I was going out, I was working with sleep scientists.

I was actually going to build a pillow.

And in one of the sessions with a sleep scientist, she very passively was like, oh yeah.

And like after the blanket should look into sleeping with 10% of your body weight.

And I was like, what?

I was like, wait, what did you just say?

And she was like, yeah, if you sleep with 10% of your body weight, it's this incredible anti-anxiety relief.

And I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa, I was like, stop everything basically threw the pillow off the table and was like, we, I have to learn more about this.

And when I went out and I was searching for it, really couldn't find anything out there other than these children's blankets for autistic kids and like some use cases for the medical field.

But there really wasn't anywhere where you could go and purchase these things for like

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a normal use case and a normal person that just wanted it to like feel comfortable.

And so I was like, oh wow.

So I made myself like a 10 pound blanket and put it on my chest and I passed out in like 10 minutes.

And I was like, what do you mean by you made yourself a, how do you make yourself a 10 pound blanket?

What does that mean?

So I went to Amazon, bought these weighted pellets and then sewed them into two sheets basically.

Why'd you do that versus just buy one of these specialty weighted blankets that were kind of fringe at the time?

I did buy a bunch of those too, but like the websites that sold them were like kind of crazy.

Like it was easier to make my own than to go and get a wet, than to go on the internet and buy it.

Which I was like, okay, I hope this thing works because this will crush if it turns out to be what I hope it is.

And it was when I put it on and I fell asleep and woke up, I was like, oh my God, this, I don't even care, I'm comfortable screaming about this to everyone that I know because I know that it works and I loved it so much.

And like, you know, if I sat down and looked at it, like pillows are probably a bigger market opportunity.

Like that my pillow guy is making like 400 million a year or whatever.

I don't know.

But like, I don't know what was more fun for me and what like felt a little bit more unique and a little bit more special to me was something this idea of a weighted blanket because, you know, no one's ever seen that before.

So for me, it's sort of like a balance of this sort of like invention, newness thing, something that I would actually truly love.

And then, you know, is it going to be capable of actually being a real business?

You know, I almost tweeted this the other day, but I'm trying to not tweet ever.

Every day I sleep with the gravity blanket, I wake up and I, you know, meditate and do work on my moon pod and then like at night I light my birthdate candle and like have my little like fun.

You're living your lifestyle.

Like I literally touch and use every product that I make every day.

And I've had a bunch of other ideas that I know would be massive businesses, but like they just don't really excite me.

It's amazing how much better your execution gets when you are using your own product.

You know what pain points the customer is going to have because you are the customer.

You're not guessing.

Yeah.

So it eliminates a whole feedback loop of like wondering what a customer wants, doing

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research, talking to them, trying to figure out what did what they tell me.

Was that real?

And what's the truth?

It's like, no, I know what I want and I can test it on myself.

So that's amazing.

The other thing you said, which is good, I want to call out, which is like, you just did the thing that was most interesting to you, not the thing necessarily that looked like the most beautiful business on paper.

It passed the interestingness test.

And I don't know what you think, but there's something to that.

There's something to following like your note, your gut on what's interesting to you.

I had a bunch of VCs tell me to do the pillow business.

And when I said the weighted blanket thing, they were like, what, they're like, what are you talking about?

And I was like, no, no, no, you don't get it.

Like you've got to use.

And they were just like, no, look at the tam on pillow or some shit.

And I was like, shut up, you don't get it.

So I went my own way.

And I'm, yeah, I'm really glad that I did.

Yeah.

So you build the prototype yourself, essentially.

Use it.

You're like, okay, I believe in this.

I would be willing to chill for this because I believe in it.

What happens between there and let's say the Kickstarter being successful.

Tell me a little bit about how that came about.

Yeah.

So it was long.

It was like a long time.

So I had that idea and found that product probably like five or six months before I even talked about launching it because I was basically like broke with nothing.

And so it took me a really long time to get any sort of momentum.

And is that because you kind of, you weren't fully convinced yet.

So you're still dabbling in other possibilities, all their ideas, or you just didn't have the means to do it.

It was literally the means.

Like I didn't have, I really was making deals.

I was promising my friends that if they let me stay on their couch for more than two weeks, I was going to take them on vacation when I was successful.

And like I was living off of a credit card that I gave myself, like it was like no interest or whatever for like a year and a half.

And it was literally like, all right, every day was like, how do I eat and sleep?

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And then it was like, okay, do I have an hour or two to explore this idea?
But then, you know, you need, you need people, you need a team, you need money, you need all these things to come together.
And it took me a really long time to get that.
So eventually
What were you doing to hustle to make money in the interim?
We bartending?
What are you doing?
No, nothing I was doing.
I was literally, I was taking like a massive risk.
I made this website called the Bermuda list.com and it was an idea.
And this was the thing, like all my days, I was testing out like nine or 10 ideas.
I made this website, the Bermuda list.com.
And I basically said like the landing page was like sign up and this is a curated list of the best people and we all let each other stay on each other's couches.
And so I sent it to one friend couch surfing, but couch surf right house couch surfing with the right host with like your friends of a friend.
And I sent it to one of my best friends and was like, Hey, can you send this to five of your best friends that you would want to sleep on your couch?
And I actually got like 500 people signed up to this thing.
And then I just would hit the list of those people and say, Hey, I'm the guy, can I come sleep on your couch for a week?
And if I liked them, then I would say, I would give them the deal.
I would say, if I can stay here for more than two weeks, when I get it together, I'll take everyone to Bermuda.
And that basically was my hack to survive and sleep on couches, but that took up a lot of my time.
That took up like most of my day to figuring out all that, testing the idea, finding the right people, all that.
And then I started setting up people to stay with themselves and it turned into this whole funny story.
But that basically got me to a point where again, like it took me like five or six months.
I talked to a friend that had a media company and I was like, Hey, media's in a really weird place right now.
This is future or something.
Futurism.
I was like, media's in a really weird place right now.
I have all these product ideas.
Why don't we partner?
It'll be a great way for you to show that you can, you know, bring revenue to a product.
You can go do this to a bunch of other people and it'll be a great way for me to get my stuff off the ground.
And that's cool because most media companies are trying to do this like ad model or affiliate

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links model, but you need huge scale.

So this kid was just a friend from NYU and you know, that's kind of the conversation.

It was like, don't go run and do that fool's errand.

Let's try to do something new.

And he was like, all right, I'm done with that.

Let's try it out.

And so, you know, that was like five or six months of just like finding a person, chicken and rice and couches to find a friend that wanted to experiment with me.

And you needed that because they had distribution built in.

Is that it?

Yeah.

I thought it was really important to launch to a big audience.

I'm not sure if that ended up being the case.

Like I don't think I would go and do that again.

I wouldn't go and like partner with a media company to do this again.

But something you believed at the time.

Right.

It was like, you know, this whole thesis of like media and product and everything's changing and attention and it ended up basically just being Facebook.

Like you just need to buy Facebook ads.

Which would have been a lot simpler.

But yeah, that was sort of the bet of like, you know, I need a team.

I need resources.

Let's launch this thing together.

We'll go to your audience.

And it was clear that their audience was interested in a weighted blanket.

And so we were like, okay, this will be worth our time.

And what do you mean by it was clear?

Did you actually run a test with them or you're just guessing, oh, futurism, they'll be interested.

Or did you do some kind of content or some test?

Yeah, we did like a quick sample size of just like, hey, is this something you guys would be interested in?

Okay.

So you just asked them.

Right.

Yeah.

Like, really?

No manufacturing.

No.

I'm guessing at this point, you don't know how to do manufacturing of a product, correct?

You're like.

So I kind of did.

I had a handbag company in college.

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I was making women's handbags.
I did a few, I did like women's wear.
I did a few seasons of women's wear.
So I had manufacturing relationships and I've made a few things before.
And just for the record, he's wearing a blue t-shirt at the time.
He's not the most fashionable, you know.
Oh, come on.
No handbags.
I don't see anything here, but.
I got pretty into it.
We launched a New York Fashion Week.
It was like a whole thing.
Like fashion boy.
Nice.
You're a hustler.
Okay.
Good.
So yeah.
I mean, like, you know, I had an idea.
I knew that I could make a couple thousand blankets.
If it got down to it, I had no idea what was coming.
Right.
But you didn't go make the blankets first.
No.
You start the Kickstarter first.
We did it on Kickstarter.
Going into that.
Did you think, oh, I got this playbook where this is going to be a successful Kickstarter?
Was it like, I don't know.
We'll just figure it out and see what happens.
It was up in the air.
Like it was actually funny.
We all took bets with me and the team that was helping me.
We all took bets on what it would do.
And I bet I had the highest bet.
I thought it was going to do a million bucks.
Yeah.
And everyone thought I was insane.
And everyone thought I was even more insane for the couple months that we worked together that I was trying to convince them to help me launch a weighted blanket.
So they were like, okay, this kid is ridiculous.
I thought it was going to do well.
I knew it was going to do well.

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I didn't think it was going to do that well that quickly.

Right.

And so what's the trick?

Okay.

So you want to do a successful Kickstarter.

Tell me about some of the elements that go into like why you think it worked for you guys.

It may not work now.

But at that time, these were the things you guys did to make that Kickstarter successful.

I'd love to dig into some of the details of the core critical components.

We played into this whole like our mood board as stupid as it sounds was like Tesla for sleep.

Right.

And so we did gravity blanket and we gave it this whole science feel.

And that was really when like Elon Musk was like the god of all gods or like anything he did was like retweeted 90 times.

We're drinking the Kool-Aid.

Everyone's drinking.

Everyone.

No one had hated him yet.

And you know, so we got, we got the branding right.

We got the messaging right.

We got the audience right.

We got the timing right.

This was like right when Trump was getting elected and everyone was freaking out and was like, oh, you know, I'm not sleeping.

And like also the Casper thing and the sleep thing just happened.

And this was sort of taking a different angle where it was like, you know, this isn't about necessarily sleep.

It's about a wellness relaxation and there's no gender to this product.

It's everyone uses a blanket already and it's just sort of increasing the efficacy of a product that everyone is familiar with.

So again, like I could go down a list forever and like dissect it, but the problem is again, like if I tried to take this formula and overlay it onto something else, it wouldn't work.

So for like moon pod, when I did the second Kickstarter, I approached it completely different.

I didn't get a media partner.

I didn't try to launch to this like with this big grandiose thing.

I didn't spend a lot of money because I didn't think the product was right for that on.

I didn't spend a lot of money on advertising.

The value prop was different.

The promise was different.

So it was like, you know, you have to really.

You looked at the fundamentals and you're like, what do I have and what do I need?

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A hundred percent.

I want to bring up a couple of things that you said because they're kind of nuanced and we won't go too far into the details, but you made some decisions.

Anytime you launch a product, there's like this decision tree you go down.

And by the end for successful products, it's like, oh, of course, of course that makes sense that you would call it the gravity blanket.

You would make it, you know, sort of grain neutral and not like pink or blue or whatever. You would use the science thing rather than, you know, something else, a different angle to market it.

And so give us a sense of what are some of those other forks that, you know, you could have taken in an alternate universe.

It was not called gravity blanket.

It was called blah, blah, blah.

And instead of going after science, you were going to go after a different angle to position it.

What were some of the alternates that you guys ruled out?

I mean, we joked about it.

We joked about calling it the Trump blanket.

We joked about calling it a boyfriend blanket or like a girlfriend blanket because that's everyone was like, oh, I don't need a significant other to snuggle with by gravity.

Boyfriend blanket might have worked.

Boyfriend blanket might have worked it like, and again, but like just didn't.

It's a balance between having these ideas that you can test, but then at the end of the day, like, I mean, this is why like, you know, quant hedge funds don't, don't really work and like why AB testing your way to product market fit doesn't really work.

There still comes a time where you have to have real product insight, confidence and a vision and just take that bet on your gut.

If you try to do this whole thing of like, here's the decision tree and here's this and let's AB test and this, you just get lost and you forget what you forget that feeling that you had when I first put it on myself.

And that was the feeling that I, that I really leaned into when I was driving and making all these decisions.

It was like, okay, yeah, like, haha, this is a joke.

Let's call it a boyfriend blanket.

And I was like, I don't know.

That's not how you felt when you used it.

This is too serious.

I was like, this is too real.

This isn't a joke.

This is like, this is going to change how people sleep.

And so, you know, it was like, okay, so like gravity blanket, it's, it we're going to, we're going to move towards this idea of science because there was science there.

So it really is about, you know, it's good to explore and have on the table all of these

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different areas that you could go.

But at the end of the day, I really am a believer that it comes from like having some sort of real gut.

Totally.

On the product side, you can't A-B test your way to success, but the possibilities do exist and do come to your brain and you use something, either data or just conviction around which path to go down.

And so you, you were making those decisions as you were going.

So there's that element.

The other thing you said that was interesting was product promise.

I've used this term.

I've never actually heard anyone else say it.

So when you said it, I got kind of excited because the way I look at businesses, every product makes a promise to a customer, what am I going to do for you?

And you got to make the right promise because if you're promising something I don't care about, then I'm just going to ignore you, right?

Right.

I promise, you know, if I promised you that I could, well, you know, turn your hair blue, like if you don't care about your hair turning blue, you don't, who cares, you don't care about me.

So you got to make the right promise and then you got to live up to it.

And so the promise of the gravity blanket is what?

Is it to reduce anxiety?

Is it to, what is the simple promise that, that you try to make with that product?

Yeah.

So I spent a ton of time on this and we landed on the tagline that really worked for us was a 25 pound blanket for sleep stress and anxiety.

And it took a while to get there to find that like simple sentence, but like really if you're using it to sleep better, you're going to probably sleep better.

So we were like, okay, that, that works.

If you're stressed out and you throw it over you, it will probably calm you down.

Okay.

That, that's good.

And if you have this crazy anxiety that's happening and you sort of throw it on top of yourself, the same thing is going to happen.

So all those promises that we were making, we were super, super confident that it's going to be delivered from the majority of the customers.

Right.

And let's give people a sense of the scale of things.

So you, you do this Kickstarter, you get five million bucks of essentially pre-sales.

Yep.

To date, what has the product done in sales now?

Like how far did it go?

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How far did the gravity blanket really go?

Yeah, it's a lot.

We've been around for like two years.

I have sort of stepped away and the team there, you know, is scaling it in a really incredible way online mostly, we're starting to get into some retail stuff and whatever.

Yep.

I don't want to speak for them.

I read a number that said 15 million when I was doing my research for this, there's down over 15 million in sales.

That's printed somewhere.

Yeah, that's printed somewhere.

Amazing.

So yeah, so like, yeah, it's a little more than that now, obviously, because that was probably what a year ago, a couple months ago.

Yeah.

So it's grown since then, but again, like it's a super healthy business.

I mean, it was profitable from day one.

And when that happens, you know, you have this positive feedback loop of gas that helps it grow.

And you developed that product and you've developed a subsequent product since you said Moon Pod.

What's the other one?

The candle?

The candle's fun.

Tell us about the promise that those make.

Yeah, totally.

So Moon Pod was a similar promise.

It was, I basically was like, I started freaking out and was like, holy shit, like what if I'm just the blanket guy forever?

Like what if I can never.

The one hit wonder.

Right.

And I asked, why did it work and how do you have a successful thing?

I was really scared that I just got lucky or that like, you know, it was, it was because this or that and, you know, maybe Facebook was cheap or something or that audience that I had access to.

Like maybe I did just trick everyone into buying something and I'll never be able to do that again.

And I was like freaking out.

So the second the gravity hit, I was like, oh my God, I got to come up with number two.

And I went over to Japan alone to sort of have a chill out and I started just seeing all of these like beanbags.

And I was like, wow, like there isn't a great beanbag in the United States.

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And I was like, okay.

And I sat in a few in Japan and like kind of had that same feeling that I had when I put gravity on where it was like my chest sort of like, you know, it felt like my soul sort of left my body and I was sort of just like in this like bliss.

And I was like, holy shit, this is another product where that happened again.

And I was like, went home and I bought a bunch of beanbags to test them out.

I wasn't happy with any of them.

But when I used some of the beanbags with the gravity blanket, I was like, oh my God, this is the perfect platform to use with gravity blanket.

Amazing.

So I was like, okay.

It's complimentary.

Complimentary.

I would sit on it when I was stressed, when I needed a nap or I had anxiety.

And what makes it better than a normal beanbag that I've experienced here, you know, growing up in the States?

Totally.

So we have pretty cool rounded design that's super unique.

And then the material that we use, there's like a dual membrane where we have an inner layer and an outer layer.

And the outer layer is this like elastic jersey type of thing that holds its form.

And then the inner bead is this custom like high friction bead that we, you know, we found there's only like one guy in the US that makes these things the way that I wanted them to and that would work with me.

And so, you know, with this whole combination, you basically get this sensation that you're like kind of floating and you're like supported and it can turn into a chair and you know, it's this weird modular thing and you know, you don't see that out there.

It's like Love Sack and a few others that are just like this big giant sack of foam.

Yeah, I've seen those.

And this is sort of this lightweight malleable support system that's sort of like, you know, you feel it in your lower back, any which way you lean into it, it sort of pushes back against you.

Right.

And you know, that was pretty unique.

Like there aren't a lot of people doing that and no one's really telling the story that we're telling where it's kind of like, Hey, this is an adult beanbag.

Right.

It's okay.

It is kind of the best place to sit where you want to do work or chill out or hang out.

You know, normally on the podcast, I don't even, I remarkably don't talk to the guests so much about their product because it ends up feeling like a sales pitch because usually the person's really into their product.

And I just, you know, we people are here for more of the story.

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In your case, I actually really want to talk about it because the product isn't naturally interesting.

I feel like it's interesting to everybody.

Okay.

So this is the secret.

It's the viral product.

But this is the secret.

Everyone focuses so much on other shit that doesn't matter.

It's like, Oh, you know, like, what's, what's your conversion rate or this or like this?

It's like, wait, what are you selling?

And whenever I sit down, I always talk about the product because that shit is the most exciting.

That's why we're here.

That's what we're selling.

I'm not selling some arbitrage on Facebook or like some like access to an email list or some sale.

It's like, no, no, no, it's so fucking simple.

I make the best beanbag ever.

Like that's it.

That's why we're here.

My weighted blanket feels incredible.

Like there really isn't much else to talk about.

Everything else is blocking and tackling.

It's like, get that moment and find that product that makes you want to talk about it.

You know, like you say, you don't really ask these questions, but it's because I've spent time finding these products that are interesting that people want to talk about.

And that is sort of something that no one really talks about, which is crazy to me.

There's so many people that come to me and have all these questions and I'm like, great, what are you selling?

And they're like, oh, it's a snack that this and I'm like, great, why is it different than this, this and this?

And they're like, well, it has a different logo and I'm like, well, I don't care.

Right.

Now I'm out.

Yeah.

It's like, okay.

I would say your very simplistic approach to this is inspiring.

Like when you were saying that, you're like, I got the main thing right and I kept the main thing, the main thing.

And that's kind of the main, that's the thing to do and why are we all distracting ourselves?

And I like that.

I like that approach very much.

I heard that five hour energy guy who's like idle stuff.

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He said the same shit.

He was like one of my bus rides around California and I was just like, you know, trying to figure it out.

They were like, why haven't Coke or Pepsi or whoever like come and knock you out of the water?

And he was like, they always forget about the most important thing.

It's the product.

He's like, I made the best formula and no one can copy it.

And you know, like, why does Coke still exist?

Yes, there is, there is a very real argument that they own distribution and all this shit.

But I don't care if you just replaced Coca-Cola with Moxie.

I'm not being tempted by Moxie.

Right.

I'm just caving in.

I, you know, I'm not like leaving the gym and still being like, I don't know.

I kind of want to treat myself to a Moxie just because it's in my face.

Coca-Cola tastes like magic.

It is incredible.

It is consistent.

I've never tasted anything like it.

And that wins for a reason and there's a reason why the special Coke formula is this massive secret that no one can ever copy is because they understand that it's the product.

So you're in San Francisco.

There's a lot of people that would disagree with you, not just on Coke being great as a drink, but just everyone who says that Coke is not a good drink, brand supply chain, everything else.

And I like that you have a different take on it.

You have to have all of it.

You have to have all of it.

But I mean, a lot of people that are just going out and raising two million bucks to like, you know, put a different logo on toothpaste or something.

It's like, I don't know, man.

I don't know if I'd take that bet.

I don't know if I'd want to spend five years of my life just sort of like doing a brand exercise and like, you know, getting it on the shelves of a few retailers.

Right.

It's not really that exciting.

And don't tell me that you're chaining people's lives because you're not.

And again, like it's just like, find that magic moment and you can do the equation.

You can raise money.

You can tap all these distributors and you can throw it in someone's face.

But at the end of the day, it's not going to really last or work unless someone naturally falls in love with it.

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And that comes down to the product.
Your story reminds me a little bit of the founders of Calm.
Do you know those guys?
I don't.
Alex and...
I don't.
We worked with the gravity.
Yeah.
We did like a whole collaboration with them.
So I'm going to have them on the podcast.
They're good friends.
And Alex has this crazy life story where he was, I think, 20 or 21 years old and he created MillionDollarHomePage.com because he just wanted to...
He was like, how do I make a million dollars?
He's like the reason this podcast should exist, really.
He's got the best story.
So I'm going to have him on.
But he made a homepage.
Did you ever see Million Dollar Homepage?
You know what this is?
No.
So he took a website.
It was back, you know, year 2000 or something like that.
I don't know exactly what it was.
But internet wasn't super mature yet.
And he takes a website and he just divides it up into 1,000 by 1,000 pixels to a million pixels.
Oh, I saw this.
I saw this.
He just sold every pixel, every square for \$1.
Sick.
And so...
And you could buy like 10 of them or whatever.
And so he, in a few weeks, essentially sells a million dollars of advertising on this website.
It was amazing.
And was like, be a part of internet history.
And he played the PR machine and whatever.
So he makes a million bucks.
He spends it like within a year because he's like 21 years old and he's having fun.
He blows it.
And he was, you know, enjoyed it.
And he thought, all right, that next hits right around the corner.

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And in the next 10 years, he basically failed to make another hit. But he kept trying, kept trying, kept trying until he makes Calm. And actually Calm was not an instant hit either. Calm is a meditation app. Probably one of the most popular meditation apps in the world. It's like valued over a billion dollars now. And at the time, I remember talking to him when he was starting it, it was like, you're doing a meditation app. And it's kind of a crazy story, but he was still in the same space you're in, which is around anti-anxiety, de-stressing, getting better sleep, having better focus. You know, these are the kind of core needs that society was feeling, given the way that the world has evolved. And he came at it from a very different angle, you know, a meditation app. But I feel like you guys were solving some of the same pain points. And like you said, like, there's a lot of sleep boom, there's a lot of sleep products nowadays. Yeah. I mean, again, it's all, like I said, you got to get 90 things right at the same time. And like the timing of, I don't know where this collective agreement in the world is that everyone's more stressed out than ever right now. I don't know where that comes from, but like it's a problem that people need help with. Do you say that because you don't believe that? Or when you say, I don't know where that comes from. Are you saying? Oh, no. I mean, I know it's political. I don't know if it's environmental. Oh, you don't know the cause. Yeah. Like I don't know where this thing is coming from, but everyone's just like, I am so stressed. I'm like teetering on depression. I need help. Like it, for some reason, it seems more than ever that this idea around like getting relief for this stress is so important. Yeah. And again, yeah, like, I don't know, like, you know, weighted blankets were around for a while. And how did people feel who made weighted blankets and never saw, you know, an ounce of the, you know, 100th of the success that you guys found very quickly with it? What was, were they encouraging you because they're like, great. Now this is going to market or they sort of jealous of you guys for sort of just taking the concept and really running, commercializing it and making it mainstream. Yeah.

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I don't know.

People called me that had companies and they were like, Oh my God, thank you so much. We, you like tripled our sales and you grew the category and now everyone knows about it.

And it's just up to the consumer, which one they like better and like, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Other people wrote articles calling us like, you know, they thought we were like the devil that stole.

It was like, there wasn't this, there was no patent, there was no invention.

It was just this thing that is really great for people and everyone loves and definitely seems like it's helping everyone that tries it, I like to have an optimistic viewer.

It was just like, we just, we just have this thing that a bunch of people wanted and we told a different story and that opened up a brand new use case for a whole new market segment.

But you know, you hear that in business all the time.

Like there's a product that exists that's being used for one thing and it's like, oh wait, that can also be used in this way for this new set of people and it takes off.

Right.

Yeah.

Can I actually go to the bathroom?

Sure.

All right.

All right.

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All right.

Back from the bathroom break.

Oh yeah.

Here we go.

Okay.

So I wanted to basically round out by, I have two things that I like to kind of leave people with.

The first is you mentioned this candle and I really just wanted to know what it is.

So can you give me the like one minute on what this candle is because I got to check this out.

Totally.

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So I just had this really funny idea about, you know, I saw the astrology thing happening and I've actually secretly been a huge fan of astrology for like my whole life.

My sister had all these books about birthdays and what it means to be born on your birthday.

I had this idea about what if you took this whole, you know, astrology text around what it means to be born on your birthday and we put those on candles.

So we have 365 candles, one for every day of the year.

You buy the one that's on your birthday and we give you basically this whole reading and then, you know, we give you strengths, weaknesses.

It's like the day of the charismatic lion or whatever, and then there's like three paragraphs on the back that has a pretty awesome, accurately describes what it means to be born on your day.

And what do you mean by accurately?

Because I'm a non-believer like, okay, so just see, I think you're wrong.

So I think you're wrong.

So two days ago, or I don't know, 36 hours ago, my daughter was born, my first child was born.

You got to tell me more.

September 8th, craziest day of my life.

I'll send you a candle.

I'll send you a candle for you.

And so the funny thing is, we're obviously in the hospital and there's these doctors and everything is science, like they're asking, they're taking labs, they're asking questions. Everything is science.

And then they're like, oh, Virgo baby, you know what that means, I'm a Virgo.

And they're not just making conversation.

I can tell they totally believe this.

And so I kind of had this, I bucketed that sort of in the hocus pocus land.

I personally didn't, I never put any stock into it, but it caught my attention yesterday when they were saying this, that they really believe.

And we were also, we were naming her.

So her name is Blush.

And so we were looking up like the etymology of a name.

And then you see this thing where we looked up her middle name, her middle name's Elani.

And it means like, I looked up the definition, it was like, very, you know, a brave charismatic girl who blah, blah, blah, all these amazing things that obviously I want to be true.

But I'm also a little skeptical, like, you know, is this just a fortune cookie telling me like a nice, positive thing?

Like when you say accuracy, I question that, like what do you mean by accuracy?

My answer is what does it matter, right, and, and like, you know, this is a way.

So you're down with like the placebo style thing, correct?

I read an article the other day.

So one, I'm not saying astrology is placebo for all the astrology people out there, but

I read this article the other day that made an incredible case that it is unethical to

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not give patients the placebo before they're actually prescribed the real thing because it is the most powerful with the most success rate and no downsides and no downsides, right?

And so like, that makes sense.

And again, when we're talking about product and what works and what it's like, what's the most powerful thing in the world?

It's a story.

And it like, what do you do when you pick up something, you're like, okay, water.

Why do you choose that water?

Smart water.

Oh, this is going to help me with this and this, it's a story that you tell yourself and it's a promise that you make to yourself every time you interact with an object.

You're picking it up and you're choosing it and you're like, okay, blue shirt today.

This is why I want the blue shirt and you're telling yourself this inner narrative.

That is incredibly powerful.

And there is something where you have this idea of a mantra or a prayer, regardless of what you're telling yourself, if you're just telling yourself anything about yourself, it's going to probably come true.

So astrology, my question, so two things, I'll go down like the storyteller, like mythic answer of why astrology is really interesting.

And then the scientific answer where there actually might be something there is one, again, like the stories that you tell yourself probably will end up happening.

And it's super powerful when you are presented with an object that tells a certain story about yourself or the thing and the promise.

And when that comes true, you start to believe it and it's a reinforcing positive cycle.

So when you say, oh, I'm a Leo, you're charismatic and passionate, you know, every time I look at my candle, I'm like, boom, I got to be charismatic and passionate because that's who I am.

And then I'm calling someone and I'm inviting them to dinner.

And then all of a sudden I'm charismatic and passionate.

Where did that come from?

Is that some DNA inside of me that was formed around the astrological birth of me?

Or is that a story that I'm telling myself?

Does it matter?

I don't think it matters because it's happening and it's working, it's sticking around.

Astrology has been around for longer than most religions.

It is something that people are continually obsessed about for right now it's becoming more and more.

And again, like, yes, you can say it's not rooted in science and whatever, but there is something magical about a story that makes people sort of light up.

And that moment, I think is one of the most important moments in someone's day or in a life is that moment of just pure bliss.

And I think depending on, you know, there are some things where that's bad or, you know, it'll lead to something like drugs or whatever.

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But I think for the most part, if it's positive and harmless and reinforcing some good aspect about yourself, I think it's amazing.

And so when people tell, when people hit me up about the astrology thing, they're like, I like that thing every day and I am reminded about the best parts of myself and I am reminded about the parts of myself that I need to focus on and work on.

And it just makes me feel really great and it smells really good too.

At the end of the day, I think it helps and I think it's good and I don't think it matters why it works.

I just think it kind of works.

Yeah.

That resonates with me.

I have a, I have a belief around this, which is that everything that I believe to be true is just a story.

I don't actually know what's true and what's not.

And the question is, if everything is essentially a story, right?

We create these shortcuts in our brain that tells us this is this.

When in actuality, you may not be seeing half of what's there, you may not know the root of it.

Very little in our life, we truly, we know the truth of, but we create these stories and then they, they live with us.

And so the question then is, does the story serve me?

There are some stories that don't serve you.

They actually like detract you.

It's a story you tell about yourself that why you can't do this or why you're bad at this or why, blah, blah, blah.

Why this other thing is really bad for you in your life.

And then there's other stories that serve you.

And I think that like, I'm not a religious guy, but I think religion is one of the most powerful stories that serve people.

It helps people behave in a way that makes them have a better life and they're happier.

And the statistics show that the people who have faith in their life, do have a higher quality of life and do better and have low risk of a whole bunch of really bad things that can happen to a human being.

And so the question really isn't, what is the truth?

Because that might be an impossible task, but the better question might be, if this is a story in my life, is this story serving me?

And if it is, great, let me double down on it.

If it's not serving me, let me try to figure out, is there another story that's a better frame of that thing in my life, that thing that's happening to me?

So that's how I've lived my life.

And so I guess my skepticism about the astrology could actually go back into that same bucket where if lighting this candle made me feel good every day, who cares what the reason is that it makes me feel good?

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It just makes you feel good.
It makes you feel good, which is the goal I have anyways.
And choosing to believe can be all the difference.
This is really just branding.
There's this whole thing happening now, I've been looking a lot at the story of Jesus and the Bible, which is, again, just a story that has not gone away.
And what is that?
What is the mechanics in that story?
Why when they tell you to do this, this, and this, and look up to the heavens and pray?
What is praying?
Praying is literally forcing you to tell yourself a narrative of what you want.
I have a super religious friend that has been making us pray when I eat with him.
And I started giggling at it.
And then he just started saying these things.
And I was like, well, shit, what would I actually say?
What would I ask myself for?
What would I ask the heavens for?
I didn't even know how to put it into words.
And then when I started to put it into words, all of my things in that day started leading closer to getting the thing that I asked for.
And so, again, is that some magical man in the sky granting me a thing?
Or is that me just basically tricking myself into some sort of positive reinforcing to get the thing closer?
It doesn't matter.
It doesn't matter.
Have you ever seen Life of Pi?
I haven't.
But I know roughly the story.
It's so good.
I saw this a while ago, and I didn't really understand it.
But at the end of the movie, he tells the whole story about how there are these animals on the thing, and he killed them all and had to eat them and whatever.
And the scientist that is interviewing him is like, well, you know, there's all this evidence that it wasn't animals and that it was people, and you killed these people and you ate them.
Which one was it?
And he was like, well, which one do you like better?
And the guy was like, I like the animals one.
And he was like, yeah, same.
Did you learn anything different?
Would anything change if it was people?
And he was like, no, not really.
It's kind of the same message.

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And he was like, exactly.

So like, whether or not this is a scientific story or if it's a religious story, they're both probably going to lead you to a similar place.

And I was like, I mean, you hear a scientist, you hear like Neil deGrasse Tyson or some shit talk.

He is preaching.

Yeah.

That is a narrative preach.

He has no clue.

There is some scientific evidence around the experience, but he's talking about this and that.

And then an article will come out next week that they debunk it and it's like, oh, shit.

That was a narrative around science that just completely got disproven.

So what is so scientific about it?

Like string theory.

I was looking at string theory shit.

It was like, oh, there are these different narratives that make sense, but they don't really make sense.

And other, I was like, you're just talking about stories.

Don't call this string theory.

This isn't scientific.

There is nothing that back.

It's string story, string story, string story.

So I don't know.

I don't know.

Do it makes you feel good.

Yes.

There's a, on the self reinforcement, I'm a big Tony Robbins guy and a lot of people have all different types of opinions about him.

But the one thing he said that that was actually stood out to be true.

He goes, you ever notice if you go car shopping, you know, which I recently was doing because we, you know, having a baby, we wanted to get, go from a sports car to a SUV and so get a family car.

And you ever notice when you go car shopping and you, let's say you're looking for BMWs, you know, for the next week when you're driving around, you'll be seeing BMWs everywhere.

You'll be like, oh man, look, that's the model.

Oh, there's another one.

Oh, there's another one.

It's not that BMWs started popping up everywhere.

They've been there the whole time.

You're just now looking for them and your brain is filtering because there's so much going on.

Our brain has a mechanism in it to filter out everything it thinks is unnecessary.

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And so once you start saying, now BMWs are necessary for me to learn, learn about, think about, consider, your brain starts letting those in.

So similar principle applies where I have this app that basically at the end of the day just asks, you know, what are you grateful for today?

Yeah.

And this habit of basically writing down three things that have three moments of the day that I'm grateful for.

The first day I tried it, I was like, okay, great.

I want to be more grateful.

I want to have a gratitude practice.

Let's do this.

And I sat down and I couldn't remember anything from the day.

I couldn't remember what I had for lunch.

Didn't remember any grateful moments.

And so I kind of struggled the first day.

Yeah.

Second day, similarly embarrassing.

By the third day, during the day, I was like, ah, that's going to be one of my ones tonight.

I'm going to have my three tonight.

So my brain started like logging things I'm grateful for, and therefore I started being grateful for more things.

And it was like this reinforcing thing for me.

That's what I've experienced.

I think that can apply to many more things in my life.

I want to use that.

I mean, what you're doing is basically that is prayer, basically.

That is like ending your days with some prayer.

What is the prayer you say, what you're grateful for?

You ask what you need and you thank God.

It's like people have been doing that forever for a reason.

I don't think people are that different and I don't think much changes.

And so like, again, like you just rebranded the story of prayer by saying it was an app.

It's like, okay, call it whatever you want, do it however you want.

But like those like core mechanics of how people work, I don't think change that much.

And I think that a lot of people are really skittish around accepting that right now for some reason.

But I think as the more people are honest with themselves and open about certain things and maybe not being certain about other things and being open that there might be a new possibility that they haven't just emotionally clung to, I mean, maybe that will kind of help as much as the way to blanket to sort of de-stress the world.

And so there ends the spirituality portion of the podcast.

We will finish up with the money round, which is very short questions that are sort of like rapid fire.

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It comes to mind, if you can't think of one, feel free to either throw out some BS or just pass it.

Either way is fine.

So the first question is, what is the sort of best under \$200 purchase of a product that improved your quality of life like the products you've made, but not something you've made to disqualify your own product?

I'm going to say every once in a while a Coca-Cola.

It makes me so happy and I get so pumped and I think about it and I'm like, God, they did everything right.

It's perfect.

It's magic.

I don't drink them every day.

I don't drink them every week, but every once in a while, a can of Coca-Cola pumps me up.

Best ROI out there.

I have to have like probably my first Coke in like five years.

I haven't had it today after this conversation.

My mouth is like salivating from the conversation.

All right.

So next one is when you made your first million bucks, what was the sort of, what was the feeling like and did you, what was that day like when you realized that you're sort of, you financially you've made it to an extent like you won't be back on the couch anymore or that sort of thing?

Like what was the feeling like when you hit financial freedom?

It was not that sick at all.

I did not feel great.

I used to work for this one guy that told me he kind of had a mental breakdown the first time he made money and I was like, I don't believe you.

You're such an idiot.

Like shut up.

Like be grateful.

Right.

Give me the money.

If you're going to act like that.

Okay.

Sick.

And then it happened.

And then I was like, oh shit.

He was right.

This is, it's the wrong framework.

I don't really believe that, and again, like, you know, you kind of have to get it to realize that it's wrong.

I like that Jim Carrey line where he's like, I wish everyone would be famous and rich so that they realize that's not the answer.

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That's not what they want.

Yeah.

And the most valuable thing from all of this shit was having absolutely zero money, like less than zero money and figuring out how to survive off of that.

And I've, you know, zero has never felt better and it's the most freeing thing.

And now money is just this thing that exists that's sort of a scorecard, but I literally don't spend money on anything.

It does not change my lifestyle.

It doesn't change my thought process.

It doesn't change how I build the companies.

It doesn't change how I think about product.

All of that shit, the real, real, real, real, real magic is kind of free.

But then the Chanel line of the second best things cost a lot of money.

Yeah.

So yeah, I didn't feel that great, but again, like, I wasn't really why I was doing it.

It was never to get a million bucks.

It was just to make something work and, oh, okay, cool.

Now money came along with it, great, but.

And so what's something you said, I don't spend a bunch of money and I think that's pretty common amongst most people that are in this room sitting in that chair you're sitting in right now.

But I think everybody has something that they almost don't realize that they spend freely on now.

It's like, oh, like, like I had the founder of native deodorant on last week and he said, I never think about the prices on the menu anymore.

I love to eat great food and I just order whatever I want.

If my mom is there, she's like, oh, no, we don't, don't get that.

And he's like, no, we're going to get the drink and they advertise or like, it's not a lot of money, but he just feels he's price insensitive on that now.

Is there anything you're now price insensitive about that you like?

Yeah.

All of those things that caused me crazy stress of just like, oh, like late fees, change fees, like stuff on the menu, you know, the founder's fun guys.

The reason why I'm out here is that I'm going to Montana with them tomorrow and I didn't pack anything.

And I'm going to buy shoes out there because it's easier and that and like that is incredible.

That's kind of the only thing I recently got into watches, which is the thing that I've always told myself forever that would be the only thing that I spend a lot of money on.

And that under Raidley has brought me a lot of happiness.

Yeah.

Have you been to the interval down there?

I have not.

Oh, the interval down in Fort Mason is like this bar that's all about like time.

[Transcript] My First Million / #13 - He Made Millions From... Blankets, Bean Bags & Candles?

It's the coolest place ever you got to go.

Yeah, just like, you know, that, that zero to \$50 purchase that used to make me throw up.

I don't care about anymore.

And that is by far the best thing possible.

You don't need that much money to live like that.

Great.

And so to wrap up, a lot of people like to reach out after the episodes and be like, wow, that was inspiring.

I loved your story.

Can you help me with this?

Blah, blah, blah.

People reach out for all different kinds of reasons.

Sometimes compliments, sometimes requests that both come hand in hand.

Do you want to be contacted?

How should people follow you or contact you?

Media, whatever, shout it out so that people can kind of get more, more John, if they want more John.

Totally, totally.

So yeah, definitely reach out, like to hear people's stories, like to be helpful.

I'm hiring, always hiring, always looking for partners.

I have a bunch of ideas that I'm about to launch that are going to be their own companies. So if anyone's out there interested and sort of joining, always happy to chat or help them on their own.

I would probably say Instagram is the best slide into those DMs.

I would say my Instagram is at John underscore fearantino.

That's probably the best way to contact me.

Awesome.

Brother, thank you for doing this.

I appreciate the flexibility on the timing.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I told you, I was like, dude, do you have a baby?

That's so sick.

I'm jealous, man.

That's next.

That's the next chapter.

The greatest product I've ever seen.

Of all time.

That's the answer.

That is it.

I'm speaking of, I got to go back.

I left my wife for one hour.

That's one hour too many.

[Transcript] My First Million / #13 - He Made Millions From... Blankets, Bean Bags & Candles?

So I got to get out of here.
But this is great.
Bye man.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
Okay.
Sorry, Ollie.
Bye bye.
You see.
Man, what a quality of chicken.
That song.
That's so funny.
I mean it.
Don't watch For Amendment.
Go on The N acoustics.
Then where is it?
I'm on policemen transplant.
I had it.