

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Building beautiful products with Stripe's Head of Design | Katie Dill (Stripe, Airbnb, Lyft)

the use of the word beauty in books that have been digitized by Google has decreased pretty dramatically.

And it's aligned with this idea of functionality is king, functionality is what matters.

And as if people think about functionality and beauty as two opposite things, like no, they're not two opposite things.

Functionality is important, and actually beauty enhances functionality

because it does make things easier to use, more approachable, more compelling to use.

And the other piece of it that is not talked about in business as often is just the importance of how people feel, things that are more beautiful, increased trust.

And you see that we've put painstaking detail into this, and we care about the details of how something works.

And that gives you assurance that we care about other details that you can't see too.

Today, my guest is Katie Dill.

Katie is head of design at Stripe,

where she oversees product design, brand and marketing creative, web presence, user research, content strategy and design ops.

Katie was previously head of design at Lyft and head of experience design at Airbnb.

She's built and led design teams at three different hyper growth companies,

seeing the team scale at least 10x, and two of which Airbnb and Stripe are some of the biggest and fastest growing companies in the world and also the best design products.

In her conversation, Katie shares stories of trials and tribulations of leading large design teams, processes she's put in place for operationalizing quality, how she thinks about quality and beauty very practically, how design can directly lead to growth, and examples of this that led to big lift and conversion at Stripe.

Plus a math formula she uses to increase team performance, how she suggests organizing your design and product teams, what to look for in design hires, and so much more.

I was really lucky to get to work with Katie while at Airbnb and I am so excited to have her on this podcast.

With that, I bring you Katie Dill after a short word from our sponsors.

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Katie, thank you so much for being here. Welcome to the podcast.

Thanks for having me. Good to be here.

It's absolutely my pleasure.

So as we were preparing for this podcast, you hinted at a story that you had from your time at Airbnb, where the design team staged an intervention with you, which I had no idea about because I was there during this time and did not know this was happening.

I am so curious to hear the story. Can you share what happened?

Uh-huh. Starting with the easy questions I've seen.

Yeah. No, I'm happy to talk about it because, frankly,

it was the biggest learning experience of my leadership career, or at least that happened in one moment.

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And it happened in my early days at Airbnb.
So I was hired to take on the experience design organization,
that's basically the product design team, which was 10 people at the time.
And so they had been reporting directly to one of the founders,
and they were going to start reporting to me.
And during my interview process, I learned a lot about what was working
and what wasn't working and some of the trials and tribulations
with the design organization and its collaboration with others.
So it seemed like there was room for improvement
in how engineering and product management and design all worked together.
And there was also really low engagement scores in the design team.
And so I came in ready to go and excited to try to help make some change
based on all the things that I had learned from various leaders
and people across the company.
And I came in swinging, ready to go.
And then about a month into my time there,
I got a meeting on my calendar Thursday, 8.30 a.m.,
it was an hour and a half, with half of the design teams,
that was five people, and our HR partner.
I don't know, that's never a good sign.
Yeah.
And I remember this so vividly and remember walking into the office
and all the rooms in Airbnb's office are very unique spaces
that look like Airbnbs.
But of course, this was the one room with all white walls
and just like a gray, flat rectangle table.
And I walked into the room and there were five of them seated around the table
and they had a pack of papers in front of them.
And they went on taking turns, quietly reading from the papers,
all the things that they saw that I was doing wrong
and all the things that they didn't like about me.
And it was a really hard moment there.
I went through all the usual kind of stages of grief
when one hears feedback, which is this immediate want to respond
to be like, oh, well, there was a good reason for that.
And that's not how it actually was.
And this is why I did that.
But luckily, I had the sense to just listen and not respond in that way.
I mean, clearly what they were telling me
is that that was one of the things that was missing.
And so I heard them out and took it all in.
And regardless of each individual saying what was very clear
was the missing piece, the theme that was across all of that

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is that I hadn't earned their trust.

So whether, how right or how wrong what I was doing was, is like the key piece is that I wasn't bringing the team along with me.

They had no idea that they could trust in what I was trying to build and what I was trying to shape and that I cared about them and that I had their best interest and shared goals at heart.

And that was absolutely my fault.

And in retrospect, as hard as that was, I'm very grateful and very amazed that they could come together and share that with me.

It can be hard to bring feedback forward like that.

And so it was an extremely valuable learning experience.

And I took from that to then immediately shift how I was operating.

And really a key part in building trust was to listen, to hear out what the individuals and the team were setting out to do, what they cared about, what motivated them.

And so I started to make pretty fast change and still moving in the direction that was necessary for the org to make a really large impact in how we were operating, but bringing folks along with me.

You can inflict change on people, but if you want to do it with them, you really trust is the key element there.

And then a couple months later, we had the best engagement scores in the company. So it did objectively improve the situation.

And since then, taking that on into next steps and other companies that I've joined and just think about instead of coming and swinging, come in listening so that you can really set out to make change that actually has true positive impact on the folks around you and that you bring along with you.

Wow. I was there during this.

I did not know this was happening.

Is this the time when all the designers were all always in one room together in there?

Is that that period?

Before I got there, I think there was a little of design is just going to sit with design and not necessarily work in close proximity with engineers and product managers, etc.

And one of the things that I believe as a necessary part of building a high functioning organization is that one, building together is important.

So having engineers and product managers and designers be together, have shared goals and align on that and be able to just look over each other's shoulder and talk about things is important.

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So sitting together is important.

However, that fair thing that you're talking about actually was something that I was very devoted to, which is bringing design together at key moments multiple times throughout the week to also build a community in design.

You know, like Joe Botte at Airbnb once said, it's like, well, what t-shirt do you wear?

Like, what team are you on?

And I was like, you wear two t-shirts.

You have two t-shirts, you have the design t-shirt and you have the marketplace t-shirt or whatever cross-disciplinary team that you work on, because both are really important communities to build for slightly different reasons.

So yeah, there was a good spot for that.

Zoom me out a little bit.

I think the elephant in the room a lot of times with design is this idea that I'd say most PM's, most founders, intellectually understand the value of design, understand the value of high quality.

But day to day, it's often not actually prioritized versus new features, new product launches, and partly because the ROI is just really unclear.

If we spent another month making this more awesome and making this even more amazing design-wise, experience-wise, what is that going to get us?

Clearly at Airbnb, design was highly prioritized at Stripe.

From an outsider's perspective, it clearly is.

I'm just curious what you've learned about how to make the case for the ROI of design and just how Stripe and Airbnb and Lyft have done that.

It's a great question.

And I think this is an age-old question that I don't know if we'll ever go away.

And probably because the quality bar keeps evolving and keeps rising.

But I think first to level set before we dive into that, I would say that there are levels of quality.

There is the like, does the thing work?

Does it provide some sort of value proposition that executes on its job?

That's baseline quality.

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Next, is it like, does it do it exceedingly well?
Is it like error-free?
Actually, maybe that's not even exceedingly well,
but just error-free and it actually works
in a well-rounded way.
And then beyond that, like level three,
level four, level five, does it exceed expectations?
And it does something that you weren't even
in seeking for as a user.
And I do think the levels of quality
should be based on user expectations.
I don't believe that there are disciplines
that just don't care about quality.
I think it's more about that prioritization
and kind of like what you talked about is just like,
is it really worth getting something
to that exceedingly well state?
Or is it, what about just like another feature?
And getting that being seduced by the chase
of another feature versus actually taking your features
to a level of being great, that is hard.
And I get it when you look at your user base
and they're all shouting from the rooftops
for this additional feature that of course
you're going to want to prioritize that
over something they've never asked for.
And then the other thing would be you end up
with like you've got three things that you could possibly do
to make perhaps the next stage in your product development.
Two of them you know you can measure
and they're going to line up to business goals
and one of them you can't.
Of course that's going to be enchanting
to want to go after the things that you can actually measure
and you know that they're going to have that impact.
But the companies that know that quality is non-negotiable.
It is a long-term necessary aspect of what they build.
Don't play that numbers game or that they,
what they do is they recognize that it is absolutely
functionality but the quality of those features
that is actually going to get great usability,
desirability in their product.
And actually I think it's kind of like an analogy for

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going to the gym or working out.

Like I don't know about you but literally every time

I think to do this there's like a fight in my head

of like do I really need to work out today?

You know is this one day you know going to give me six pack abs?

Like of course not.

So like why go?

Why not just like skip it today?

But of course like then at some point hopefully I realize

that it's like well if I skip it today

what's to stop me from skipping it another day.

And really in the belief of that these things can you know

it really does add up to a better outcome in the end

and so you know a longer healthier life.

And so hopefully I get myself together and go to the gym.

And I do think some of the best companies in the world

and the planet thinks that way.

And I recognize that

or customers don't always ask for it.

I mean you might see it in you know support cases for example.

Like clearly they don't know how to use this next step

and that is probably a quality issue.

And that you know they might be asking for

in a more improved features.

But some of the levels of quality that you know the level two

and three and four you know you might not get direct asked for.

But I guess I'll you know give you another analogy.

If you don't have competition that's fine right.

Like if you think about the first car I'm sure that wheel

was really hard to turn.

And I'm sure that seat was not comfortable.

And you know you could have any color you want

as long as it's black right.

But like there was no competition.

The competition was a horse so you know no big deal.

For you know cars today.

It's like the stitching.

The you know the choice of the leather.

The sound of the door.

Like these distinguish you know what okay car

to a high end special car with higher value.

And this is very much by understanding

that how the details matter

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and how execution of quality will take it to the next level.
And you know lastly I'll just say that like I know there's this saying of like its growth versus quality. But like quality is growth.
And if you think about how you can make your product easier to use and more understandable.
You know that will of course drive people to use it and use more of it.
And take you know have a better experience with it that they'll you know want to talk about with others.
You know in fact at Stripe our growth team I would say is like pretty much maniacally focused on building better experiences because we've seen it tied directly to our business metrics.
We have things that we've improved on in you know our onboarding flow for example to make it easier to understand the products. Understand how they work for your different use cases. Such that then we have seen activations increase because we've made these quality improvements that are just directly tied to growth.
You know one of the biggest examples that I've seen of business impact through quality is actually in the checkout experience.
So we've done research on the checkout experience in some of the top sites e-commerce sites. And we found that 99% of the top e-commerce sites have errors in their checkout flow that actually hinder it more impactful, more you know seamless quicker checkout and therefore higher conversion with their customers.
And these small things really like their quality issues they're just that if you really understand what a consumer is trying to get out of the experience then you can make it better.
And so we have been maniacally focused on that over many years trying to make the checkout experience so much better for businesses and their consumers.
So by improving the quality of the checkout experience through details small and large we have seen a 10.5% increase in businesses revenue from that you know an older form of checkout to a newer form of checkout.

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And those little details matter
to have such a material impact on one's revenue.
You mentioned this before we start recording
but you guys power the checkout flow for some very big sites.
Can you mention a few of these
because they'll give people a sense of like holy moly.
Yeah, Stripe is used by millions of businesses globally
small and large from early stage startups
to SMB's larger organizations and enterprises
like Amazon and Hertz Shopify Spotify X
which I believe you use.
And you know the work that we do it ranges
we have checkout flows.
So when someone's paying online or in person
or we also provide a suite of financial automation tools
so that you can run your subscriptions business
and recognize your revenue and receive tax
essentially you know manage the complexity
of the financial space through powerful tools
that hope to make your job easier
so you don't have to sweat the details
of how these things work.
I just want to follow this thread a little bit
you talked about these opportunities
to improve the checkout flow through a design lens
you could also think of it from like
like as a product manager I'd be like
oh wow let's just find all the things
that people get stuck on and fix them.
How is it that you see that
from the quality design perspective
versus like oh there's just let's just move this metric
and here's all the things that are stopping people.
What would you say is the designer's lens on that
if there's anything there?
I honestly a pet peeve of mine is this way of talking
about things as there's business goals
and there's design goals because you know
I think maybe the first conversation
you know one should have is that you know
what are we trying to build towards?
And I would think that folks that want to create
you know really impactful products

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they want to create quality products
and that they want to create things that
actually serve their customers
in a you know positive and beneficial way
because they know that will build
a stronger business in the long run.
So yes there may be you know slight prioritization
details different through the process
where you know a designer might be thinking
you know more about the emotional experience
and how somebody feels
because that's you know oftentimes how they're wired
and that is an important lens to bring on it
whereas you know somebody else might just be like
well you know just make the button bigger
and they'll click it more often
and you know that's what the outcome that we seek.
So this is again why I was talking about
how important it is to have multi-disciplinary
teams that work closely together
because sometimes we are you know
the checks and balances in the conversation
but I do think if we can align on
what are we trying to build?
Are we trying to build something great?
Then you know we can you know recognize the fact
that like it isn't just that you know
utility is an incredible important part of that
but so is usability and so is desirability
because these things together
make something truly great
and so you know beauty is an important part of that
because it does make things more useful
it does make things more accessible
and that with these things kind of coming together
you can you know build towards something better.
I think that you know beauty on its own
or just like you know like craft on its own
without utility I mean that's like
I don't know that's like blu-ray or or path right?
Like that does not lead to a high quality product
so it is like the combination of these things
and so it's like stepping towards that

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but if you really want your you know product
those features to be utilized for all that they're worth
and like to actually you know gain such you know
esteem and respect and reuse
taking it to that next level
and thinking about you know how do I make this
actually you know an enjoyable use
and that it really feels like it's you know
meant for me and it maps to my mental model
that craft and that quality of you know
the execution of those details is going to be paramount.
You mentioned this word beauty
and I wanted to follow on this a little bit of just
this is a big question but just like
what is great design?
What is beauty?
Is there like a objective definition
where if designers like this is great design
is there just like yes that is true
or is it just an opinion?
How do you think about what is great design?
What is beauty Katie Dill?
I love that we're talking about this
because I feel like there's probably some people
listening that are like squirming in their seats of like
you know like beauty like we're talking about business here
and I mean that's which is great
and the actually there's a fun fact
it's Stefan Sagmeister and Jessica Walsh
have a book called Beauty
and I would highly recommend it
very very worth the read
but one of the first things they talk about in the book
is that from the 1800s to the 2000s
the use of the word beauty
in books that have been digitized by Google
has decreased like pretty dramatically
and it's aligned with this idea of like
well functionality is king
functionality is what matters
and as if people think about functionality
and beauty is like two opposite things
but what the whole book talks about is that like

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no they're not two opposite things
you know functionality is important
and actually beauty enhances functionality
because it does make things easier to use
more approachable more compelling to use
and there is actually some objectivity
to whether or not beauty enhances things
but if you ask you know a wide audience
you know what color do they like more
or what you know version of things
do they like more like they tend to say the same thing
because there is this like shared understanding
and you know the other piece of it that
yes I can imagine is not talked about in business
as often is just the importance of how people feel
and you know a good example of how something looks
and how something is structured
and how that can translate to that
also from the the book beauty
they mentioned that they studied the tweets
that came from people that were traveling
through Penn Station versus Grand Central
and if you've been to those places
I'm sure you know where I'm going with this
which is just like that the people tweeting
from Penn Station it was just like
more negative than the people that were tweeting
from Grand Central Station
that tended to be much more positive and optimistic
and so you know the things that you create
have this impact and if you're thinking about
like I want people to enjoy using my product
I want them to feel you know at home in our product
of course beauty is a part of it
you know and this matters deeply to us
and I know you know as a financial infrastructure company
in the B2B space you know some may assume
that that doesn't matter as much
but it's actually a key priority for us
because number one things that are more beautiful
increase trust you see that like we've put
painstaking detail into this
and we care about the details of how something works

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and that gives you assurance that we care about other details that you can't see too then secondly it is easier to use as I've mentioned it gives better user outcomes you know what we're trying to do is we're trying to have quick businesses to make the right decisions to be more successful at what they do and by you know bringing a interface or you know our invoices or whatever it might be to be more beautiful and more easy to use and more trustworthy that will lead them to better outcomes thirdly I strongly believe beauty begets beauty and so when you know our business users or the consumers see you know the beauty and the care and the creativity that we put into the things we deliver then you know that again reassures them of you know the just like the care that we put into them and actually a perfect example of this have you seen the show The Bear I have yes great example all right and I know it's spoilers but like all I have to say is peeling mushrooms do you know what I mean yeah yeah yeah such a good example such a good example someone just mentioned that same episode recent podcast episode okay all right well it's that good it's that good and I wish I could remember which episode that was but it was seven I forget yeah that's exactly right oh nice okay all right well then lastly you know quality is a matter of pride beauty is a matter of pride if we put that in you know kind of care into our work more people want to work with us because they want to see you know their time spent and the care for their craft recognize and utilize and see that that can can be you know

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put together into something really impactful
and so you know we really put that on the pedestal
you know because we know how much it matters
to our users and how much it matters
to the people that work with us
beauty beauty is an important part of it all
amazing speaking of beauty
I think when I think of stripe and beautiful
I think of your website
and some of the specific landing pages you have
which are just incredibly nice
I'm just curious how you decide
it's time to redesign your website
and how much time and thought you put into a new website
because that feels like a
a common question founders have like
should we redo our website
and it feels like
you guys really think deeply about that
so I guess is there anything there that you can share
yeah there's definitely a couple things
we could talk about in terms of like
operationalizing quality because
I mean the gravitational pull is to mediocrity
right like you know it is it is very easy to
fall into a path of a baseline
where what is required to go to that next level
where something feels truly great is
certainly a lot of effort
and it's a concerted effort
and I will definitely say
we are a work in progress
you know we have not nailed all the things
and it is an ongoing pursuit of excellence
and so the way that we build the website
is that you know we we certainly do
you know put a lot of care into
what we're putting out into the world
and we view it as a articulation of
you know how we care about our users
and in all that we provide for them
so we take that very seriously
we try to kind of meld art and science

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so it's the creativity of the work
but it's also just like the technical
kind of power of the way that we show it
how we've actually operationalized
the way we do that
is that we have design and engineering
and our product partners
and product marketing
we're really really closely on this
and actually it's one of the few teams
where all of these things report
well not all of them
but most of those functions report into one place
so engineering and design
actually all report up into the design organization
when they work on the website
and together they like quite literally
as we were talking about earlier
you know if we were physically together
they would be standing side by side
and you know they're batting ideas back and forth
because you know the engineer on the team
you know has a great idea
for how we could go about executing on it
and the designer on the team has another idea
and had to you know push that a little further
and so that kind of rapid cycle of iteration
is really really powerful
especially when we're you know trying to move quickly
but at an extremely high standard
that's super interesting
is there anything else
that you found to be really helpful
in just operationalizing
great design craft beauty
any processes systems frameworks
yeah I would love to tell you
about something that we've actually rolled out
pretty recently
that I'm extremely excited
about the positive impact on
awesome but before I get into that
one of the things that you know

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kind of has been driving
a little bit of this process
and the way that I've been you know
thinking about how you know
we can build better things at Stripe
is actually I've been just talking to people
talking to different you know
design leaders product leaders
engineer leaders
at different organizations
and try to understand you know
how they go about it
and there are a couple of themes
that are clearly coming through
you know number one is that
quality is definitely a group effort
you know you're sunk
if you think that like you can just like
hire some incredibly talented person
and like and they'll do it
that'll be fine you know
the rest of us will do what we're doing
and they'll do it
or that it's just like one organization
that's going to look out for quality
or you know QA is going to solve it all for you
it really does need to be
you know an organizational and a group effort
and if you think about like you know
the way that you run you know
the the internal functions
is going to show up in the outside
and like how clear you all are
and how you're talking about it
and the standards that you set inside
and you're constantly reminding people of
in the way that you communicate inside
will then eventually show up outside
so take you know of course
keeping your talent bar high
and then thinking about how those things
you know really need to be cared for
you know that shared care

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across the organization is number one
number two is that you know
there needs to be some amount of vision
and alignment
so you know if you hire all the best people in the world
and you just like set them out
to like go and do their thing
what are the chances
that they're all going to end up
with something that actually aligns pretty well
right like even if they all have incredible taste
and they're very good at what they do
you know there's subjectivity
to every decision in some part
and so that they might end up
with some things that are really great
but don't fit together as a really nice whole
like the perfect example
would be building a house right
so you have like the person that works on the roof
and the person that works on the deck
and the person that does the siting
etc etc etc
and a house is arguably far less complex
than most of the technical products
that we all know
and yet they're like
is painstaking effort put into
having the plans
and having a drawing
of what the final thing is going to look like
there's a GC
there's an architect
and these people are helping to make sure
that all those pieces fit together
and we should have that same care
when we're trying to build products together
and so I think a big pair on that
is then the next piece which is editing
and you know you might call that your GC
or your architect
or somebody that kind of sees
how all these things fit together

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and then has an ability to kind of help narrow
and reduce and remove
the things that don't fit
and so like at Airbnb
you know Brian Chesky is like the editor
of all the things that you know come together
at the Economist
you know there's a chief editor
but you know other organizations
they might decentralize that approach
which is you know certainly possible
and but you know challenging
because you do need somebody to help
kind of like see these things come together
and that pairs with the next piece
which is about courage
like the ability to actually like say
you know no this isn't good enough
like to have the resolve to just be like
almost but no
which is like one of the hardest decisions
I think leaders can make
and certainly I've had to ever make
in my career too
it's just like you know a team puts like
all this care and effort into something
and then you're gonna say like
actually it's just like
unfortunately like we're just not there yet
let's try again
and that is I think you know incredibly
important part of getting there
and building that you know
kind of the fitness of what you do
and then lastly the thing that I've learned
that will lead me to the example
that you were asking about
is that in order to build quality
you really do need to understand it
also from the user perspective
which kind of gets me into you know
my fixation with journeys
because that is how a user sees it

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the user very very very rarely
just like deals with any aspect
of what you build in isolation
there has to be a moment where they learn about it
there has to be a moment where they get to know it
and then there's a moment where they
actually decide to use it
and then well something just changed
and now they need to use that product
in some other way
and so you have to understand it
from that point of view
to really understand whether or not
the quality is there
and I think that's a critical piece
of building teams that have empathy for their users
so we have been operationalizing that
you know all the things that I just mentioned
but like one of the key pieces is to
you know kind of bring that approach
to understanding the quality of the product
and so our goal was to set out
to try to solve the fact that
products can be shipped
and they could be at their highest gain
when you ship them
like they go through all the processes
internally
to be you know a high quality thing
and then it gets out into the world
and then over time the quality regresses
and some of the reasons for that
is that you know other things are being shipped
and it's kind of like again
back to an analogy of a house
imagine you have one room
where you redo the molding
and you know you paint the little aspects
and you've put like new plates on the lights
now all of a sudden that room is great
but it makes everything else look worse
and the whole composite is worse
and so that is you know

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something that can happen to products
is actually they you know kind of get worse over time
and then you organize a company oftentimes
and you know parts to be able to focus
on their key business areas
that's a very good thing
because they get focused
and they know what they're you know
building towards
and they get expertise
and they're you know laser focused on that
and so that ideally they move faster
but what also happens
is that they get so focused on that
they forget about that piece of the journey
and how it all fits together
and not recognizing that you know
part of their product experience
is intimately tied to another
so what we did was we set out to
number one increase the you know
kind of awareness and accountability
of leaders to own their journeys
and so what we have established are
you know we started with 15
of our most important user journeys
15 is you know
somewhat of an arbitrary number
it's a number that we can kind of
keep track of
but also you know
has pretty good breadth
but it's certainly not comprehensive
of all the most important things
but 15 of our you know
critical user journeys
the things that we know matter
so deeply to our users
and we must get right
at the highest level of quality possible
and so those 15 things
then each have
engineering product and design leaders

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that are responsible
for the quality of those products
and they review these journeys
what we call walk the store
where they review them
as if they're in a walk in the floor
of their store
on a regular attendance
and they friction log
what they experience
which I know David Singleton
talked about on your podcast
and they will write
you know what they have seen
what's working
what's not working
and they're
they're viewing this from
you know they're trying to put
themselves in the shoes of their user
this is of course
doesn't replace user research
but it you know
kind of substitutes it
and it adds to that
and so they go through the experience
and noting you know
what's working
and what's not working
and very critically
it's a journey
so a lot of times
you know it starts from
internet search
it starts on you know
Google trying to understand something
goes to the website
you know they end up on docs
they end up in the dashboard
and they're seeing it
as a user might
and with that they'll be
they're able to find

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you know the entailments of
you know the experience
that may or may not be working
and they drop that down
they file bugs
they reach out to the teams
that may own the different
parts of this experience
and then they score it
and then on a
you know again a regular key
and so we come together
in almost like a calibration
where we meet
and we talk about the score
of their work
and it kind of relates
to performance reviews
right like
you know performance reviews
managers are assessing
an individual's performance
which is hard right
like it's like there's some subjectivity to it
just like understanding quality can be
but what we do as managers
is we calibrate
we come together
and we talk about like
okay how well is this
you know
is our interpretation
of our
ladder's document
and you know how well
does that performance align
and are we doing it's
you know consistently
across the rest of the organization
and so we do something very similar
we calibrate
you know these scores
because what we're really trying to do

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is not just you know the
15 essential journeys
and the owners of those
we want to actually like
up level
and bring more
you know shared understanding
of our quality bar
across the company
and so these moments of calibration
kind of start that
and then having leaders do this
you know kind of like
creates this like
you know number one
it like cascades
this idea
of the importance of owning your journey
and then also
has upstream impact
because when people see
the state of products
in the wild
as a user would
they learn a lot about
you know what are
you know some of the bigger opportunities
that we can make
to make the product better
what are some of the things
that maybe want to change in our process
to make sure that we have
you know even better things
coming into the wild
and you know one of the
best parts of this
is since then
we've learned that
you know folks
you know have seen that like
oh my goodness
our SEO
for this particular product

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you know or
you know the way we're articulating it
doesn't align to actually
how we want people to understand it
later on in the journey
so if we improve this over here
we're going to improve outcomes later on
and so they're seeing that
and you know they're
now you know like
able to make that happen
even you know faster
to make some of the changes there
and then my you know real favorite part
is that we're hearing from folks
that maybe at first
didn't see this as as necessary
that you know maybe in different functions
that are you know just like
oh you know I was
so very focused on executing
you know the technical ability
of what I do
on this thing
but I you know hadn't seen it
from this lens before
and now they're like
actually like converts of like
yes this isn't a really important part of it
and that goes back to the point of like
it's a group effort
like you don't want just one function
looking out for the quality of the product
so having engineers and product managers
and people of different disciplines
kind of walking the store
seeing the experience
feeling it firsthand
I think will lead to better care
in you know all of the details
that will align to
better craft in the end
oh man what an awesome process

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I have a million questions
I want to ask to
better understand how you operationalize this
I'll try to ask just a few
but one thing that stood out
about this process is
I think people
kind of don't trust their own judgment
when they're
looking at their own product
they kind of
especially product managers
almost have to like
feel like they have to rely and use research
or data to like
know a thing
versus like
I just see this
and it feels bad to me
and I think
I've learned over time more and more
you should really trust that
because you're
you're spending your energy
trying to use this thing
you're not that different from a potential user
so just
I love that this actually
relies on your personal judgment
trying to use a thing
which I think people undervalue
yeah
a couple just very tactical questions
how often roughly does this happen
is it like once a quarter
yeah and
yeah to your first point 100%
they're all just forms of input
like I'm definitely not saying
like do this instead of user research
do this instead of data
it's like
you know these things in additional sense

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and I do think what's so powerful
about doing it firsthand
is that
although I am like
the biggest supporter of user research
even hearing somebody talk
about an experience
while that is like
really really powerful
feeling the pain firsthand
is just like this next level
of visceral understanding of like
oh this could be better
and your users
you know they might not always say
what's missing
or what's wrong
or maybe they don't
you know they don't know
that certain aspects of it could be better
so
yeah having your
you know
point of view on that
in addition to the user research
and what you've heard from them directly
is really really important
but you asked about how often
we have
you know as I've mentioned
we are you know
constantly looking at our processes
and trying to figure out
how we can
you know make them better and better
you know as an organization
you know as we've grown
you know things
you know need to adjust
we today are doing it quarterly
and the quarterly aspect of like
walking the stores
by no means meant to be like

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that's the only time people do it
but that is the time where
you know we're looking for like
update your scorecard
and you know share the information
in a dashboard
where
you know everybody can see
and that is
feeling right now
to be the right cadence
because
that's enough time
that you know there can be
you know material differences
made
and so you can see
and kind of like the scores evolve
over time
but also frequently enough
that
you know you're not missing that
perhaps
you know there's been a setback since
but of course my real hope
is that is happening
you know they're happening
weekly
just perhaps in different parts of the organization
I want to ask a couple more questions
so that folks can try this at home
I was just thinking like
this podcast is the opposite of
don't try this at home
it's like here
do you try this at home
try it at home
yeah
so I want to try to
give people
a few more answers to questions
when they're probably going to try to
do this

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themselves
so who's in these meetings
like do you join these walkthroughs
does like David join
what do you suggest there
yeah
so what for
what we're doing for each team
is they do them
themselves together
so
bare minimum it should be the engineer
product manager
and designer
doing it together
and the reason why we like to see
it happen together
is again
as we've talked about before
is that like people bring
a different perspective
to something
and so let's say
you know somebody in the room
might be like
oh my goodness
you know that
like
that the load time
didn't feel really good there
and like
oh whoa that like
the way we're stating this
is not consistent per page
and ah
that's not on our design system
so
you know
it is really powerful to have folks
like come together and do it
and in fact
David Singleton
who you mentioned

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he and I
do these things very regularly too
like this is like
kind of outside
the essential journeys program
but like he and I
walk the store
and we'll just pick random flows
and go through it together
and you know
I can't code
but he can
and so he'll like
he'll do the code part
and I'll be
you know sitting there being
what
you know do they really do that
like you know
can we
you know
how can we make that better for them
and so it's
I really love the multi-disciplinary
approach
but then when we do the calibration
after the team has done
these walkthroughs
and they've kind of gotten their own
perspective
and they you know
fill out the scorecard
based on our rubric for quality
we will come together
in what we call PQR
product quality review
and they will take us through
what they have
you know
experienced
and
then they'll talk about
like and so this is why

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we've scored this
a yellow
or a yellow green
and
and then we might have a
you know
conversation about that
it's like
well actually
like that felt
a little worse than
you know
you've described it
and actually
like I think that
you know
we probably need to
put more urgency
on solving that
or in some cases
it's like
actually like
that was pretty great
you know
if you think about
you know
what we're
we're trying to
you know
help somebody achieve
at this moment
like that actually is
is really
you know
hitting the mark
and so we will
debate that there
and in those meetings
you'll have
yes myself
David Singleton
um
Will Gabrik

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who you know
leads product and business
and then various leaders
from the organization
that might be relevant
to that area
we are trying to give people
kind of like
insight to what's
happening across
so
again
it's a multi-disciplinary room
trying to keep it
you know
not too
too large
because obviously
it can be
hard to have discussion
but it is
very valuable
to make sure again
that we have
you know
the perspective of
product marketing
and the perspective of
engineering
and expected
product in the room
as we discuss
what our quality bar is
awesome
okay
that makes a lot of sense
in terms of scoring
are you scoring
individual steps
of these journeys
or is it
yellow
for like segments

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what are you scoring
the way the rubric works
is so that
and we
we have a template
for the friction log
so
people fill out a friction log
and it'll be like
screenshots
and then what they experienced
and then there
is a
you know
kind of a tool
the tag
for each
kind of moment
it's like
oh
that was a nice touch
or
oh
that is
you know
not great
we should consider a fix
or
different levels
of kind of severity
of like
oh my gosh
p0 bug
we need to fix this right now
so they'll
they'll tag
for different moments
in the journey
and then
there is a
summary score
at the end
which is

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based on a rubric
that we have
that talks about
you know
the importance of quality
from the point of view
of usability
utility
desirability
and you know
actually going to that next level
of surprisingly great
and then we'll ask them
to score on a whole
what they felt of these things
and then that
adds up to a summary score
which we have
also talked about
the different ways of scoring
you know
is it a number based system
is it a letter based system
like A9SB
yeah
we have so far
we have landed on
color system
because
honestly
I think people can get a little
tied around the axle
on how you're measuring it
and like to your point
and like
especially in subjective things
and it's just like
oh you know
it's like
well is it really
at six
or is it a seven
and you know

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we didn't want people to get
a little too
too worried
about
you know
how does
like it's not meant to be
an objective
quality
quantitative score
it is qualitative
it is judgment
we hire people
for judgment
you know
so we want
you know
them to bring that
to the conversation
and so
that's
you know
how we chose the score
because we felt
that would actually
lead to
you know
quicker
but like
straightforward
opinions and decisions
at a lot of companies
you have these reviews
and the founders
like share all this
like oh this is broken
this is busted
and as a product team
you're like god damn
we have these goals
we got to hit
we have this roadmap
and now we're going to get

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a hundred things
that the founders like
got to fix this
I'm curious just how you
and tell teams
to take this stuff
and prioritize it
amongst all the other things
they're going to do
is it just up to them
is there like
need to fix this
anything you can share there
but just like
had actually operationalized
taking this feedback
and doing something with it
yes
yeah I've seen some
organizations
talk about
you know
when they're doing
planning
you know
you do your
OKRs
for quarterly
or half year
or year or whatever
recommendations of like
10% of your time
should be spent
on you know
fixing things
and 20%
on growing things
and the rest
on you know
keeping the lights on
whatever it might be
so yes
I've seen different companies

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you know
build a recommendation
based on certain percentages
of how they think
teams should be spending
their time
and we at Stripe
think that
you know
first and foremost
is that
you know
we have to
make sure that folks
are number one
you know
hired
with that fact
that they have
great judgment
and care
for what they build
and they take pride in it
like you know
that's like number one
and then
you know
you can give a lot of trust
to people
based on that
that kind of
commitment
to building great things
that they will use that
in their decision making
and then of course
it needs to be very clearly
advocated for
at the highest levels
of the company
and with that
I think that kind of like
fuels

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people's thinking
as they're building
their plans
but there is iteration
in the plans
and we do have
multi
multi-disciplinary
people
you know
making
the plans together
so it's like
oh okay
are we advancing
these features
are we
are we going to be
building growth
and you know
is that
you know
improving the quality
as well
and so I think
that's how we kind of
together get to it
but we don't have
there's no formula
that we ask people to
so basically
what I'm hearing is
it's the cultural
kind of just everyone
people are hired
with this expectation
and we are going to
focus on quality
and we'll prioritize
things
even though
they may not
move metrics

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because we know
that this will
generally improve
and grow the business
part of it though
is
showing how it moves
metrics
because I think
that is
a dangerous
belief
that is
absolutely out there
as we
we talked about earlier
but that
actual quality
improvements
do increase growth
they do improve
the bottom line
right that like
you know
for example
we you know saw
that folks were
reaching out to support
because
they didn't know
the state
of how
you know
one of their
invoices
was performing
and what we
when we dig in
we realized
just like
well we had a button
that like
looked nice

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but it wasn't super clear
and so
they didn't know
how to access
the thing that
they were trying to do
and so
by improving that
we decrease
the need for them
to have to reach out
which is clearly
not their
you know want
to have to call somebody
they you know
find the answer
to their problem
and so with that
we made an improvement
and we of course
improve
the bottom line
because of that
so I actually think that
maybe
in one of the steps
that somebody should
consider
and the organization
is just like
you have those examples
like every company
does
where you know
quality
leads to
better business outcomes
and
to talk about those
and make them
known
because I think it's

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actually a false belief
that
you know it's like
one of the others
like are we going to
work on quality
and it doesn't move the
metrics and
and
where we do
and some of them are
longer term
and so you have to look out
for a while
to see that change
and you know
the beliefs of your customers
or you know
how often they're
they're sharing your product
or how often they're
succeeding
and what they're trying to do
but some of them are
short-term impacts
and that is
an important thing
for people to be aware of
because
it will give them ideas
of like
oh we could do this
in our team too
we could have a
higher quality product
and actually move
the business metrics
is there anything you do
in how you
evaluate performance of
teams
that helps prioritize
this sort of thing

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so generally
it's just like
cool this team
moved this metric
by a ton
they're doing great
I guess is there
anything that you bake
into performance evaluations
at Stripe
especially for
product teams
that help them
understand
and prioritize
some of these things
that may not
obviously move metrics
other than just broadly
we believe
great experiences
are going to improve growth
yeah
well I think
one part
is being clear
on what impact means
because I do think
that in some companies
impact
there's like
okay
what business metric
did I move
and how much
and there are
certainly
really important
impact
projects
that folks can have
that maybe
they're multi-quarter

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multi-year
and so
maybe you didn't move
this incredibly
important business metric
in one quarter
but actually
like the work
that you are doing
is instrumental
to the success
of the business
so there's that
and then
like you said
there are
perhaps
quality efforts
that are harder
to measure
or their longer term
but they are still impactful
so I think
number one
is that
you know
when you're thinking
about how
to come up with
the rubric
for how you're
going to judge
performance
is just like
really honing in on
what
what does impact me
and
and then
a lot kind of
comes from that
and being able to
celebrate

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and recognize
great work happening
even when
you know
it's not necessarily
materially moving
that number
and
the other part of it
is we have
a levels
and ladder system
so it's a
document
that's not meant
to like
lay out
like here's the checklist
of all the things
you need to do
but it's
you know
kind of a guide
for
this is what is expected
in your role
and at this level
and in these
documents
we talk about
the importance
of things
like quality
in that
that you know
what we pursue
is building these
you know
things that
are great
and
another part of that
is also

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the operating principles
which is kind of like
the thing that we align on
underneath
all of these
kinds of levels
and letters
systems
that we have
and our operating principles
include
meticulous craft
it is one of the things
that is really important
to us
as an organization
is just like
having that meticulous care
for all that you do
like
whether it's like
you're
you know
designing the space
that we
work within
or that you're
creating the API
or that you're
building the interface
or that you're
you know
talking to people
on support calls
like the meticulous craft
is something that
you know is actually
expected of everybody
today's episode
is brought to you by
one schema
the embeddable
csv importer

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for SAS
customers always seem to want
to give you their data
in the messiest
possible csv file
and building a spreadsheet
importer
becomes a never-ending sink
for your engineering
and support resources
you keep adding features
to your spreadsheet importer
the customers keep running
in csv issues
six months later
you're fixing yet
another date conversion
edge case bug
most tools
aren't built for handling
messy data
but one schema is
companies like scale ai
and pave
are using one schema
to make it fast and easy
to launch
delightful spreadsheet
import experiences
from embeddable csv import
to importing csv's
from an sftp folder
on a recurring basis
spreadsheet import
is such an awful experience
in so many products
customers get frustrated
by useless messages
like error
on line 53
and never end up
getting started
with your product

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one schema intelligently
corrects messy data
so that your customers
don't have to spend hours
in excel
just to get started
with your product
for listeners of this podcast
one schema is offering
a \$1,000 discount
learn more
at oneschema.co
slash leddie
I'm going to shift
to a different topic
and this is just the last area
I want to spend some time on
which is
team building leadership
that sort of thing
so you've led design
at three hyper growth
companies
two of them airbnb and stripe
like two of the biggest companies
in the world
and also just known
for great design
and I'm just going to ask
a broad question
what have you learned
about building
leading
managing
scaling
large teams
are there lessons
that stick with you
anything come to mind
when I ask that broad question
one of the things
that has stuck with me
and you know

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through all the trials
and tribulations of leading
and as I've already laid out
for you in the very beginning
of this call
haven't always got it right
but one of the things
that has like
been a clarifying force
is I think about
growing and leading teams
is actually something I learned
at airbnb
when we were there together
it's a formula
sort of
so performance
equals potential
minus interference
and I really like this
it's pretty simple
but like
is a good reminder
that you know
as a leader
one of the things
that you are
of course driving towards
is trying to get
better performance
you know better performance
so that you know
your team feels
you know more purpose
and motivation
and is excited
about their work
and that you're building
greater things
for you know
your customers
and you're having
more business effect

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of course performance
but the key
pieces of that
of course is potential
so thinking about
how you increase potential
which would be of course
hiring really well
developing the talent
and helping them
grow and increase
their own potential
to do better
and greater things
and then
paired to that though
of course is decreasing
the interferences
which could be that
like kind of lead weight
on top of great talent
because you can hire
the best people in the world
but like a muscle
atrophying underneath a cast
if you know
there are interferences
that are holding them back
from doing great work
you know
they're going to burn out
they're not going to enjoy
the work
they're not going to be as
successful
then you will not get
as strong of performance
from it
and so I really do think
of this constantly
as to like
how can I increase potential
how can I decrease

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interferences
and over time
especially as your company
grows
you know
you're going to have to
keep doing that
like you know
the design work
is never done
in designing a team
because the more people
you bring in
you know
the more it puts
your processes
in a faulty state
we
you know
intentionally
or I have intentionally
you know
run teams where
you know
you get to a point where
like it's
kind of like
running hot
right
it's just like
okay
like we've
outgrown our processes
and that's okay
because then you can learn
as to like
okay this is how
people are actually
trying to work
and
this is how we actually
can improve it
so

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you know
making those changes
as needed
you know
helps to make them
you know
more
sought after
and
you know
more
informed
in terms of
as you
improve the processes
one of the things
that I've been
working on
since
I worked back at Airbnb
was this idea of
improving awareness
of the things that are
happening
what happens
at a lot of companies
especially as they grow
as people lose touch
with what's happening
in different parts
of the organization
and you know
everybody's got
like a doc that
you know
their PRD
where they've written down
what they've done
it's got like
tons of
you know
words
that nobody really

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understands
and you know
keywords
for the
different projects
and that
isn't
you know
the best way
to lead to clarity
and
I'm a strong believer
that a picture
tells a thousand words
and
a prototype
tells
you know
saves a thousand
meetings
what we do
and I've been doing it
for the last
you know
I don't know
you know
decade or more
is
having people
within the design team
share
as a screenshot
or a prototype
of what they are
working on
in a shared deck
and so they add this
to a slide
and google
slide decks
and for you
a couple of weeks
and we get to see

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what's happening
across the design team
and this is really important
for all the designers
because
they could see
you know
whether or not
they're a team of 10
or 170
or whatever it might be
what is happening
and they can say
like
oh my gosh
like you're working
on that surface
like
so am I
and
let's talk about it
or
oh that's an interesting
pattern
and like
you know
maybe we could use this
in more places
and
we send it
to
the product managers
and the engineer leaders
and the leaders
in the company
because it is
also a really great way
for them
to understand
what's happening
and
what are we building
together

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because going earlier
is
I talked about
the importance of
thinking about things
as a journey
so like
what's happening
in the marketing side
what's happening
in the
you know
this aspect
of the product
and seeing
how all these pieces
really fit together
that has been
you know
absolutely
like one of the things
I will take where
you know
wherever I go
whatever I do
because
it has just been
like
very very
useful tool
I remember that
at Airbnb
and I
there's nothing more fun
than just looking
through a bunch of awesome
designs and products
that are in motion
and
in a deck form
is so handy
just
flip through

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what's going on
around the company
and like
oh wow
look at this thing
that's amazing
and it's interesting
that ends up in a deck
like feels like
Figma would be really good
for that too
but
but somehow
decks are still really
really handy
for simple things
like that
and one of the key pieces
is just like
keeping it
really low maintenance
yes
you know
the design team
would definitely
prefer that
it would be in Figma
but I
you know
critically
I
want all functions
to be able
to look at it
and
you know
if
not everybody is on Figma
and you know
if they were
that would be great too
but if they are not
you know

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it's just like
flipping through
really easy
touch up a button
you know
you can just like
send it off
it's behaviors
that people are really
used to
commenting
but
yeah
maybe one day Figma
and the way you do that
is it's just like
a scheduled call
for all designers
add your stuff
to this deck
and then you email it out
every two weeks
I think you said
yeah
yeah we
and we experiment
with like
how often
we ask folks to share
and also like
you know the granularity
of what they're doing
like it is not meant
to be a status check
we're not asking
everyone like
show us what you're doing
it's more of like
what are the projects
that are happening
and you know
we might ask
like

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we'll show us
like the medium
and large projects
you know
if there's such
just too much going on
and all of a sudden
it's like a 200 page deck
and no one's going
to flip through it
so we have experimented
and evolve that
depending on the team size
and I think right now
we're at monthly
sharing of it
and that seems to be
working pretty well
it used to be bi-weekly
which I loved
because I really love
looking through
but it ends up
you know
if it's
you know
feels like
it's a arduous task
then you know
it's not succeeding
yeah and especially
knowing designers
they'd want to make sure
it's the best version
of what they've done
and then it takes
all this extra time
to like
okay we got to
make this beautiful
mock
yeah
you know and we're actually

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another part of it
that you know
is another benefit
of you know
opening up
the curtain
a little bit
of like we
you know
we do
you know
certainly we have to take
things seriously
in terms of like
you know
it's confidential work
it's work in progress
you know it's not ready to go live
you know
we're not ready to
you know
critique all the details
about this
like
you know
we do need to make it
very clear to folks
that this is
like work in progress
but also
you know that
it
it is
really beneficial
to bring the work out
because
what isn't great
is that you get to the end
of the project
and people have worked
tirelessly on it
for some
long stretch of time

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and then find out
that like
oh my gosh
this is the same project
that we're
doing over here
and you know
this can be completely redundant
or like
these two things
are on a path to collide
so we want to know that sooner
because it
absolutely in the end of the day
will make the work better
save time
and so
you know
opening up that curtain
and showing the work in progress
you know
it can feel
hard at first
but I think people
have started to see
the benefits
and doing that
and then
you know
usually that
will lead to better outcomes
and they'll all run
in the culture too
Going back to this
formula you shared
which I love
performance equals
potential minus interference
is there an example
that comes to mind of
helping with interference
where you
found that

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oh wow
this is really slowing things down
and
you change something
it actually goes back to org design
that we talked about earlier
and where people sit
so when I joined Lyft
as I mentioned to you earlier
I was like
oh I had learned
from the experience
that I had at Airbnb
and I came in
and you know
needing to transform the organization
and was
hopefully much better at it
because I had learned so much
what actually
was going on there
is that
the
way that the team was organized
before I got there
was that actually
physically
the design team sat separately
they sat in a room
that was just like
beautifully designed
separated from
engineering and product
and all the other functions
by a locked door
and
that was really interesting to see
because of course
there were a lot of benefits to it
which is that like
design
you know
had this like

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very safe space
for creative discovery
and exploration
and communication
there was
you know
work all over the walls
it was like
wall to wall
whiteboards
and it was just like
absolutely a place
where creativity could thrive
it sounds exactly
like the Airbnb situation by the way
the current Airbnb situation
the original
the fair
fair times
yeah
yeah
yeah
and you know
absolutely
there are a lot of like
tie-ins to
you know
what I had seen
and the
interesting part about like
how you know
actually teams were working is that
you would see that
there was like
a lot of wasted work
and there was a lot of like
misalignment
in what we were trying to do
because there was
you know
product managers
and engineers
that were sitting alongside each

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other
making decisions
and talking about the work
and deciding things
and then designers
were sitting over here
in this other room
and they were working on something
and then they like
you know
they'd meet up
and just like
well
that's not aligned
like
no
that doesn't fit the goal
and like
what
you know
you went that way
we were supposed to go over this way
and so
you know
interference
in the sense that it was like
it was wasted work
it wasn't actually aligned to the goals
it was slower
and you know
there were definitely benefits
like there was real reasons for doing this
and I know there are companies
including Apple that have
you know
kind of like separation of these things
but I think
if you're going
into that kind of way of working
you know
there's probably a lot of other decisions
you need to make too
in terms of the way the teams work

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and so what
I was seeing there was just
you know
it's kind of like
the composite of all these
you know
aspects coming together
that was not leading
to
you know
more efficient
and and less interference
and so what we did
was to evolve
the way we were working
and bring better alignment
to the different functions
and again
you know
had done it with
you know
an approach about listening
and you know
came into that with a
you know
kind of
better understanding
of getting to know the team
and getting to know
engineering and product
and see what our goals were together
so that when we were making changes
we were making the changes together
and we you know
actually were aligned
so that like
on the day that we
opened the doors
and you know
brought you know
design and engine product together
and and had you know
spaces for folks to like

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work together
and like
they actually sat with each other
we still kept the creative space for
you know
this is where we'll do crits
this is where we'll do working sessions
this is where the folks that
don't work
in an embedded fashion
will sit
but we had like
you know
the best of both worlds
in that way
and so with that alignment
of the way that the
the teams were working together
there was much like
faster kind of
iteration cycles
better clarity
on how the work was working
and we still kept and protected
you know
that room for creative space
like literally the room
and literally
the room in terms of like
figuratively speaking
for allowing for
in creative exploration
but more aligned
and just to understand
essentially you
re-orged the teams
and not just
physically
move people
but you kind of changed the way
the product and design
and engine team
was even organized

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yes
yes like literally and figuratively
we broke down the wall
and you know
brought the teams
physically together
so that they would work together
and then you know
we had an org chart
where it's like
okay
these designers
are working on driver
these designers
are working on rider
these designers
are working on
you know
it's the safety team
and then they would
sit with their
respective engineers
and product managers
and then
you know
we would
as I talked about earlier
like we would come together
at key moments
to make sure that
we as a design function
we're still
you know
aligning
on you know
shared goals
about
you know
the overall experience
but also
making sure that
we could work well
with our partners

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so interesting
that that was a
recurring pattern
at the places you went
I imagine Stripe
was not like that
there was not
all designers
sitting in that
locked room
not in a locked room
and I joined Stripe
it was a zoom universe
so it's
a little bit different
but you know
we do
even today
we have
you know
a studio space
where you know
we have all the
great you know
tools of craft
and when you do
go into the offices
we do have places
where you know
designers sit together
especially in the functions
that aren't embedded
so we do have
for example
we have brand
and marketing creative
we have the
the website team
and
we have
you know folks that
work kind of
across all of the things

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that we do
and so
you know
for sure
there
there usually is
some sort of
creative space
which
I actually think
like having a physical space
for creative discovery
and exploration
and you know
having that up on the wall
like you know
I love that so much
and you know
I go into the office
about half time now
and you know
I think over time
we'll probably build out
more and more
because it is really powerful
in addition
to having teams
like sit by
the disciplines
that they work with
every day.
It reminds me of a quote
I have on my wall
that
I think I found in the
Rick Rubin book
but it's by someone else
so I don't know exactly
where I
found it
but it's a
the object
isn't

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to make art
it's to be
in that
wonderful state
which makes art
inevitable.
Ooh that's good
I like that very well.
By Robert
Henry.
Okay
by Robert.
That's what I try to do
in this little
podcast
studio that we got here.
That's awesome.
Is there anything else
that you
think would be useful
to share either
from scaling
design teams
or broadly?
I think one of the other
tendencies I see
of companies
at different stages
of their growth
is
a fear of bold ideas.
What happens
is that
it can happen
at small sizes
and then it can happen
at large sizes
actually.
It's just that
a fear of
kind of like
shaking things up too much
or big ideas

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with lots of things
changing influence
are really hard to measure.
And so like actually like
you know if we just like
make an incremental approach
it's very measured
and we can
we know what the outcome
is going to be
feel safer.
You know I can get it done
in the quarter
and depending on how
your performance is managed
that might be more attractive.
And so
that is a
dangerous tendency
because I think if we go back
to like
what quality means
you know and you think
about it as like
well like
quality is really
you know your users
are the judge of that
and the way that they
experience things
oftentimes
are like across products
across surface
across time.
If you just think about
you know these like
incremental approaches
to the little
you know to the scope
of whatever that is
that you own
you are very likely
not to like

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make the
the whole thing better.
So I think we have
to fight against that
and you know
the way I look at it
is you know
the way I talk about it
is like
reach
reach for the stars
and land on the moon
and what I mean by that
is that
vision work
is really important
and I think like
sometimes you can get
a bad name
because you can end up
with some folks
that are doing vision work
that goes nowhere
and they make a beautiful deck
and then it gets like
seated on a shelf
and nobody ever builds it
like that is not
what I'm talking about here
that is not
what I recommend
but actually
you know vision work
that absolutely does
look at the
you know
the entirety of the experience
a comprehensive approach
and you know
a journey approach
and thinks about
how these things
you know various things

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may come together
to be better
and like
sketch out the
ideal version
and I think
Brian Jesky talks about it
I think it was
like the 11th star
experience
I think you once said
let's listen to white stuff
that we talked about
a couple of times on this podcast
yeah
looking at it as a journey
yeah like
it's not the five star approach
it's not the six star approach
but like
the 11th star approach
where they go
show what that ideal version is
like because
if you don't know
what that is
like
what are the chances
that you're going to
increment yourself
to the right
outcome in the end
and
you know as I talked about
before
like building the house
like you want to see
what that picture looks like
in the you know
the you know
how all these pieces
come together
and I strongly recommend

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you want to see what it looks like
in you know
an ideal form
because you're going to
always work back from that
and so it's like
okay if this is what we want to get to
this is what like
our product is going to look like
in two years
how do we get there
and what very likely is
it's a team effort
and various parts of your
organization
are going to have to own
various parts
and you know
maybe we ship this piece first
so that we can study it
and learn
and you know
make sure that the data is good
before we move to that next piece
like I'm not suggesting
you have to ship
the whole thing at once
but that like
you know kind of
North Star
lays out the process
in a way that I think allows for
you know
big risk-taking
in a way that is measured
and thoughtful
and you know
actually also
feels like progress
as you step towards that
versus like
you know
trying to like

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get there
you know
day one
and you know
likely
you know
end up
giving up
I love that
reach for the stars
land on the moon
that could be a
metaphor for so many things
let me try to squeeze in
one more tactical tip
for people listening
if someone's hiring a designer
so someone that's not a designer
you know
just founder
or product team
just like
what should you look for
that may be a red flag
or something that you want to look for
to kind of feel good
that they're going to be a good fit
the key
I think to keep in mind
is
you know
it's easier to teach tools
and process
than it is
taste and character
so I would certainly
you know
pay a lot of attention
to that
you know kind of like
their hit rate for
you know
great judgment

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in
in great taste
and how they've honed that
you know
even if
you know
they're not very experienced
like
just to like
see
do they have that
you know
natural inclination
for great things
the other piece of it
is that
you know
certainly
you want to find somebody
with great talent
for sure
and high craft
but you also
want to find somebody
that's humble
you know
that like
folks that are really good
at what they do
aren't always
but
humility is a really important part
I mean
I think it's a really important part
for anybody on a team
because
you know
if you're working on a team
you know
you need to work together
and
it is important that they have
that respect and empathy

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and understanding
and
you know
enthusiasm
for the folks around them
but also the users
so
you know
humility means
that they're going to
pay more attention
to what
the users are saying
and hopefully be curious
about what's working
and what's not
and you know
strive to
navigate these things
to make it better
and then I guess
the last piece
would just be
you know
hustle
or
or hutzpah
I'm not sure exactly
what's the right way
to put it
but
you know
the
design
and you know
the creative functions
is
you know
it's the act of creation
and
it's scary
you know
it's like to like

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take a blank piece of paper
and
propose something
that you think is better
it's
scary
to
you know
have the courage
to say
this is not good enough
and we should do it again
is scary
and so
having somebody
that has
you know
that kind of
like courage inside them
to
you know
fight for great
is pretty important
and
that hustle
to like
try to
execute on that
you know
rapidly
is of course
essential
as you're
you're hiring
at really
any stage
company
and I guess
lastly I think
you were asking
in particular
like
is

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you know
especially with younger
companies
who are startups
you know
I think
one thing that can be hard
is like
do you hire
a
you know
more junior doer
or a more senior
you know
kind of like
thinker or operator
you know
it's like
if you had all the
in the world
like
all of it
but
I do think
in your early stages
you probably do need
a doer
but it is important
to also have
that kind of lens
of
you know
how do you
build an organization
that's user focused
and the way that they
operate
and the way that they
work together
and bringing
you know
a strategy
that will

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help to be
user focused
from the start
so
you know
maybe a great way
of doing that
is kind of
having like a more
you know
senior leader
design advisor
and then
a you know
kind of
executor or doer
you know
full-time on the team
that's a really cool tip
on the craft
and taste
piece
a lot of times
people don't
have that themselves
necessarily
any tip
for how to
measure that
is there
I don't know
a book
you'd recommend
or
trick
or is it just
trust your
trust your judgment
and like
does this feel
great to you
it's contingent on like
what is the thing

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what is the user need
you know
so something that
you know
is is really great
like
we do
a lot of tools
that like
we strive
to make them power
tools for our users
and a lot of times
that means
like dense information
that of course
is like
still you know
easily accessible
but you know
we'll definitely
feel different
than perhaps
you know
a consumer product
that is meant to be
extremely
you know
light and sparse
and you know
directive to like
one individual
thing at a time
so it really kind of
depends on the context
of the product
sometimes
so that's why
it's hard to kind of
quote an individual book
but yeah
I mean I can think on it
and we can put it

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in the show notes
there there are
definitely books
that talk about like
the principles of great design
and we can look at that
amazing
willing to extra books
that come to mind after
one other question
I wanted to ask
is what's
a favorite project
that
y'all have worked on
at Stripe?
Oh yeah
we get a good one
that I'm so excited about
we
well first off
I don't know
if everybody knows this
but Stripe
prints books
so Stripe Press
we print books
that are
we consider
of ideas of progress
it's
you know
our intention of
bringing great ideas out there
they don't
all have it
you know
most of them
don't have anything to do
with financial infrastructure
it might be
any number of
interesting

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problems
and opportunities
of things
and ideas
that people have talked about
I have many of them
in my background here
I'm a
huge fan of Stripe Press
nice
and we take great care
to
you know
kind of like
deliver these ideas
of progress
in books
that hopefully
feel beautiful
and
we have a new book
coming out
that you can pre-order now
and it is
Poor Charlie's Almanac
and so it's actually
I already pre-ordered
you did
I'm so excited to hear that
I'm really excited for it
it's
it's a fascinating book
and it's
20 years old
it's actually
Charlie Munger's
words
but
Peter Kaufman
a friend
and a colleague of his
assembled
all of these documents

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over the years
of things that
you know
Charlie had written
and said
and put it into this
kind of like anthology
and so this book is
really fascinating
and it's not
you know
it's
not really a linear story
so much
and so
we have
reprinted this book
uh
we also have
we created a teaser site
that I strongly recommend
you all check out
it's
oh man
it's
unreal
I remember
that when you
launched that
I was like
just keeps going
and gets
crazier
and wilder
and amazing
I don't even know
how that's possible
on a
on a website
it's
it's pretty awesome
and that's
uh

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our website team
is just like
as you know
we talked about
the importance of
like design
and engineering
working
super closely together
and it's just
just like that
and wild
you know
that art and science
coming together
into something that
you know
hopefully is
is fun
and engaging
and people want to
you know
pursue it
and
so we're working on
that the book
will be coming out soon
and we're working on
an update to the site
that we're
really really
thrilled about
so you can
you know
kind of
read the book
online
um
and it really
in a special
kind of way
so yeah
very big fan of this

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what's the website
for folks
that you happen to have
that you're
all otherwise
we'll link to it
in the show notes
for you
yeah
yeah
it is
uh
press.stripe.com
will be
where you can see
all the books
that we have
at Stripe Press
and I believe
the first one
in the line
and actually
what you'll see
in the
the website
is that
you know
we originally
had a kind of
like
you know
typical
buying model
of like
the squares
outlined
and
one of the things
that you know
we sought to do
with the website
is to kind of
consider like

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what would be
you know
a great experience
for understanding
different books
and like
when you go into
a bookstore
like you see
like
you know
the the
spines of the books
and you
you know
kind of pick them up
and you turn them
around
and you look at them
and so that's
actually what you
will experience
I mean
I should stop
describing
it just go
and check it out
and you'll see
as we
we sought to
deliver this work
in a way that
you know
would be
aligned with what
a reader
would want to pursue
I can't help but ask
but how did that
even come together
was it just like
this passion project
of like

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oh this book's coming out
I just want to
invest a bunch of time
resources into this
or is
how does that happen
at a
at a stripe
yeah
well
I mean
a stripes mission
is to increase
the GDP of the internet
like we
you know
we strive to build
global economic
prosperity
because
you know that's
greater access across the globe
but there's more ways
to do that
than financial infrastructure
financial infrastructure
is absolutely
a major part of that
right
and it is like
kind of like
the lifeblood of businesses
and it enables them
to accomplish more
but this notion of
like ideas of progress
is another angle
into that
so while it might not
be our core business
it is very much aligned
with our mission
and so

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yes
it takes time
but we feel that
it's important
for what we're
setting out to do
and it also
relates to
you know
the pursuit of
you know
creativity
and excellence
it is a part of
you know
our identity
it is a part of
you know
who we
we
feel we are
or we strive to be
and you know
we're excited to
share that with people
so you know
in part
it's like
in some ways
like
how they get to know us
and they get to see
you know
the care
that we put into
you know
any number of things
Katie
is there anything else
you want to
share
or touch on
before we get to

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our very exciting
lightning round
we talked a little bit
about
you know the
importance of
different disciplines
and the
you know
kind of importance
of
quality being
a group effort
and you know
I
I hope this doesn't
insult my function
as I say
but like
at the core
design
is
is simply intention
bringing
attentionality
to the decisions
that you make
and thinking about
you know
who is this thing for
so like
if you're designing
a doorknob
let's say
and it's like
okay just the doorknob
speak to
whether or not
I'm going to push
or pull
or turn
is it
comfortable in the hand

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is it easy to manufacture
is it easy to put on
and remove
you'll see
these are some of the
intentional decisions
one could make
whether or not
a designer
an engineer
the product person
any old function
can you know
put that intentionality
if you think about
like
who is impacted by this
who is using this
that literally could be
anything from designing
a doorknob
to designing your org
structure
to designing your strategy
now obviously
great design
is also creative
and it also
is demonstrated with great taste
you know
for what is beauty
and so of course
that's where
you know
I would say that
like design expertise
with people that have these
you know creative skills
and these great tastes
is you know
an incredible
important thing
to you know

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bring into the organization
but I think
you know
day one
everybody can bring
more care and intentionality
and I think that will result
in better outcomes internally
and externally
in the long run
like your podcast
is a great example
of great craft
and great quality
like your
you know
I would
I was just saying this
to my husband
the other day
as I was talking about
doing this
and it's just like
your podcasts
there's like
more usable learning
per you know
minute
than you know
most
I don't know if that's like
a metric
that you're measuring
but like
I love how you don't have
your guests
tell about their background
right
because like when someone tells
about their background
like that is interesting
but like
it's not really like

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usable information
of like
oh I can take this information
and run with it
and then bring it to my own team
and make my work better
and so like
you have clearly thought about
that
well I don't know
if that's why you made
that decision
absolutely
that is a great way
okay okay
that's great
and I also love
you know
the way that you
you set these things up
you know
you had said to me
you know
in the thing that you set me
just like
if it's not good
we're not going to ship it
and you set it in very nice
ways by the way
but like
at first I had this like
oh gosh
like
if it's not good
what if it's not good
but I also had this moment
of like
oh well that's pretty great
because
if it's not good
he's not gonna
you know embarrass me
to the rest of the world

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hopefully
and I love that
because that was that
courage
that I was talking about
earlier too
of that like
you're not gonna let
that go out
because
you know
that
each one of these little things
will end up
you know
leading to
a belief
of the
level of quality
of what somebody
you know
can
rely on getting
when they listen to your podcast
and you know
again
like
one workout
isn't going to be a six pack
but like
every one of those things
you know
will end up leading to
better
you know
quality overall
so
kudos to you
you're nailing it
so great
wow
Katie
what a nice way to end it

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I really appreciate that
that's exactly how I think
about it
actually you cracked
my whole strategy
of just
making it as
concretely useful
as possible
I was actually on
David Perrell's podcast
recently and
and he
had this really good way
describing this
which is exactly what I've
tried to do
but I haven't put my words into it
of
make it as
useful as possible
per minute
without
removing the humanity
and I
realized that's kind of what I do
is like
you know
I could cut all the stories
of everyone's backgrounds
but that's
that's
that sucks
so it's just
optimized for value
and
concrete tactical advice
also make it
fun and human and interesting
yeah
so
thank you
for the kind words

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and
with that
we reached our very exciting
lightning round
I've got
a number of questions for you
are you ready
I'm
ready
let's do it
let's do it
what are two or three books
that you've recommended
most to other people
one
how to win friends
and influence people
it's an oldie but a goodie
I forget how many years old it
is
but many many decades
yeah I think it was like
in the 1930s
but yes
I mean the cover is funny
you know
you might be embarrassed to
read it on a bus
I don't know
but
the learnings from it
you know
are timeless
and I've actually read it
four times
and
I'm gonna
always do for another
because
it is a great reminder
of just like
how important
the way you articulate things are

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and you know
not a
you know
negative or gross kind of way
but like
people care first and foremost
about themselves
like
that's the body that they are
within
that is the context that they are
within
and
recognizing that
you know
I think can be really powerful
as you think about leading teams
as you think about
working with other people
as you think about being
a good spouse
like whatever it might be
so
a big big fan of that one
the other one is
a newer book
I think actually
I was still a couple of years old
it's about the Wright Brothers
by David
McCall
I think
I've been learning how to fly
and so like
I'm very obsessed with this
but like
I think it's a book
that's relevant to everybody
especially
even
on
Furnors
because it just like

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kind of talks about
the
impossible challenge of like
nobody thought it could be done
you know
even
you know
the American like
Institute of Science
like didn't think it could be done
and you know
these individuals
that had the like
resolve
and the commitment
to
you know
make it happen
and I think also the power
of this like
beautiful partnership
of course
the brothers
that doesn't always mean
you get along
but they
their brotherhoods
and they
you know
they did so
and
it's a beautiful story
so
big big big big
big fan of that
and then
third book
I would just say
is actually
I brought it over
because I knew
you were going to
ask me this question

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I don't know
if you could read that
but
the boy
the mule
the fox
and the horse
this book was given to me
by Jenny Arden
which
I think you may know
it's wonderful
it's a beautiful story
it's like
you know
it's
make you laugh
it's
you know
it teaches you
a thing or two
and
you know
one of the
best quotes
in it is
one of our greatest
freedoms
is how
we react
to things
very roots
yes
awesome
what is a recent
favorite movie
or tv show
that you really enjoyed
Oppenheimer was amazing
and tv show
shrinking
and
that one was really good

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and it actually
really surprised me
how like
funny
and like
positive it was
because the
trailer for it
does not give that impression
but
it was really good
sweet
I've not seen that
what is a
favorite interview question
that you like to ask
candidates
tell me what
work you're
are most proud of
and the reason I ask that
is because
well
it helps me understand
their taste
and their judgment
what motivates them
what work they view
as good
and as a good outcome
it also helps me understand
a little bit about
you know
what they like to do
and where
you know
they're
kind of like
gravity pulls them
is their favorite product
you recently discovered
be a nap
or physical thing

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anything
yeah
well as a parent
you should definitely know
the Tony box
oh I don't know this
the Tony box
so good
the Tony box
I should have brought it over too
so it's a
it's like a squishy box
but it's a speaker
and your kids can control it
and the way they control it
is these little figurines
I mean this is also like
a brilliant product
because you want to buy
all these figurines
but
the little figurine
so it could be like
you know
Belle from Beauty and the Beast
or like Elsa from
Frozen
and you know
they place the figurine on top
and that activates
the stories that this book
the thing reads to you
or the songs that it plays for you
you can record your own voice
so that you're telling stories
to your child
and they control it all
by themselves
and they can drop it on the floor
and it's all good
but the Tony box
pretty awesome
it just texted my wife to

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check this out
amazing
great
very handy and timely
do you have a favorite life motto
that you'd like to
share
come back to
find meaningful
I don't say this out loud
but I do
I've had it as a post-it
like in my jewelry box
and that I
you know see regularly
tomorrow
is today
and what I mean by that
is that
so often
you know
I will like
in my head
be like
oh I'll do that tomorrow
like oh I'll eat better tomorrow
oh I'll think about that vision tomorrow
I'll you know
communicate better expectations tomorrow
and you know
it's kind of like those like
joke signs that like
free beer tomorrow
because you know
very easily tomorrow
just always moves on
and I needed to run
mind myself
that like you know
it's actually
it is now today
tomorrow is not that one
I feel like I need to

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take all these
mottos
which are amazing
I love this question
that I just invented
and just put them all
my wall here in this office
yes
that's a great idea
you should make a book
look of letting go
oh man
the tribe of mentors
version of
Lenny's podcast
that's awesome
is there a lesson
that your mom
or dad taught you
that has really stuck with you
especially as a newish parent
yeah
I think about this a lot
I am a mom of twin girls
and you know
I feel so lucky
that my parents
raised me to see that
accomplishment
is based on merit
and hard work
and they never made me feel like
you know
because I was small
and that I was not as strong as
you know somebody
whatever it might be
that I wasn't able
and so like
my dad had me
you know
chopping wood
and mixing cement

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as a young kid
and you know
that certainly led me
you know
in one part to be a designer
but also
you know
to be able to pursue leadership
and be you know
even though sometimes
I'm comfortable
like willing to be in the room
where I am vastly outnumbered
by people that you know
don't look like me
and you know
wanting to
or just like
not letting that hold me back
and I actually
I thought about that the other day
because I was riding in a
lift to the airport
this was also at like
4 a.m.
so it was like
really hard time to be in a lift
to go under the airport
and the driver was telling me
about his kids
and actually he had twins
it was one boy
one girl
and so we were talking about twins
and he's like
yeah yeah you know
like my girl
she's my princess
and you know
I you know
my son doesn't understand
why I don't let her take out the garbage
and like

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why her job is to sweep
and you know
that's his job
he's like
I'm not gonna let her take out the garbage
like
and I was just
was sitting in the back of the car
wondering like
should I tell him like
you're screwing it up
like no
like just because
you know
she's a female
doesn't mean that like
she's not you know
able to do the jobs
even the hard ones
and even the bad ones
like taking out the trash
and you know
I really do think that
I'm so fortunate
that
you know
that was never
the way that my parents
were looking at it
and that
you know
now
today
I feel like
that is very much
a part of
a little bit of my
hutzpah
and willingness to
you know
kind of like step out there
because
I you know

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hadn't been held back from those
hard jobs earlier
beautiful
final question
you mentioned that you fly planes
and this is my
actually related to my last question
I guess one that's
I was gonna ask if that's true
you mentioned it is true
is
is there a lesson
that you've taken
from learning to fly
and flying
that you can
that you've brought into
product leadership design
anything come to mind
yeah
first of all
learning fly
has been
such an amazing experience
because
there haven't been many things
in my adult life
where you feel
like yourself going
from like
knowing nothing about something
and
like being able to do something
and it's just like
what an incredible
kind of journey that is
and so
whether it's like
you know
learning a language
or whatever
like that
that is awesome

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and highly recommended
but
no
one of the key things
that is definitely sat with me
from the experience
of learning how to fly
that I
definitely thought about
how to bring it into my work
is that
when I was
kind of
getting to the stage
of being able to do things myself
so my instructor
is sitting there next to me
and
you know
usually he's right there
at the controls with me
so if like
something goes wrong
when I'm
you know
flying
that he's right there
and
I remember
the
you know
one of the first times
when I was
like learning how to land
where
he moved his seat back
and like
like a lot
and so like
he was now like
kind of out of touch
for the controls
like he could jump there

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if he needed to
but like
he really pulled back
and it was
such an incredible
like
visceral experience
I was like
he trusts me
like
in like
right now
he is like
he is showing his faith
in me to
take this
and like
take this challenge on
and I think about that
all the time
it's just like
you know
how can I show
you know
my team
people I work with
like
my support
and trust in them
you know
to take that challenge on
and so like
you know
I can't always move my seat back
but like
what might be the way
and so that's been a
you know
pretty
pretty great example
of like
something I want to pull forward
that is an awesome metaphor

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I feel like this whole episode
is just full of
beautiful metaphors
also just full of beauty
Katie
thank you so much
for being here
two final questions
working folks
finding a line
if they want to reach out
and maybe ask some questions
and how can listeners
be useful to you
yeah
well first off
please do
you know
find me online
because
you know
as I talked about
like
we are in
the pursuit of
you know
trying to build
excellent things
and it's always a work in progress
and so I'm always interested
to learn
how others do it
and you know
see how we can improve
our own methods
I am
Lil
underscore
dill
on Twitter
and then I think
that name was taken
on threads

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so I'm Lil
underscore
dilly
with a why
on threads
and then I'm Lil
LinkedIn
find me there
we're hiring
so definitely reach out
we
at our job board too
stripe.com
slash jobs
definitely check us out
we definitely
would love to hear from you
Katie
again
thank you so much
for being here
thank you Lenny
bye everyone
thank you so much
for listening
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