

[Transcript] The Diary Of A CEO with Steven Bartlett / E249: No.1 Habit & Procrastination Expert: We've Got ADHD Wrong! Break Any Habit & Never Be Distracted!

What's your thoughts on ADHD?

Oh, this is a big topic and I'm probably getting myself in trouble here, but there's something fishy going on.

We can get to that.

Mere Aiyal, one of the world's leading experts in procrastination.

Named the prophet of habit for me.

Talking about how to keep focused, how to set the right goals.

This is a must listen.

Avoiding distraction is the key to not living with regret.

90% of the time that we get distracted,

it's not because of what's happening outside of us,

it's because of what's happening inside of us.

If you can't sit with a friend without looking at your phone every three minutes,

it's not the phone.

It's your inability to deal with the discomfort of silence or boredom.

All human behaviors driven by a desire to escape discomfort.

It's not hard to do something you enjoy,

but it's how do I do this stuff that I really don't feel like doing it?

I found this technique.

Thousands of studies have shown this to be very effective.

If you don't master that,

everything else becomes much more difficult if not impossible.

So the first step is...

The number of people being diagnosed with ADHD has significantly risen.

ADHD is a very real thing that can be debilitating

for people that suffer with it.

ADHD is real, but I have a lot of concerns.

10% of children in the United States are diagnosed with ADHD and Europe it's 1%.

That's a big red flag.

Training a generation to believe that solutions come in pill bottles.

We do not wait how dangerous those pills can be.

They have consequences.

The whole chemical imbalance theory,

no psychiatrist will tell you that's true.

Scientific rules, skills before pills.

And what I hate about a lot of people in the ADHD community,

they feel like it's an identity and that is so dangerous.

We need to look at ADHD as...

Nia, it is very good to see you again,

because I have to admit you've changed my life,

but you also changed my father's life.

You're the reason my father quit smoking.

I've told this story maybe once or twice before,

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but once upon a time I came home from for Christmas
and I left your first book hooked in his bathroom.
He picked that book up once I'd left, read it, understood habit loops,
and from that moment he took steps which led him to quit smoking.
So I have to say thank you, but also you've been on this podcast
once before, a long, long time ago,
when not many people were listening.
And from that conversation there were small nuggets
which have stayed with me every day since.
My first question to you, Nia,
for people that have just clicked onto this podcast
and that are thinking about whether to listen or not,
can you tell me who should listen, why they should listen,
and what value they're going to gain
from listening to the conversation we're about to have?
Yeah, so first of all, thank you for having me.
It's an honor to be back for the second episode.
I think the reason to listen is because regret sucks.
Having regret in your life is awful.
And so what I want to minimize with the work I do,
and frankly I write for myself more than anyone else,
I try and solve my own problems,
is I don't want to look back on my life with regret,
not for a day, not for a month, not for a year,
not for a lifetime, certainly.
And so avoiding distraction is the key to not living with regret
because we all basically know what to do, right?
We know we should exercise, we know we should eat right,
we know we should spend quality time with our family,
we know we should do the hard work that we have to do
to move our careers forward.
But many times we don't do it, even though we know what to do,
and if you don't know what to do, Google it, it's all out there, right?
So the problem is not that we don't know what to do,
the problem is we keep getting in our own way.
And so it's really about becoming indistractable.
This is how we live the kind of lies we deserve.
You described becoming indistractable on Twitter
as the single most important skill that anybody in the 21st century
can adopt and learn.
Yeah, and I think it's the macro skill, right?
Because there's no facet of your life
that is not affected by your ability to control your attention.

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So whether it's learning a new skill,
whether it's getting into relationships,
whether it's business, whether it's physical fitness,
all of these things depend on your ability to follow through.
And so that's why I think it's a skill of the century,
that if you don't master that skill,
everything else becomes much more difficult if not impossible.
But if you do, if you can become undistractable,
you know, I made up the word undistractable,
it's meant to sound like indestructible.
It's meant to be a superpower,
it's meant to be a trait that we want in order to achieve our dreams.
And so my goal is not to tell people what to do, right?
I'm not going to say you need to exercise,
you need to live right, you need to do this, you need to do that.
That's not my goal at all.
If you want to play video games for your waking hours,
that's fine with me.
What I want to help people do
is do the things that they themselves want to do.
Whatever it is that you say you want to do with your time and attention,
that's what I want to help you do.
So why don't we do what we want to do?
Because as you say, the information's all out there.
We have Google, we have all of these books,
we have podcasts like this.
But regardless of, you know, we've had loads of health podcasts
in a row on this show where we've had the best health experts
from all around the world.
And I'm sure there's people that have listened to those episodes
have heard, don't eat sugar, don't do this, don't do this,
do this, do this, do this.
But they're still at home struggling now
to turn that intention into behavior.
What is standing in our way?
What's getting in our way?
Yeah, so I wish I could give you a one sentence answer,
but let me back up and kind of frame this a bit.
So the best way to understand what distraction is
is to understand what distraction is not.
And to do that, we have to start with where the word comes from.
So the word distraction comes from this Latin root trahere,
which means to pull.

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And if you notice that the opposite of distraction is not focused.
Many people say, I don't want to be distracted,
I don't want to be focused.
But that's not the opposite of the word.
The opposite of distraction is traction.
That both words end in the same six letters,
ACTIO, and that spells action, reminding us
that distraction is not something that happens to us.
It is an action we ourselves take.
So we have traction, we have distraction.
Traction is any action that pulls us towards what we say we're going to do.
Things that move us closer to our values
help us become the kind of person we want to become.
Those are acts of traction.
The opposite of traction.
Distraction is any action that pulls us away from what we plan to do,
farther from our goals,
farther from becoming the person we want to become.
So this is really important.
This isn't just semantics because I would argue
that any action that you do with intent,
anything that is planned ahead,
anything that involves forethought is traction.
So there's a lot of talk today
about how social media is melting our brains
and video games are bad for you.
I don't agree.
I think that anything that you plan to do with your time and attention
as long as it's done with intent is fine.
That becomes an act of traction
as long as it's planned for with intent.
As Dorothy Parker said,
the time you plan to waste is not wasted time.
Now, just because something is a work-related test
doesn't mean it's not a distraction.
In fact, that's the worst kind of distraction
because these distractions trick you
into not even realizing you're getting distracted.
I'll give you a perfect example.
For years, I would sit down at my desk.
I would take out my to-do list.
By the way, we can talk about later why to-do lists
are one of the worst things you can do

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for your personal productivity.
We can get to that.
I would sit down at my desk and I would say,
okay, I've got that big project
that I need to work on right now.
Nothing's going to get in my way.
I'm going to stay focused.
Here I go.
I'm going to get started.
But first, let me check some email, right?
Let me just scroll that Slack channel.
Let me just do that one thing on my to-do list,
that easy task just to get started here,
just to get the rhythm going, right?
It's a work-related task.
And when I didn't realize that,
that is the most pernicious form of distraction,
the distraction that you don't even realize is happening
because if it's not what you said you were going to do
in advance within your time and attention,
it is by definition a distraction.
So what we tend to do is we prioritize the easy work.
We prioritize the urgent work
as opposed to the hard and important work
we have to do to move our lives and careers forward.
So just because it's a work-related task
doesn't mean it's a distraction.
That's the most awful type of distraction.
It's not the video games.
It's not the social media.
It's the distractions we don't even know
are distracting us from what we said
we would do with our time.
So now we've got traction.
We've got distraction.
Now the other two parts of the model
involve what we call triggers.
Triggers are these things that prompt us to action.
We have two kinds of triggers.
External triggers are things in our outside environment.
These are things that we tend to blame
like cell phones and our computers
and all the pings, dings and rings in our life.

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But studies find that those account
for only 10% of our distractions.
Only 10% are caused by these external triggers.
So what's the other 90%?
90% of the time that we get distracted
is not because of what's happening outside of us.
It's because of what's happening inside of us.
These are called internal triggers.
Internal triggers are these uncomfortable emotional states
that we seek to escape.
And so that's the first step
to becoming distractible and answers your question
around why, by and large,
even though despite knowing what to do,
we don't do it.
It's because all of these problems
are an emotion regulation problem
that in fact, time management is pain management.
I would argue weight management is pain management.
Money management is pain management.
In fact, all human behavior,
all human behavior is about a desire to escape discomfort.
And then answers your question around
why don't we just do what we say we're going to do?
It's because we don't realize
that these are always emotion regulation problems.
So that's the first step to becoming indistractable
is mastering the internal triggers.
Then the second step,
we talked about traction earlier,
making time for traction.
The third step, hacking back the external triggers
and then finally preventing distraction with packs.
And so that's the model, these four steps.
And then, of course, we can go in as much depth as you like.
But if you understand these four fundamental steps,
and this is what took me five years writing this book,
namely because I kept getting distracted, right?
I was very distractible myself,
and I wrote the book for me, as I mentioned earlier.
But it was when I boiled down the hundreds of studies
and research, and you can see there's 35 pages of citations in the book.
It wasn't until I could kind of solidify this model

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that I could make it practical enough to change lives.
It certainly did mine.
One of the things this podcast has taught me
from speaking to all these people across multiple fields
is that sometimes we can feel like our body,
our wiring is against us.
Especially as it relates to health, right?
So, you know, we know sugar is bad.
So why does our brain send us these cravings to go and eat sugar?
And in the case of distractions and sort of behavioral psychology,
I know instinctively and intuitively that distractions,
like hanging out on TikTok for an hour, is bad.
But my brain is doing it.
What does that tell us about how we should
go about adopting behavior change?
Yeah, so that's why it's really about this holistic model.
So that's what took me the most time to figure out
was what are the four mandatory components
of living without regret, of doing what you say you're going to do.
So the first step is mastering these internal triggers,
figuring out why you feel this way, right?
What is that underlying sensation?
So if you're trying to avoid that chocolate bar,
it might be hunger, or it might not be hunger, right?
So I used to be clinically obese.
And I'll tell you what, I did not eat to excess
because I was hungry.
I was eating to excess because I was lonely.
I was eating to excess because I was bored.
I was eating to excess because I felt guilty
about how much I had just eaten.
It wasn't just about the hunger, right?
Very few people who are obese are just hungry all the time.
That's not what's going on.
It's because we're eating our feelings.
That's what's happening.
So that's the first step.
We have to understand the deeper reason.
How did you understand that?
A lot of work, a lot of figuring out stuff in my life
to help me understand that.
And I think actually that's where my fascination
with what I do today in terms of,

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it's the same exact reason that we would overdo
our use of technology.
It's not the technologies fault, guys.
I hate to tell you this.
I wish I could blame Zuckerberg and TikTok,
but these are just tools, right?
And then before those, there were other tools.
It was they used to call our generation couch potatoes.
And before that, it was the radio was the moral panic.
And before that, it was comic books.
There's always some moral panic, or at all,
this is melting our brains
because we don't want to face the facts
that we are looking for escape from these internal triggers.
Time management is pain management.
All human behaviors driven by desire to escape discomfort.
So when you realize that, that you know what?
I was just unable to deal with these sensations
in a, in a healthful way that moved me towards traction.
I was trying to escape them with distraction.
It's not until you understand what sensations
you're trying to escape from that you can deal with them.
If you can't sit around the table with a friend
without looking at your phone every three minutes,
it's not the phone.
It's your inability to deal with the discomfort
of maybe having silence or boredom
or whatever else is going on in your life.
So that has to be the first step.
It's not the only step, but that's the first step.
I'm really compelled by really interested in
how you figured out the thing you were trying to escape from.
Because I think that's the starting point,
which is a very difficult starting point for most people.
They can see the sort of compulsive behavior
that's maybe making them live outside of their values
or causing them to excessively eat
or excessively watch porn or whatever it might be.
But diagnosing the root cause of that
is a difficult thing to do.
Most of us don't know what we don't know.
It isn't, it isn't.
You don't have to go to therapy.

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No, there's nothing wrong with it.
If it's helpful, please do it.
But that's not a requirement.
Something as simple as...
So whenever I work, I have on my desk,
I have a little post-it note and a pen handy.
And when I get distracted,
or when I even feel the sense of distraction,
just noting down that sensation,
just writing down what is it that I felt
right before the distraction.
So I write every day.
And all I want to do when I write, you know this, right?
When you write, all you want to do is go Google something
or do some research or go check email for a quick sec,
or let me just find that one thing that might be...
And they're all distractions.
They're all taking you away from the core thing you need to do,
which you said you would do, which is right.
And so if I can just pause for a second
and reflect on what was that sensation
that I was feeling right before.
It was boredom.
It was anxiety.
It was fearfulness.
It was uncertainty.
Just writing it down is an incredible first step
towards gaining power over that discomfort
because then you can start to identify it.
And so what I'll do many times is just pause to reflect on,
wait a minute, what's going on there, right?
What is that sensation?
Because then you can begin to do
what's called reframing the trigger.
So now when I feel the sensation of wanting to get distracted,
I say, you know what?
What's going on here?
Okay, I'm feeling this sensation because I'm stressed.
Why am I stressed?
Because this is really important to me.
I want to get this right for my readers and for myself.
And so reframing it as not a negative,
but something that happens not to me, but for me,

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that that sensation is a sign that I can listen to.
I think most of us, we think when we feel this discomfort,
that's happening to us, right?
But it's not, it's happening for us.
It's a signal for us to listen to.
Now how we interpret it is up to us.
And that's where the magic happens.
If you interpret it as something that is harmful,
is dangerous, that you need to escape, right?
You don't want to feel that uncomfortable sensation.
You look for distraction.
But what we find is that high performers across every field,
when you think about the arts,
when you think about sports, business,
high performers, when they feel those internal triggers,
they experience the same internal triggers
the rest of us do.
They experience loneliness and stress and anxiety,
just like everyone else does.
But they deal with it by using it as rocket fuel
to push them towards traction, whereas distractible people,
as soon as they feel that discomfort,
they try and escape it with distraction.
That's the big difference.
That's one of the things that you said to me
when we spoke last time,
that really has had a profound impact on my life,
specifically around the area of procrastination.
You said about that, which is like taking a moment
to pause and ask yourself what the,
which psychological discomfort you're trying
to escape from in the moment.
And then that second step.
So now I'm clear.
I'm trying not to do this book,
because this particular chapter,
I just don't feel that competent on.
I don't feel like I've researched it.
It's making my brain feel a bit hot, thinking about it.
I reframe it and go, okay, so I've understood it now.
Then what do I do?
Yeah. So step one is.
Understand it.

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Is master those internal triggers,
or they become your master.
That's step number one.
There's a bunch of techniques.
We're just covering the surfaces over a dozen different techniques
that you can use to help you master those internal triggers.
Now, the second step is to make time for traction.
Okay.
So when you have those doubts,
one of these techniques that is really life changing
is scheduling time for worry.
Scheduling time for worry.
That what happens is in the moment,
we feel these feelings, we think these thoughts,
and a distractible person will say,
well, I got to deal with that sensation right now.
I have to work through whatever it is
that I'm feeling right now,
and they stop everything to do that.
And that's not the right method.
The right method is to write down that sensation
and get back to the task at hand as quickly as possible.
We're using these four strategies.
Then later on, right now that you've written down
what that sensation is,
you're going to make time in your calendar
to think about that sensation.
So you start processing it.
Using the book example.
I've hit chapter 12,
and I just I'm struggling with this chapter.
Right.
So.
So you step number one,
you have these tools,
like maybe I can digress for a second.
I'll tell you my favorite tool
for mastering internal triggers.
It's called the 10 minute rule.
This comes from acceptance and commitment therapy.
And the 10 minute rule says
that you can give in to any distraction,
any distraction.

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Maybe it's smoking that cigarette
if you're trying to quit.
Maybe it's eating that piece of chocolate cake
if you're on a diet.
Maybe it's checking social media,
whatever it is, whatever distraction,
you can give into that distraction,
but not right now.
You can give in in 10 minutes.
Don't misunderstand, not for 10 minutes.
Sometimes people get it wrong.
It's in 10 minutes.
OK.
So what does that do?
What that does is we talked
about psychological reactants earlier
and you asked how do you,
what do you do about psychological reactants?
You're allowing yourself to acknowledge
that you are in control.
That you decide what many people do
is they have strict abstinence, right?
Strict abstinence says,
no, I will not do it, right?
I won't eat sugar.
I won't get distracted.
I will do this.
I will do that as opposed to saying,
hey, I'm an adult.
I can do whatever I want.
I choose not to go off track
for the next 10 minutes.
That's it.
In 10 minutes,
I can give into whatever I want.
So now I'm in control.
You know, the whole just say no technique turns out
makes you ruminate and think about
and have more discomfort
around the thing you want,
increasing these internal triggers.
And that actually is what makes you
give into that distraction.

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We know that with smoking,
actually, it's very interesting.
We're finding that nicotine is less and less part of the
reason people get addicted to cigarettes.
It's more about the rumination around.
I want to smoke, but I can't.
I want to smoke, but I shouldn't.
I want to smoke.
I want to smoke.
Fine.
I'll finally smoke.
Now I get relief.
How do we know this?
If you ask smokers, why do they smoke?
The number one reason is relaxing.
That makes no sense.
Nicotine is a stimulant.
Makes no sense.
Right.
Why would it be relaxing?
It's relaxing because finally,
I can stop telling myself,
I don't have to do it anymore.
I don't have to fight with myself anymore.
And that eases that psychological reactants.
I can finally give in.
So when you use this 10 minute rule and say,
okay, I can give into that distraction
in 10 minutes from now,
what you're doing is you're establishing agency, right?
Now you're in control,
and we can do anything for 10 minutes.
And if 10 minutes feels like too long,
try the five minute rule.
The idea is that you're building that ability over time.
So the 10 minute rule becomes a 12 minute rule,
becomes a 15 minute rule,
and you're learning, wait a minute,
I can't actually delay gratification.
Remember, all these problems of distraction
are an impulse control issue.
So when you teach yourself, wait a minute,
okay, I could delay for five, 10 minutes.

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That's no big deal.
You're proving to yourself,
hey, I'm not addicted to these things.
I'm not powerless.
My brain isn't being hijacked.
I do have control as long as I use these practices, right?
So the 10 minute rule is a very, very effective technique.
Now, when you, we were talking about budgeting
that time later on, okay?
So when you use those techniques,
that's step number one,
by the way, there's a dozen other techniques
that you can use.
The 10 minute rule is just one of them.
Later on in the day,
you're gonna put time in your schedule
to come back to that feeling, right?
I want you to literally put time in your calendar
called worry time.
And that's where you're going to look back
at that posted note and worry about all the things
that you thought you would normally
have to get to throughout your day.
Does that make sense?
So I used to do this all the time.
I would say, oh, I've got this worry.
I need to take care of that worry right now.
And that would derail me.
As opposed to when I started writing down
and planning for that worry time,
you know what happened?
Nine out of 10 of those worries and emotions
and fears and thoughts,
melted away.
When I had a few minutes to think about them,
you know what?
Actually, that wasn't that important.
That didn't have to get done.
That wasn't really a problem, right?
And the one out of 10 that really was an issue
that I did need to think about,
okay, now I have time to actually think about it.
So one, it compartmentalizes that time

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so it doesn't pull you away
and it lets your brain relax.
Second thing it does is that it lets your brain say,
okay, I don't have to worry about this problem right now.
I can think about it later.
We see this, by the way, with children.
Many parents, there's a whole section in the book
indistractable on how to raise indistractable kids.
And so many parents ask me about what do I do
with social media and this and that.
Part of my advice is schedule time
for your kids to play video games.
Put it in their daily schedule.
Like sit down with them and make a schedule for the day
and have that time
because then they don't have to worry about all day.
When do I get to play Fortnite?
When do I get to hang out with my friends online?
It's in their schedule.
It's coming.
They don't have to think about it all day long.
And so it's the same with any of these potential distractions.
We want to compartmentalize these times
when we can think about them later in the day and work on them.
So what happens then?
So I've compartmentalized it.
I'm writing my book on my chapter 12.
I've got a bunch of worries popping.
I'm scheduling that for later.
And I'm going to crack on with the book.
That's what I say to myself.
That's section two of your four step process, right?
Right, making time for traction.
So you're going to finish that time box?
Yeah.
Right.
So if you said I'm going to work on this book for 30 minutes,
finish the time box.
Even if you're just sitting there staring into space,
right?
Steven Pressfield talks about this and the war of art.
It's about putting your butt in the chair.
That's what makes a professional is you do the work.

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And what you find is it's very boring for a few seconds.
This happens every time I sit down to write.
There's that pause of, you know what?
Maybe I'm just not feeling it.
Maybe I should just stop for a little bit, right?
You feel that all the time, right?
If you just sit there, if you just stick with it,
even if it's just putting your hands on the keyboard
and just hanging out for a few seconds,
it always comes back, right?
Maybe a minute or two or 20 later, it'll come back.
And if it doesn't, that's fine.
Just finish that time box.
That's the most important thing.
Step three.
So step three is hacking back the external triggers.
So this is when we do talk about the usual suspects,
the pings, the dings, the rings.
That's where we, you know, very systematically go through
what a lot of people complain about,
but it's really only 10% of the problem,
because 90% of our distractions begin from within.
But people, you know, do have these issues.
We talk about the phone, the computer.
What turns out to be a much bigger problem
is not the technology.
It's what the technology is attached to, right?
So what if it's your boss?
That's the distraction.
What if it's your kids that are a distraction?
We love them to death, right?
Our kids are great,
but they can be a huge source of distraction.
Meetings.
Oh my God, how many stupid meetings do we have to attend
that are nothing but a distraction,
especially now that Zoom makes it accessible
so that wherever you are, you know,
people can call meetings, those are huge distractions.
Of course, Slack channels,
and that's what we get into more in the book,
in terms of, okay, systematically,
what do you do about these various external triggers?

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What would you do about that?
And what's your general view?
Let's take this into the professional context now.
You know the design of, like, most offices,
the kind of open plan format
where everybody can just walk over to someone else
and say, oh, Jenny, have you got a minute?
Could you just take a look at this?
Yeah, yeah.
The same applies in, you know, the healthcare field
and other sort of scientific fields
where you're working around a lot of people
who can just tap you on the shoulder
and say, could you just take a look at this?
Yeah, can you pass me the book?
Yeah.
So every copy of the book comes with...
Oh, did you tear it out already?
Maybe.
Oh, you've had this for a while.
So you tore it out already.
So usually right here in the back,
there is a piece of cardstock that you put,
it's this red piece of cardstock
that you fold to the thirds
and you put on your computer monitor.
And it tells your colleagues, I am indistractable,
please come back later.
And that screen sign is a wonderful way,
you know, you put on your computer monitor
if you work in an open floor plan office
that says, hey, I just need to be indistractable
for a little bit, right?
People say, well, why don't I just put on headphones?
Well, people think you're listening to an episode
on YouTube or something,
they don't realize that you're working with intent.
So that's one easy way to do it.
Another thing you can do is to start managing your manager.
And this is something that all of us
can start doing if we have, you know, bosses
who I hear this all the time says, you look,
I'm indistractable, I followed all your techniques,

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but my boss keeps interrupting me, what do I do?
So one of the things you can do,
one of the benefits of step two there
where you can make time for attraction
is when you have a time box calendar,
you have an artifact,
you have something that you can physically print out
and show to other people.
So what I want folks to do when they say,
look, my boss isn't leaving me alone
when I need to work with that distraction,
what do I do?
What you want to do is you want to sit down with your boss
for 10, 15 minutes.
You say, boss, hey, can we sit down
for 15 minutes on Monday morning?
I want to ask you something.
You sit down with them and you show them your time box calendar.
You take out the calendar for your working hours
and you say, hey, boss, okay, here's what I'm doing this week.
So here's my time for this meeting.
Here's my time for email.
Here's my focused work time.
Here's what I'm doing this week.
Here's the various projects you asked me to work on.
Now you see this other piece of paper here.
This is where I wrote down all the things
that you asked me to do
that I'm having trouble fitting into my schedule.
And what you're doing with this process
is you're avoiding one of the worst pieces
of productivity advice that we hear all the time,
which is if you want to be more productive,
you have to learn how to say no.
That is the kind of advice
that only a tenured professor would tell you.
That is terrible advice.
You're going to tell the person who pays your bills,
no, you're going to get fired.
That's awful advice.
Instead of saying no, what you want to do
is to engage your boss in helping you do the one thing
that they absolutely have to do as a manager,

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which is prioritize.
So you ask them, how can I make sure
that I do what you asked me to do
based on my schedule for the week?
And here's what they're going to do.
They're going to look at that and say,
you know what, that meeting,
that's actually not that important.
But that, this project over here
that you put on the piece of paper,
that's actually super important.
Can you swap those out?
And so by doing that,
you're doing what's called schedule syncing.
You're making sure that their priorities
are also reflected in your schedule.
And bosses will worship the ground you walk on.
They love this because
every boss out there, every manager,
we're wondering kind of what our people are doing.
That's what they want to know,
but they don't want to ask you that
because they don't want you to feel
like you're being micromanaged.
So you're proactively doing that for them
and you're showing them,
hey, this is the time when I need to do focused work.
This is when I'm going to be undistractable.
On that point of priorities,
you said that startup founders really only have one job,
which is to prioritize.
And that really did smack me in the face
because that's so unbelievably true.
We have a finite amount of resources founders.
We have a lot of things we want to do.
We have more things we want to do than time and time in a day.
And creating systems, like you said,
where we can sit down and reflect on our priorities
is so important because we might have an idea every day.
Then we get to one month later
and there's an our to-do list or our teams are overcome
by doing the first things we said,
not the most important things we've said.

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And a lot of the time,
because of, I don't know, cognitive dissonance
or pride or ego or whatever,
you don't want to throw something out
that a people have started working on
or that you've told them to work on.
Like going up to your team and saying,
okay, we're just going to cancel that project
we've just spent two weeks working on
because this is a new priority of ours.
Sometimes can feel difficult.
Absolutely. It's called the commitment bias,
that when we commit to something or sunk cost fallacy,
it's also called that,
that when we have a sunk cost in something,
we value it more.
But of course, that's silly, especially in business.
I mean, this is, I had a professor in a business school
who said every business dies for the same reason.
Businesses only die for one reason, cash.
They run out of cash.
Cash is oxygen, oxygen is life.
And the number one cause of a business running out of cash
is doing the wrong thing for too long.
So being able to cut your losses
and saying, I know it feels wrong,
but I know it's right in my head.
That is an essential skill of every CEO
because again, prioritization is your only job
and good priority.
People who are good at prioritization make for good CEOs
and people who are bad at prioritization make for bad CEOs.
So we're in step three of the four steps.
What's step number four?
So step four is preventing distraction with PACTS.
So PACTS are these what's called a pre-commitment device.
So this is what you do after the first three steps.
So you master the internal triggers,
you make time for traction,
you hack back the external triggers
as the last line of defense,
as the firewall against distraction,
you're going to prevent distraction with a PAC.

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Now what are PACTS?

It's when you decide in advance what you will do to keep yourself in that task.

And there's three types of PACTS.

We have, we call effort PACTS, price PACTS, and identity PACTS.

An effort PACTS is when there's some bit of friction in between you and the thing you don't want to do.

So it's just us and your millions of viewers here.

So I'll get a little personal, okay?

A few years ago, my wife and I, and again, we've been married for 22 years now.

A few years ago, before I was writing this book, we noticed that our sex life was suffering.

That every night we were going to bed and I was fondling my iPhone and she was caressing her iPad. You and me both.

Right? And we were going to bed later and later.

And not only were we not getting proper sleep, we all know how important rest is, our sex life was suffering.

So when I started this research, I came across this research around the importance of these effort PACTS.

And I went to the hardware store and I bought us this \$10 outlet timer.

Now this outlet timer, you plug it into the wall and whatever you plug into that outlet timer will turn on or off at any time of day and night.

So what did we do with that?

We plugged in our internet router into this timer.

So every night in our household at 10 p.m., the internet shuts off.

Now, could I turn it back on?

Of course I could, but I'd have to go under my desk, unplug this timer, reset it and plug it back in.

That would take effort.

So I put some friction in between myself and the distraction.

And lo and behold, every night we all knew, okay, the internet's going to shut down at 10 p.m., finish up whatever you need to do.

And it gave me that bit of mindfulness to say, okay, do I really need to still check email or social media or whatever silly thing I was doing?

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Or is it time to do what I said I was going to do,
which is get some rest, go to bed
and maybe be intimate with my wife.
People might hear that and go,
you didn't need a timer to have sex with your wife.
But I did.
I did.
Because look, in the moment, you're tired,
you're just kind of drifting off.
We've all done this, right?
Where you're looking at something on the internet
and it just, it's kind of harmless
because she's brushing her teeth and I'm waiting
and just one thing leads to another.
And before you know it,
it's you've gone to bed later than you anticipated
and you've given up a lot in the process.
So having that rule, again,
having that time box calendar, that's step number two,
where you have to, we have in our calendars bedtime, right?
Why do we do that?
Oh, I know, okay, I'll eventually I'm going to go to sleep,
but why do I have a bedtime in my calendar?
And isn't it ironic for those of us who have children,
we tell our children, you need a bedtime, right?
We're adamant about how our children need bedtimes.
But for us, we don't need a bedtime
and my daughter called us out on this.
And she said, daddy, what's your bedtime?
And she was absolutely right.
We've all read these books.
We all know how important sleep is.
And yet, we don't go to bed.
It's crazy to me how many,
I see this with multiple domains in health and fitness.
We get new tropics and we get blackout curtains
and we get, you know, all we melatonin.
Just go to bed on time.
That's the number one reason people don't get enough sleep.
They don't go to bed on time.
So did I need an internet timer?
Yeah, we all do, because this is what keeps us awake, right?
We do all these interesting things.

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Again, the price of progress is that you can find anything you want at any time of day or night on the internet. So we do need these packs, again, as the last line of defense. It's not the first thing.

You know, I don't want people to listen to me and say, okay, fine, I'll get an internet timer, then I won't get distracted.

No, if you don't first deal with the internal triggers that lead you to distraction, you'll find something else. Someone's also going to say, listen, you've got 4G internet on your phone, you've got cellular internet, so you can just go on. Again, but now it's effort, right?

If I really wanted to lie to myself, of course I could. That's not the point, right?

Yeah.

That there's always a way.

The point is it has a bit of friction, right?

It's that bit of effort that now I have to take.

And more than anything, it's a statement you're making to you and everyone in your social environment that at 10 p.m. is a shut off time.

Whether people are dear to that, as you say, there's ways to circumnavigate that, but it's the statement of having that shut off timer.

Exactly.

And now, by the way, it actually wouldn't even matter because we all know the internet's going to shut off at 10. We all need to start getting ready to stop doing whatever we're doing because now we don't even need it anymore.

It's become part of our nightly ritual, right?

And by the way, what I want to illustrate is the concept, not the practice, right?

Tactics are what you do, strategy is why you do it. That's more important.

I think a lot of these books around similar topics, around dealing with focus and productivity, it's a lot of life hacks, right?

But what I wanted was more the strategy, the psychological principles around why we get distracted. And then I'll let people come up with their own tactics. I give you lots of tactics as well,

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but this is just one illustration
of how we can use this strategy.
And that's only one pack.
There's also two other packs I can share as well.
There's a lot of...
Just before we get onto the two other packs,
a lot of debate over the years
about this idea of willpower.
Just before we start recording, I said to you,
I look to pull these time management techniques
and I've looked at these diet fads.
And there's so many of them because it appears
that none of them really work
without this underlying thing called discipline.
So you can have all the...
I can time box and I can...
The one, two, three, four technique
and the ABC five technique, whatever.
But if I don't have the underlying discipline,
then I'm not going to do any of these things.
Discipline is such an interesting word.
It kind of catches a lot of different things.
A lot of psychological forces you've described.
And this other theory of willpower
that's sort of trundled on through the ages,
that we have a limited amount of willpower.
And if we try and do too many things at once,
then we'll do none of them
and only take on one bad habit at once.
Is there any truth to all of that stuff?
No.
No?
No, willpower is not a limited resource.
At least from the latest research.
Science is never conclusive,
but from what we know today, it seems...
So a few years ago,
there was this concept called ego depletion.
Ego depletion is exactly what you mentioned.
It's that we run out of willpower,
like someone would run out of battery charge on their phone.
Right?
That it's a depletable resource.

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And this concept was promoted
and kind of widely circulated in the popular press.
And there were some fantastical claims made
that if you drank sugar, sweetened lemonade,
that you would boost your willpower.
And it turns out, as often happens in the social sciences,
when something sounds a little fishy,
we replicate the study.
We try and run the study again.
And Carol Dweck, you might know from...
She's probably been on your show from her book Mindset.
She decided to replicate these studies.
She decided to run them again, these ego depletion studies.
And she found that the only people
who experienced ego depletion,
the only people who actually did run out of willpower,
like someone would run out of battery on their phone,
the only people who experienced that
were people who believed that willpower was a limited resource.
That's it.
So it turns out...
I mean, this is incredibly important
because it has implications for all sorts of things in our life.
When we believe that we are somehow deficient,
that our brain is broken,
that the world is conspiring against us to hijack our brains,
when we believe these self-limiting thoughts,
we act in accordance.
And so it's very much the case with this ego depletion myth
that our willpower is not limited unless we believe it is.
And on this point of...
Because I think the word discipline
is somewhat interchangeably used with willpower.
It's doing the thing you said you were going to do
and you intended to do.
I was trying to figure out what discipline is
and where it comes from,
why certain aspects of my life, like going to the gym now.
So for the last three years,
I've gone to the gym about six days a week.
Before then, I couldn't.
DJing.
I've started DJing and I've done that for about 12 months.

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I've been disciplined with that.
This podcast, I've been able to do it.
We released two episodes a week
and we have done for a while now.
Why am I disciplined in some areas of my life?
Why can I continue to show up?
And why in other areas of my life is it this kind of
failing battle to get back on the horse every other week
because I've fallen off?
I had a hypothesis where I was like, well, with DJing,
I have a goal that means...
This is maybe my discipline equation.
A goal that means a lot to me.
It's worth the pursuit.
If I attain it, it feels like it's worthwhile.
Plus the psychological engagement
and enjoyment of the pursuit of the goal.
Like I want to be a DJ.
Plus the psychological engagement and enjoyment.
I love the process of DJing.
It's like meditation or therapy.
Listening to your favorite music for hours,
doing nothing other than being in that flow state.
Minus, this is where you come in, I guess,
is the psychological discomfort
or disengagement associated with the pursuit.
So for example, if the DJing equipment
was up in the spare room and I had to load it up every day
and it took 35 minutes to do it,
and then I had to load up the software every day
and it was really difficult,
I might find the process not worthwhile
and my discipline might wane.
When you look at that equation,
the why, the enjoyment of the pursuit,
minus the sort of unenjoyment of the pursuit,
does that make sense?
There's a lot there.
I mean, the basics are there.
I think what's missing is that you...
So with this DJing pursuit, you enjoy it.
And so it's not hard to do something you enjoy.
This is my problem with flow.

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You've heard about Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
with the concept of flow,
that you can get into this state where time flies
and it's effortless.
And the examples, if you read the book,
many of the examples are from sports.
They're from things that people really enjoy doing.
And that's like Hollywood.
It's nice work if you can get it.
How do you get into flow
when it's something you really don't want to do?
So right now you enjoy DJing,
because to correct me if I'm wrong,
you're not doing it professionally,
or maybe you are.
Not really.
So my guess is, right now as an amateur,
it's fun.
Stakes are low.
You're just enjoying the process.
Very much what I used to do when I first started vlogging.
I was just writing for myself,
and then I got a few readers,
and it was kind of fun.
Just pure joy, pure amateur behavior.
And then what happened when I said,
okay, now I want to publish a book,
or if you decide to professionally DJ,
it's going to start getting hard, right?
Now there's all this other stuff you don't want to do
around the core experience, right?
Now you've got to figure out,
how do I build my brand,
and how do I get people packed into my show,
and all this stuff that you have to do
that maybe isn't as fun.
And that's where flow falls down.
So this is exactly what's happening and happened.
So I started DJing,
and then we announced I'm going to do a show.
We've got 3,000 people to come to this venue.
And in the lead up to that,
DJing became a lot less fun.

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And even now,
so they're trying to book me to do a show
and I be through in Marbella this year.
And suddenly I'm getting all uncomfortable
about DJing again.
Because, so when I look at the equation I presented,
what seems to have happened in that equation
is the perceived psychological cost has increased suddenly.
Because now there's like nerves,
and yeah, yeah, now there's like worry,
and all these other forces at play.
And that equations now have killed,
and my discipline has dropped.
Right, exactly, exactly.
And so that's where becoming indestructible comes into play.
You don't need to be indestructible
for something you love doing anyway.
Right, there's no problem with that.
Follow-through is easy.
It's how do I do this stuff I know I need to do,
but I really don't feel like doing it.
If you ask, you know, we talked about earlier,
the only reason businesses fail is because they run out of cash.
The only reason we fail at our goals is only one.
The only reason we fail at our goals,
because we don't feel like it.
We don't feel like it.
I don't feel like going to the gym right now.
I don't feel like working on that book.
I don't feel like whatever it is.
It's a feeling.
Fundamentally, it's a feeling.
Of course, there's outside factors, of course.
But in terms of the number one reason
we don't pursue our goal is we quit, right?
That's the most prominent reason we don't follow through,
and that tends to be because of a feeling.
So when there are these tasks that suddenly get hard,
right, are suddenly difficult,
that's when we need different tactics.
It's easy to do the stuff we enjoy.
It's hard to do the stuff that we don't enjoy.
So what would you advise me to do then?

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In the case of DJing, I've got, you know,
potentially two shows this summer in Europe.
So I would start with your values,
and that's part of step two of making time for traction.
When people ask, you know,
how do I make a time box calendar?
Where do you start?
You start with your values.
So what are values?
The definition of values in my book is attributes
of the person you want to become.
Attributes of the person you want to become.
So then what you do is you put your values
in terms of these three life domains.
I look at them as concentric circles.
At the center of these three life domains is you.
If you can't take care of yourself,
you can't take care of others,
you can't make the world a better place.
So in that, when it comes to that life domain,
you look at the things that you want to do for yourself,
the time you want to spend
to become the person you want to become.
And you look at your calendar,
you look at this blank calendar for the next seven days,
and you ask yourself,
how would the person I want to become spend their time?
And you put that time in your schedule.
So time for rest, time for reading,
time for video games.
It doesn't matter.
Put that time in your schedule.
The next life domain is your relationships.
Part of the reason we have this loneliness epidemic
in the industrialized world
is that we don't have the time scheduled
for our relationships like we used to.
As the industrialized world became more secular,
the church, the synagogue, the mosque,
we don't go to these social interactions
where we care for others and others care for us.
We don't have that schedule in our day anymore.
And I'm not saying, and I'm pretty secular myself,

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I'm not saying we have to do that,
but that is what we have lost
because we don't have these regular,
what used to be religious institutions.
It doesn't have to be real.
I mean, Robert Putnam was talking about this in the 1990s
in his book, Bowling Alone.
We don't have these regular social interactions
like previous generations did.
And we need to bring those back.
I actually think social media overuse is a symptom,
not the cause of the fact that we don't see people regularly.
So you need to put in your calendar time
for those relationships, your friends,
your family, your kids, your significant others.
You have to put that time in your schedule.
Don't give them whatever scraps of time are left over,
put it in your schedule.
Then finally, your work domain.
This is where most people start.
It's actually, I think, where we need to end.
Work comes in two flavors.
We have what's called reactive work,
and we have reflective work.
Reactive work is how distracted people spend their days.
Reacting to messages, reacting to notifications,
reacting to requests all day long, reacting to things.
And that's fine.
Everybody's job will involve some amount of reactive work.
But if you're not scheduling time for reflective work,
you're going to run real fast in the wrong direction.
You have to put time in your schedule to think.
If you want to do work that is creative,
work that requires focus, you have to schedule that time.
It's okay if it's only 15, 20 minutes,
but that time has to be on your schedule.
So to answer your question of, okay,
well, what do I do with this passion I have around DJing?
It's a factor of how much time you want to put into it,
based on your values, based on the kind of person you want to become.
So what would the Stephen you want to become?
How much time, time, first and foremost, not outcome?
I think that's the problem with a lot of goal planning.

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This is one of my beef with to-do lists.

To-do lists are a series of outputs.

I want to do this.

I want to do this.

I want to do this.

I want it.

And it has no constraint.

A to-do list has no constraints.

You can always add more.

And so what happens?

You come home with your to-do list of a million things
after you've worked really hard all day long.

And most of those things you have not crossed off.

So what does that say to your self-image?

If every day you come home,

and all these things still haven't been done

after a long day of work,

and you haven't done what you said you would do, loser.

So day after day, week after week,

month after month, year after year,

you're reinforcing this self-image

of someone who doesn't do what they said they're going to do.

Right?

As opposed to a time box calendar has constraints.

Same 24 hours in a day.

Right?

And I don't care if you're Jeff Bezos or Elon Musk.

You can always make more money.

You can't make more time.

I think it's exactly flipped.

Most people are cheap with their money

and generous with their time.

I think it should be the opposite.

Right?

We should be cheap with our time

and generous with our money

because you can always make more money.

You can always make more money.

You cannot make more time.

So a time box calendar forces you

to work with constraints

and decide based on your values how much time

you can afford to spend on whatever you want to do.

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Right?

Because if you put in everything,

you'll get nothing.

You'll live in regret.

Whereas if you say, look, I only have four hours a week for DJing endeavors.

And here's where I'm going to put that in

because I also want to spend time with my friends.

I need to take care of myself.

I need to take care of my business.

So it's not based on outcome.

It's based on input.

Right?

So if you went to a baker, okay?

And you said, hey, my kid has a birthday party.

I needed two dozen cupcakes.

Bakers going to say, okay, I need flour.

I need sugar.

I need butter.

I need all these inputs.

I need these ingredients to make the output.

But when it comes to knowledge work, we only think about the output.

But what's our input?

Our input is just two things.

Time and attention.

Those are our ingredients.

That's it.

So you can't just think about the output.

You can't just think about the cupcakes.

You have to think about the input.

The input is time and attention.

And that, just like ingredients for a cupcake, has to be budgeted for.

You have to plan that ahead or it's not going to work out.

So you were my inspiration for starting time-blocking,

I've called it, and time-boxing.

Yeah, same thing.

And it's really, really been helpful, specifically in times when I'm not in work.

So when I go away to write, for example, and I don't have meetings that I have to do or that pop in and out, et cetera,

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it's been super helpful.

And also, I'll be honest, during the pandemic was when I really, to the point that I started developing a time-blocking app with a friend of mine, because it was that useful for me.

The pandemic had happened.

We weren't meeting anybody.

We weren't having sort of in-person meetings.

So I had long days, but that felt a bit more empty than usual.

So to sort of get a grasp on them

and stop them being whittled away by distraction,

I started time-blocking.

And it was amazing for me.

I guess one of the questions I want to ask

before I get onto this is, do you even...

In my personal relationship with my girlfriend,

we've been together for about four years,

pretty much ever since we first met, me and you first met.

It's the first time I've lived with someone.

She's moved in, we live together.

And one of the things that a busy lifestyle can do,

and I think you've described it as well,

is it can have an impact on your sex life and relationship, dates, date night, etc.

So I propose the idea to her, because of you.

We should schedule these things,

because I schedule everything else that's important to me.

So we should schedule our date night and those kinds of things,

because that's equally important to me too.

And she was a bit resistant to the idea at first,

because in her rebuttal was that it kind of takes the spontaneity and the spice and the...

Date night or scheduling sex?

Because some people schedule sex.

I don't go that far.

I wouldn't go as far as scheduling sex,

but it's really like spending time together and doing stuff.

She was resistant to scheduling it,

because she felt that it took the...

But there's an interesting concept.

Okay, so when I was...

My wife and I met at university,

and we met in an economics class.

And in this class, they discussed this concept

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of a residual beneficiary.

A residual beneficiary in business is the person, the chump, who receives whatever's left over when a business is sold.

So first debt holders get their share, then the equity holders.

Whatever's left over, the residual beneficiary gets.

And after we'd been married for a few years, she sat me down, she says,

Nir, you have turned me into the residual beneficiary.

Wow, what a thing to say.

Right?

I get whatever scraps of time are left over.

If you and your relationship, by the way, my book is not for people who have a perfect life.

Okay, I don't have a perfect life.

I still get distracted from time to time.

The difference is between a distractable person and an indistractable person

is that a distractable person

keeps getting distracted by the same things.

Poila-Coila has a wonderful quote.

He said,

A mistake repeated more than once is a decision.

Such a good quote.

A mistake repeated more than once is a decision.

Good, right?

So distractable people keep getting distracted by the same things again and again.

How many times are we going to complain about TikTok and Facebook before we say enough?

I'm going to do something about it, right?

Indistractable people say,

Okay, I got distracted once,

but you're not going to let it happen again and again.

So I'm going to take steps today

to prevent getting distracted tomorrow.

So when my wife and I found that our schedules

were getting busier and busier,

and we weren't making the proper time for each other,

it wasn't happening spontaneously.

Then we had to go to plan B.

And plan B, for a long time, there was no plan.

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It was just, well, it's not happening.
The problem is people interpret the fact,
maybe you felt this, that not making time,
not being spontaneous means that we don't love each other as much.
And I think that's a huge mistake.
That's not at all.
It certainly wasn't in my relationship with my wife.
I still loved her just as much.
Just thought I was busy, honey,
and there's this big thing happening here,
and I need to do this, and I need to do that.
And the time, what's the boy?
And we wouldn't spend time together.
That's no indication that I don't love my wife.
It's an indication that I didn't know
how to prioritize my wife properly.
So I stopped making her the residual beneficiary.
If we have extra spontaneous time,
sometimes a meeting is canceled.
Great, let's do something together.
But at minimum, we know on Friday nights, that's our day night.
Quick one, as you guys know,
we're lucky enough to have Blue Jeans by Verizon
as a sponsor of this podcast.
And for anyone that doesn't know,
Blue Jeans is an online video conferencing tool
that allows you to have slick, fast,
high quality online meetings
without all the glitches you might normally find
with online meeting tools.
And they have a new feature called Blue Jeans Basic.
Blue Jeans Basic is essentially a free version
of their top quality video conferencing tool.
That means you get an immersive video experience
that is super high quality, super easy,
and super basically zero fast.
Apart from all the incredible features
like zero time limits on meeting calls,
it also comes with high fidelity audio and video,
including Dolby Voice, which is incredibly useful.
They also have enterprise grade security
so you can collaborate with confidence.
It's so smooth that it's quite literally changing

the game for myself and my team
without compromising on quality.
To find out more, all you have to do is search
BlueJeans.com and let me know how you get on.
I'm in an interesting phase at the moment
in my fitness and health journey
because I'm training for Socrates,
which takes place in June at Old Trafford.
I've been training a lot differently,
but regardless of how I train,
regardless of whether I'm doing strength training
or cardiovascular training,
which is predominantly what I'm doing now,
I need this, which is Hewlett's
Nutritionally Complete Protein Product.
The crazy thing about this,
which I almost find hard to achieve,
is that it's 20 grams of protein.
You get 26 vitamins and minerals,
and it's only roughly about 100 calories,
105 calories, and it tastes like a dream.
The salted caramel one is my favorite.
I've got the second favorite option of mine
in front of me, which is vanilla fudge.
Both of them taste amazing.
A little bit of ice in it.
It tastes like a fantastic healthy milkshake.
Give it a try.
If you haven't already,
this is actually next to RTD.
This is my favorite product from Hewlett.
Try it.
Love it.
Number one protein powder.
When we do fall out of
quote-unquote balance in some way,
when we maybe don't have our priorities in order,
at least this is what people think.
People diagnose themselves with this thing called burnout.
I've been quite intentional with my words there
because I have my own opinions on burnout.
I don't really think burnout is what people think it is.
People think of burnout as basically doing too much work.

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I think most people, 90% of people would say that burnout is when you do too much work. It's a big topic in conversation now, this subject matter of burnout. What do you think burnout is? There's some amazing research done by two British researchers, many of them are in Stansfield and Candy, and they concluded that a toxic work environment is not the work you do, it's the type of work you do. So they wanted to see the study was what kind of work correlates with increased rates of depression and anxiety disorders. And they found two conditions that raise the rates of anxiety and depression. They literally the kind of jobs that make you sick, psychologically. And those two conditions are high expectations coupled with low control. Coupled with? Exactly, low control. So high expectations and low control. If you have high expectations and high control, no problem. People rise to the occasion. But when you have a job with high expectations and low control, that's burnout. Why? Because it's a lack of agency. I'm expected to do all this and I can't, right? I'm trying, I'm trying, I'm trying. But as much as I do, I don't have enough agency to meet these expectations. So let's zoom in on both of those. I'm really compelled by this idea of low control. When people think of control, that can mean a number of things. Is that the ability to make decisions for myself on how to accomplish the challenge? To affect the outcome. Okay. Right. So if you have, you know, you're a small cog in a big machine, but you have these very high expectations, but it doesn't all depend on you. There are other people.

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Exactly.

Low budgets.

Certain stances beyond your control that is hard,
no matter how hard you work,
you can't meet someone's expectations.

Why?

I'm trying to think from this,
the psychological discomfort framework,
why that,
that environment of high expectations,
this being pulled this way,
but then being suppressed on this end,
would cause burnout.

And burnout, I guess we have to define it as that,
what is it?

It's the sort of psychological overwhelm, which-
It's giving up.

Which makes you give up.

Yeah.

It's, I think it's because it's the definition of death.

Right?

Schopenhauer describes life
as anything that tries to affect its environment.

Life is defined by something that affects its outside environment,
changes where it is to its benefit in some way.

That's what a live organism is.

So if you cannot change your environment,
you cannot change your circumstances,
it feels like death.

And eventually you give up.

It's, you learn helplessness,
where eventually it's not worth continuing to try,
because you can't affect the outcomes.

I've always thought of burnout as being somewhat sort of
intrinsically attached to meaning.

And maybe that's exactly what you're describing there,
because you're being robbed of your ability
to affect your outside environment,
which maybe is what meaning is.

Meaning is, I think, the can be the relief valve.

So if you are toiling,

I mean, you think about the role of religion
in many people's lives historically,

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religion tells you that even though your lot in life may not change, right, there was reward to come.

So you have agency, you have control, it's just that the reward is delayed.

So even if your life is awful now, some day it'll be better.

That's, that gives you agency.

So that's meaning, right?

That gives you that meaning, that purpose of it's coming someday.

But if you believe that there's nothing you can do to get that reward, that it makes no difference, then the only logical thing to do is to quit.

I might be totally wrong here, but I think the reason I thought meaning was so important was because when you think about people in roles that typically feel that burnout, it seemed to me that it was like monotonous, tedious work where, you know, maybe like working on a production line where you're doing very, very long hours of work that is absent of meaning for you.

You don't really care about the work, but you're being pressed to do long hours.

So that was my kind of understanding of it,

because I tried to contrast it to areas where I'd never get burnout,

you know, watching Manchester United play, or playing video games, whatever.

And I thought, what's the difference?

Well, it's because of my sort of subjective meaning or enjoyment of the task.

So I thought the enjoyment and the meaning part was central somehow to becoming burnt out.

I don't know.

I'm not sure if it necessarily requires meaning per se.

I mean, you see people working two or three jobs sometimes, you know, when they're getting started from base level, just to feed their kids.

They can do very repetitive, boring work, and they do it because they are affecting change.

They have agency.

They can see the results.

They need to feed their families.

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And this idea of agency and control
is fundamentally linked to our physiological health as well,
which I find quite surprising,
that people that have greater degrees of control
in their professional endeavors are healthier.
Right. This concept of locus of control,
right, where it's external locus of control
versus internal locus of control,
or people who have external locus of control
believe that things happen to them.
People who have internal locus of control
believe that they affect change.
And what's fascinating about this is that
people who have internal locus of control
on every metric of well-being do better.
They're wealthier.
They have more, they have better relationships.
They're healthier.
Every metric of well-being,
having an internal locus of control benefits you.
Even when your circumstances dictate
that you shouldn't think that you have that much control,
even when you're in a really awful situation,
believing you have agency makes you better off.
Even if it's not true, because that mindset,
again, back to what we were saying earlier
about how mindset affects what we do.
If you believe willpower is limited,
you will act as such, right?
I used to come home after a long day of work and say,
oh, you know what? I've had a hard day.
I don't have any more willpower.
My willpower has been exhausted,
like we talked about earlier.
Give me that pint of Ben and Jerry's.
I'm going to sit on the couch and eat my ice cream,
because I believed I was spent, right?
But it was in my head.
Whereas people who believe that they have agency,
they do have control, live much healthier, better lives.
This raises the point about responsibility,
which is quite a controversial point for some reason.
Funny that that is, right?

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Why is it so controversial, do you think?

I think it's this idea, rightfully so, of not victim blaming.

But I don't think that that is incongruous,

that you don't have to blame victims,

as well as saying that we should take as much responsibility

as we possibly can.

So in my line of work, I'm fairly controversial,

because I wrote Hooked, how to build habit-forming products,

and then I wrote Indistractable,

about how to control your attention and choose your life.

And many people see those as opposites, right?

But I didn't write Hooked and Unhooked, I wrote Indistractable,

because it's about having our cake and eating it too.

It's about having both.

We can have the best of both worlds, that we can build apps,

we can build technologies that help us exercise

and learn new languages and stay healthy.

We can use these amazing technologies for good,

but we can also find ways to not get distracted from the devices

or whatever the distraction might be,

that lead us away from what we really want.

But yeah, sometimes people will say,

yeah, but that's, you know, you're blaming the victim here.

We're all victims of these technologies.

The technology companies are doing it to us, right?

The social dilemma movie tells us that our brains are being hijacked.

And they interviewed me for the social dilemma movie.

Did you see it, by the way?

I did, yeah.

Okay, so they interviewed me.

And I know you've had Johan Hari on the show

and I have big issues with his whole thesis,

because it's a line around, it's not your fault.

It's being done to you.

And look, there is no doubt that these companies

design their products to be engaging.

That's the point, right?

Do we want, hey, Netflix, stop making your show so interesting.

Apple, your phones are too user-friendly, right?

That's ridiculous.

That's the point of these products.

We want them to be engaging.

We pay for the privilege of having them be engaging.

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So it's ridiculous to think that somehow they're going to stop doing that.
It's also ridiculous to think that the government, in all its brilliant wisdom, is going to figure out how to regulate these companies properly, right?
We see, every time I come to Europe, I can't use the internet because these stupid GDPR rules that I have to constantly click, except it's, I don't even know what I'm clicking on.
They're so annoying.
We see what happens when government tries to regulate these companies. Most of the time, they're incredibly ham-fisted.
So do we just sit here?
I'm not saying I'm anti-regulation.
I am for smart regulation.
But in the meantime, what are we doing?
We're just going to sit here and wait, right?
Please, Zuckerberg, stop addicting me.
That's ridiculous.
There's so much we can do.
Starting with not thinking we're powerless in all realms of our life.
Again, even when circumstances are beyond your control, it benefits you.
It behooves you to believe you do have agency.
You do have control.
You're going to be better off, as opposed to saying, well, there's nothing I can do because what do people do when they believe they're powerless?
Nothing.
It's so interesting because I had a conversation with a friend of mine last night who is single, been single for a while.
And we were huddled around.
There was a couple of us and everyone was single.
In the circle, I'm currently not single.
And I saw some of that.
I saw some of that.
Well, it's just, it's the nature of the modern dating world.
Right.
You know, like you hear it all.
I don't want to be on these dating apps and social media doesn't work and I can't meet anybody.
So it's just the way it is.

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And you can see in that moment, it's almost like declaring defeat.

Well, there is agency in that as well.

Remember, if life is defined by something

that changes its outside environment,

that's a great way to say, well, I have agency.

I decide to quit.

It's in my control to say it's impossible.

I guess so.

Even if it is self-defeating, it feels good to say it's impossible.

But it's going to reduce your chances of finding someone.

Of course.

If you just say, okay, I can't and you blame external factors on that.

Mark Zuckerberg has become a villain in society.

You know, people have really portrayed him

as being the source of so much evil.

Destroy people's mental health because of these apps

and all of these kinds of things.

I sense you have a slightly different approach to that

or you think that's a little bit too simplified.

Am I right?

Which part?

The kind of, I saw something yesterday

where Mark Zuckerberg was playing Jiu Jitsu.

Have you played Jiu Jitsu?

Yeah, I saw the video.

Permissions of playing Jiu Jitsu.

He was doing Jiu Jitsu.

Did you see the video of him doing it?

I did, yeah.

And like the top, the person who would quote,

quote, retweeted it had said,

he's destroyed our generation's mental health,

but he's pretty good at Jiu Jitsu.

And you know, he has been attacked for the last decade

because people think that, you know, he bought these apps

and these apps have now made our lives significantly worse.

But the framing that you present seems to say,

if it wasn't those apps, it would be something else.

And it's not necessarily the apps itself.

It's our relationship to the apps because of emotional regulation

in other parts of our life.

You said something super interesting earlier,

which we kind of moved on from,

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where you said that you don't believe,
you believe that the apps are a symptom of a wider social issue.
Is that, is an accurate representation of your views?
Yeah, yeah.
I mean, I think, look, I'm not saying these companies are guilt-free.
By the way, I have been asked many times to work for them and with them.
And I always refuse because I don't want any conflict
or appearance of conflict of interest.
So I don't have any, I don't get paid by these companies in any way.
But I think there is absolutely a moral panic around social media.
We already see it now fading, right?
It was last week, it was social media.
This week, it's going to be AI.
There's always a moral panic.
And if you look back at the history of mankind,
we have always had moral panics of one thing or another,
especially with media.
Media that hijacks the brain of a population that's always been a big fear.
I think, in general, it's way overblown.
I mean, if you actually look at the research in terms of the effects of mental health,
look, overuse of any media is going to have deleterious consequences, right?
When my daughter was into Harry Potter
and she was reading Harry Potter five hours a day,
I say, hey, honey, that's too much Harry Potter, right?
Like, that's going to have some deleterious consequences as well.
You need to go outside, you need to see your friends,
you need to do other things.
So, yeah, any extremes are bad.
Now, I do think there is room for regulation for two protected classes of people.
One we currently protect, which is children.
So children, you know, my daughter can't walk into a casino
and start playing blackjack.
She can't walk into a bar and order gin and tonic.
She's too young for that, right?
So there's certain protections for children.
I think we should have those protections for social media.
I think 13 is probably too young.
The current regulation, at least in the States, is 13.
That's probably too young.
The other group of people who don't have protection,
who need protection, are pathological addicts.
So addiction, you know, we toss around this word addiction so much these days.
My wife got a box of shoes from DSW

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and the box says, danger.
Addictive contents inside, it's shoes, right?
But we use this word addiction.
We throw it around.
Addiction is a disease.
It's a pathology.
And just because something is addictive
doesn't mean it addicts everyone, clearly, right?
Many of us have a glass of wine with dinner.
We're not all alcoholics.
We have sex.
We're not all sex addicts, right?
So it's ridiculous to think just because something is addictive
to some people, it's addictive to everyone.
But if you are addicted and the company knows this might be the case,
and I've been advocating this for years,
this is the kind of legislation I do support,
then I think the government, then the company has a responsibility, right?
If an alcohol company, they don't know who's addicted.
How would they know?
How would they know who the alcoholics are?
They wouldn't know.
The online companies, they do know.
They have personal identifiable information
and they know your time on site.
So they could reach out, and this is what I'm advocating for.
I call it a use and abuse policy,
that if you are using this product,
give me a number, 30 hours a week, 40 hours a week,
whatever number is in the several standard deviations of use,
we're going to reach out to you with a very respectful message
that says we see that you are using our product
in a way that may indicate you are struggling with an addiction.
Can we help?
Can we help?
Very respectful message.
If they say no, fine.
Right?
But offer to help.
Can we help you use blocking tools
so that you're, you know, you self-select out?
Here are resources.
I think you have a responsibility.

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Now, that's about three to five percent of the population that struggles with addiction.
The problem is there's this popular narrative and a lot of people are selling a lot of books telling us that our attention is being stolen, right? Stolen from us.
If you're addicted, you could argue that.
That pathology of addiction, okay.
Everybody else, if you're not a child or you're not addicted, this is a personal responsibility issue.
It's not an addiction, it's a distraction.
But we don't want to call it that, right?
Because if it's a distraction, ah, shoot, I got to do something about it.
That's no fun.
Can't I just blame Zuckerberg?
No, I got to take some personal responsibility.
You know what, I have to learn how to manage my internal triggers.
I have to schedule my time.
I have to hack back these external triggers.
I got to put in some packs in place.
This is not hard stuff, folks, right?
The book isn't that long.
I think you may be an hour and a half, two hours to read it.
And you will be indistractable.
You'll look back at this and think this was a joke.
We were complaining about this being addictive.
Come on.
It's a few simple techniques, right?
So to sit here and complain and say, our attention is being stolen, our focus is being stolen, it's not being stolen.
We're giving it away.
Give me a break.
We're just not stolen.
We are willfully giving it away because we're not doing anything about it.
So I think, yes, is there room for regulation?
Of course.
I think there's a lot we can do.
But let's start with personal responsibility.
That's the first line of defense.

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Wouldn't that make sense?
First, let's see what we can do.
And then we can also figure out,
while the politicians figured out,
we can find ways to regulate as well.
One of the things I found compelling was the role
that our psychological trauma
and our childhood trauma can have on us.
Because one of the psychologists I sat here with
described it as gremlins and goblins.
He said, as Steve Peter said,
that some of us have goblins.
These are the hard to move, hard to budge traumas.
Usually happen below the age of 10.
That will just stay with us the whole time.
You know, like really severe traumas.
And then after that, generally speaking,
they're gremlins where you can do work
to kind of overcome them.
When people are thinking about taking those steps
in relationships or in a gym or whatever,
you know, you talked about obesity being clinically obese.
Sometimes we have these goblins at the heart of us
that limit us from taking that first step.
That just act as a gravitational force against
the behavior we want to take.
How do we, can we overcome that?
Is that, is it relevant?
Well, so severe trauma is kind of out of scope
for what I work on.
But I would say for the goblins, as you described them,
that is where I think it is very helpful to realize
that they're just feelings.
They're just feelings, right?
But feelings can be very convincing.
But feelings don't happen to us, they happen for us.
So if we can leverage that, if we can learn from that,
if we can use it like rocket fuel
to propel us towards what we want to do.
If you look at, you know, amazing artists or athletes,
it's interesting how many of them have some kind of trauma.
Right, have you ever noticed that?
Like they're running away from something

just as much as they're running towards something.
They're trying to prove something to their alcoholic father.
They're trying to prove something to somebody
because of what happened to them.
So, you know, we have post-traumatic stress.
We also have post-traumatic growth,
depending on how we frame that
and what we do with that discomfort.
And there's a lot of people who do amazing things
driven by these same goblins that other people run away from.
It's about how we reframe that discomfort.
Every successful person that's out here,
in fact, the last person that sat in the chair said,
I asked them and they said,
they were basically running away from their trauma.
And actually they actually got diagnosed many years later
in therapy with post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD.
They are the number one in their industry, I'd say.
Right. I mean, it's so common.
And many of the people I interviewed for the book,
that was what was so fascinating.
It wasn't trauma or trauma free.
Everybody has trauma from these high performers.
They all had it, something.
We all do in some way.
We've all suffered in one way or another.
And of course, it's very difficult.
It's very touchy, but it's very much subjective to us
how we deal with it, how we will grow from it.
I think that's the big lesson.
I think the psychology community as well
will teach that it's about learning how to deal with that discomfort
in a way that is adaptive, as opposed to maladaptive,
something that hurts you, that these experiences are neutral.
It's how we interpret them that matters.
That's a really key point that I've learned
from doing what I do here, the point about trauma being neutral.
It's a subjective thing.
Someone snatches a toy off you and you're a kid.
Now, you might interpret that as being a fun game,
or you might interpret it as, I can't trust anybody.
And it's the same incident, but it's interpreted
in two entirely different ways.

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And then that child might then go on to be incredibly successful because they were low in trust, but that might hurt their personal relationships. And the other child who had the same thing happen to them might just be... And it's not only psychologically true, but also physiologically true. I don't know if you've read Mind Body Prescription. It's an old book, but it basically is... A lot of people read it for back pain. It's incredible. I had my last company, a business partner of mine, she would be on the floor in pain. In the middle of the day, she would have to go to a back office because she just could not move. She was in so much pain. And her husband had incredible carpal tunnel. He would wear all kinds of devices and stuff to try and immobilize his hands. And he really suffered. And then they came across this book, the Mind Body Prescription, which basically talks about how you don't want to stop doing the painful actions that most pain is chronic type pain after the healing has occurred. Of course, there's a window, right? If you still have pain, I think what is it? Six months, if you still have pain, and it's called chronic pain, that the body has already healed within that time period. We're sure the body is healed. Why is there still pain? That there isn't necessarily... Pain does not mean physical trauma, per se. And I think this is relevant to psychological trauma as well. The pain happens because we focus on our attention on the pain. You can't have pain without attention. Do you notice that? You can't have pain without attention. So there's these cases, by the way, in World War I, where soldiers would drag their buddies to the medic and say, medic, my buddy's dying. You need to help him. And the medic would look at the soldier and say, soldier, your arm is gone. And he wouldn't notice that half his arm is missing because pain requires attention. So when we over-focus on our pain, when all we pay attention to is our pain, and I'm saying here physiologically as well as psychologically, the pain becomes worse. The pain becomes worse.

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When we try and not do the thing that caused us pain.
So now the advice is not, if you have a back pain issue, it used to be,
okay, well, immobilize, don't move, don't stretch, just rest, rest, rest, rest.
And now the advice is really changing, same with carpal tunnel.
It's not, you know, get all the wrist braces and don't move your wrist.
It's the opposite.
If you feel back pain, do whatever caused that pain three times,
because you want to regulate the brain to learn that this is not a threat.
Again, emotions, pain don't happen to us.
They happen for us.
It's a lesson for us to learn from.
It's just a signal.
Now we can interpret that signal any way we want.
So when we hyper-focus on something that was painful physiologically or psychologically,
when we don't do the thing that caused us discomfort, right?
When we want to go to safe spaces with trigger warnings,
and we're not exposed to the things that make us uncomfortable,
that only makes it worse and worse and worse,
because we're paying more attention to it and we don't have the exposure.
We know the way to treat phobias.
How do you treat a phobia?
Exposure therapy, right?
So when someone's scared of a dog, right?
When someone has severe reaction to a dog, what do you do?
Well, first you show them a picture of a puppy,
then you show them a picture of a full-grown dog,
then you show them a video,
then eventually you put them in a room with the puppy out the other side of the room, 20 feet away.
Then you expose them to the threat until their brain down regulates
and teaches itself not to cause this reaction,
this emotional reaction to this potential stressor.
And so it's the same way with many of the potential discomforts in our life.
Isn't it the same way with just belief itself, like self-belief?
Think about how our beliefs form.
People always ask me questions and one of the most popular questions anyone wants to
know in the sort of self-development community is about how we become confident.
And confidence is a belief.
And one of the ways that I've become confident in my life is by exposure therapy, I guess.
How you learn to speak on a stage is by doing it.
Like there's no other...
You can't read a book on it to get it overcome the nerves.
Have you thought much about confidence and the role it plays in everything we've discussed today
and how to build confidence?

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Funny you should say, getting on stage.
So I'm a professional public speaker.
Let's do that a lot.
Good shows.
Thank you.
Very good.
Well, okay.
We'll let me back up a few years.
So when I first started out, I wrote the book first and then I started speaking about it.
And when I would get on stage, I would have incredible stage fright.
And at first, this is with my first book hooked.
And I would tell myself this script of when I felt my heartbeat,
when I would get sweaty pits and I get very nervous.
And I tell myself, I can actually, it's funny just talking about, I can actually feel it.
I would tell myself, if I was a real public speaker, I wouldn't feel this way.
I'm going to mess up.
I'm going to stumble over my words.
I'm going to fall flat and people are going to laugh at me.
And I would do worse on stage.
And then when I started researching, Indistractable, I found this technique called
reimagining the trigger.
And reimagining the trigger is when we take the same exact physiological reactions
and we reinterpret them.
So now when I go on stage and I feel my heart racing, I don't use the old script.
I have a new script.
The new script says, my heart is beating fast because it is pumping oxygen to my brain
so I can deliver the best possible talk.
That's where confidence comes from is reframing the triggers.
What used to scare you should embolden you, should strengthen you.
Someone that's low confidence.
Are they lacking in something?
Are they lacking in positive evidence?
Or are they abundant in negative evidence?
I guess it can be either.
I think they're stuck to a script, Frank.
This is why we see Michael Pollan's book, How to Change a Mind,
where why psychedelics are so interesting for treatment of depression,
anxiety, various conditions.
It's not the drug itself, right?
There's no healing taking.
Even the whole concept of the broken brain and chemical imbalance,
this whole chemical imbalance theory turns out it's rubbish.
Nobody believes it anymore in the psychology community.

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It's only the public that thinks that there's a brain chemical imbalance.

It's not fixing anything in the brain.

It's simply showing you that a different perspective exists.

That's all it does.

It simply shows you that a different perspective exists.

And that can snap you out of what we call a trapped prior,

a trapped belief around how things are and says, wait a minute,

I don't have to think that way.

So when it comes to confidence, I mean, what do actors do?

Actors inhabit completely different characters on demand, right?

And that's a skill I think we could try on for size.

We should actually once in a while say, well, what would it be like if I acted different, right?

Do I have to stick to my old beliefs?

No, there's no law that says you have to act the same way every day.

It's simply that our sense of self, our self image,

is based on what we did previously.

A topic that's actually emerged a lot in public consciousness

and conversation since we last spoke is,

and it's very much linked to all the work you do,

is attention deficit disorder.

You wrote a book about not being distracted.

What's your thoughts on ADHD, ADD?

This is a big topic and I'm probably going to get myself in trouble here,

but let me start by saying it is not up to me or anyone you would listen to

on a podcast to tell you whether you have or don't have a diagnosis,

go to a physician and get a diagnosis one way or the other.

I will say that I think there's something fishy going on when it comes to ADHD.

I have a lot of concerns.

One, the discrepancy between what's happening in the States and in Europe is weird, right?

10% of children in the United States are diagnosed with ADHD and Europe is 1%.

Something strange there, right?

There's something about the culture in the United States that I believe overdiagnoses and it overdiagnoses

because I don't think there's a great check and balance

to disincentivize the diagnosis, meaning if a teacher says,

this child is a pain, this child can't sit still,

and we're talking about many times, five, six, seven year olds,

where it's funny, a lot of people say how technology is this

and technology is that.

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Public education is also a technology.
It's only about 150 years old.
It's not that old.
We haven't done it for that long.
And so there are negative repercussions also to putting a bunch of kids in a box
and expecting them to sit still and be quiet
and listen to some boring person lecturing on the front of the classroom.
So I think there's a clear incentive for teachers and parents
to try and calm kids down.
And I don't know if there's enough of a check and balance
to say, look, is this really necessary to diagnose,
especially when there are pharmaceuticals involved.
So I like to repeat, and I'll repeat it again and again,
skills before pills, skills before pills.
ADHD is real.
These diagnoses, and for many people,
medication is the appropriate course of action.
But I have talked to so many people in the field
who just don't have the resources to teach skills.
And so all they can do is prescribe.
And it's the first thing they'll do.
Kid will get diagnosed.
Here's some pills.
And I think those pills, we do not properly
wait how dangerous those pills can be.
Not only, look, these things are amphetamines.
They have consequences.
They have side effects.
And many times we will give pills to take care
of the side effects of the pills we just diagnosed.
And more importantly, they are training a generation
to believe that solutions come in pill models.
And I think that has some very severe potential consequences,
especially when for many, many people, adults and children,
the skills are here.
If you have tried the skills and they still don't work.
If you've taken a day or two, just a day or two,
to learn some of the skills that I talk about indistractable.
And then if you find you know what, it's still not working.
Okay, got it.
But to jump straight to the pharmaceuticals,
I think is a big mistake because they all come with side effects.
So skills before pills.

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The justification that I got from one of my friends
that was diagnosed was that his brain doesn't make enough dopamine.
That's not true.
We don't know that.
That's pure conjecture.
The science doesn't support that.
The whole chemical imbalance theory,
no psychiatrist will tell you that's true.
It doesn't.
That's just scientifically false.
Where did that come from?
There were, it was a theory that has since been discredited
with further research.
We actually, you cannot find ADHD in the brain.
There's no brain scan to say, there's no blood test.
You go to a doctor, they will ask you questions.
You'll take a little assessment.
And then if you get whatever it is, six out of eight of these criteria,
by the way, very gameable, completely gameable,
you'll get a diagnosis.
And of course, many physicians, unfortunately,
will cater to what they think the patients want
because they don't want a bad review on Google
that says this doctor didn't believe me, right?
So they fear a bad review and they'll do what the patient wants.
Furthermore, I think a big problem.
Okay, again, this isn't black and white.
I'm very much for a proper diagnosis.
I'm sure that ADHD is absolutely, absolutely real.
Let me say that again.
But if you go to a physician that does not also give you an undiagnosis plan,
everybody thinks about diagnosis.
What about undiagnosis, right?
When you go to the doctor and you have a broken arm,
they put on a cast and they say, come back in a few weeks,
we'll take the cast off and you'll be healed.
Where's the undiagnosis plan for ADHD?
It should exist.
It should exist.
We should be able to help people overcome and we see this all the time.
When people want to, in my family, I've seen this,
people in my family have been diagnosed with ADHD.
They go on medication.

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They suffer from the consequences of some of the side effects.
They go off the pills.
Then they get to the skills.
They learn the skills and they functionally don't have anymore.
Remember, it is not what I hate about a lot of people in the ADHD community.
They feel like it's an identity.
It is who they are and that is so dangerous.
We need to look at ADHD as something that is treatable.
It's treatable sometimes through medication.
It's treatable through behavioral practices.
We can learn to overcome many of these things
because if it's not functionally hurting you,
you shouldn't have a diagnosis anymore.
But I think if you go to a physician that doesn't give you
some kind of undiagnosis plan,
which could take years, it's not an instant solution,
but there needs to be some kind of plan to how do we make sure
that this functionally doesn't debilitate you without medication
as a constant course of treatment, especially when it has side effects.
That's a big red flag.
The treatment is based on what people believe the cause is.
So if I think the cause is a chemical imbalance
or your brain is broken in some way,
I can't create an undiagnosis plan.
Right, that's the problem.
Look, people are cured of addiction.
Addiction is a pathology.
You have it for a while, so addiction is a confluence of three things.
The person, the pain they're going through,
and the product that they are addicted to.
But when any of those three things change,
they're no longer addicted.
I don't believe in this.
I'm an addict for life.
I think that's incredibly harmful.
You will be very hard-pressed to find someone
who's in the addiction treatment community who calls people addicts.
We don't call them addicts anymore.
We call them people struggling with addiction.
Because we don't want to stigmatize them to believe that's who I am.
What people do when they have an identity,
they conform to that identity.
That's terrible.

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You struggle with an addiction for a while,
and then you are treated, and then you recover.
Why do we think that ADHD would be any different?
The BBC wrote an article this week,
which is what Spiro sort of caused this discussion amongst my close friends,
where the BBC said they kind of presented the idea that TikTok
had been really driving an overdiagnosis.
Because on TikTok, you'll see a lot of videos that say things like,
if you have this problem and this problem,
you can't focus on this or you lose your keys a lot,
and you forget where you've put them,
that's ADHD.
It's kind of simplified the ailment.
And the BBC wrote this piece sort of saying,
that is it driving an overdiagnosis in culture?
And I've seen it.
I mean, if I go on my social media, that's what I see.
I see so much content around saying,
well, if you've got this, this, and this, if you've got this habit,
then that's ADHD.
And that does concern me a little bit,
because we both know that ADHD is a very real thing
that can be debilitating for people that suffer with it,
but trivializing it into small, small little...
Right.
And if you look for it, it's recency bias.
When you are looking for something, you'll find it.
So if you look, do people who,
everyone who loses their keys from time to time have ADHD?
Of course not.
But if you are looking for it, and you say,
okay, I lost my keys, it must be this,
or I was having difficulty reading a book,
it must be this, when that's repeated at nauseam
in the popular press, I think that's part of the demo,
whether the media is TikTok or traditional media.
There has been, I think, a popularization of the diagnosis,
and the more people hear about the diagnosis,
the more they potentially will look for it.
And I think the pendulum should swing the other way.
Now, I don't think there's anything wrong with teaching the skills
that could make ADHD functionally not a problem.
But what's wrong with that?

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There's no problem.
I think the problem comes in when we get people to identify,
you know, we hear this all the time,
say, oh, I have undiagnosed ADHD.
Well, you haven't gone to the doctor,
you haven't taken any kind of assessment, how do you know?
And even then, if you did want, there's also,
okay, there's some gray area there too.
Or people say, oh, I'm so OCD.
OCD is a terrible pathology, right?
It's not, I like to wash my hands more than others.
I like to keep my room clean.
No, no, no, that is a serious pathology.
So when we, addiction, I think,
is probably the most overused phrase.
Addiction is a terrible pathology.
But when people say, I'm addicted to this,
I'm addicted to that, it has two terrible consequences.
One, it's, I think, greatly offensive to people
who actually struggle with this disease of addiction.
That's one big problem, or the pathology of addiction.
Two, you are creating this identity for yourself
as someone who is powerless.
Addiction, the word addiction comes from addictio in Latin,
which means slave.
So you're a slave to something.
So when you call yourself a slave to something,
you're basically saying you're powerless against it.
So using these medicalized terms
and moralizing these terms, I think, is a really bad path.
Who stands to gain from this?
I've sat here with so many health experts,
and they tell me about the sugar industry
and the smoking industry that published a lot of media
back in the day, saying that sugar was good for us
and cigarettes were good for us.
And I think about this conversation around ADHD now.
Who stands to gain from an increased diagnosis
of people with ADHD?
Well, I don't want it to sound like the tobacco industry
that was sitting in smoke filled rooms plotting,
but there are systems in place
which benefit some groups over others, for sure.

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I mean, I think the psychology industry,
the pharmaceutical industry, benefits quite a bit.
Again, I don't think they're sitting there thinking,
oh, we're going to convince people
that they should be diagnosed.
But of course, there's incentives.
And more importantly, there's no disincentives.
I'm not so worried about the incentives.
I'm not pointing fingers at unethical practices
in psychiatry or in the pharmaceutical industry, per se.
What I'm worried about is where are the disincentives?
Who is saying you're diagnosing too many people here?
It can't be that 10% of American children have ADHD.
How can that be?
Something fishy going on.
Where are the breaks?
Who says this doesn't seem right?
What's the most important thing you think
we haven't talked about today
that we should have talked about?
So we didn't talk about how to build
an indestructible workplace.
Oh, okay.
I read a stat that you tweeted a couple of years ago
that said nurses had managed to reduce the rate of
mistakes when they're giving subscriptions by like 80%,
just by wearing like a vest that said,
do not disturb me, which is staggering.
So that's where I got the idea of that
screen sign that comes in every copy of the book.
So these nurses, in the UK actually,
this huge problem of prescription mistakes
that patients were being prescribed the wrong medication
or the wrong doses of medication,
it turns out that in almost all cases,
it was caused by distraction.
They were on their dosing rounds
and somebody would tap them on the shoulder
and disrupt them and then they would make mistakes.
And the solution was that they had these nurses
wear these bright red vests that says,
drug round in progress, do not disturb.
And they reduced the percentage of prescription mistakes

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by 88%.

They almost eliminated the problem.

And so I tell the story.

I know that not everybody who reads the book

is in the medical profession,

but I tell the story to illustrate,

one, how we too don't realize the problem is happening until it's too late.

We think we're doing our job, we're doing great, everything's fine.

And just like these nurses,

not until they came back to work the next day,

did they realize, hey, did you realize

you gave Mr. Johnson the wrong medication?

You almost killed the man.

In that case, they got that immediate feedback.

It's awful, life-threatening.

For us, we don't realize how much better we could be at our jobs or at life when we work without distraction.

There's a whole section in the book on building an indistractable workplace.

We found that there's three characteristics of an indistractable workplace.

The first is that there is a sense of psychological safety.

This comes from the work of Amy Edinson at Harvard.

And she's identified that psychological safety

is this ability to talk about your problems without fear of retribution.

So if you can't raise your hand

and talk about the problem of distraction,

hey, boss, I'm really having trouble finishing my work because I constantly feel I'm interrupted.

If you can't talk about that problem, that is the problem.

It's not the technology.

It's that you can't talk about the problem.

So number one trait, psychological safety, the ability to talk about the problem.

Second is a forum to talk about the problem.

So a little sidebar, Slack was one of these products that a lot of people complained about when I was researching the book.

And I said, what do you find most distracting?

And Slack kept coming up or other group messaging services,

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but Slack was the biggest at the time.
And so I went to visit Slack.
I went to Slack headquarters in San Francisco.
And I expected if Slack is this super distracting technology,
well, nobody uses Slack more than Slack.
I expected to see an office full of people
who are constantly distracted.
But that's not what I found at all.
That at Slack, the parking lot clears out at 6 p.m.
And if you use Slack on nights and weekends,
you are reprimanded.
You are told that is not what we do at our company.
And what I found was that they exemplified these traits.
There's another company I profiled in the book,
but Slack is one of them.
So they have psychological safety.
They give people a forum.
That's the second trait.
They give people a forum to talk about the problem.
And so they created Slack channels
where people, it was called beef tweets.
They had a Slack channel where people could post complaints
or suggestions about the company.
And so what was important about this as a practice,
it doesn't have to be on Slack.
Some companies, I profiled Boston Consulting Group as well.
They had a massive turnaround as well
when it comes to their company culture.
They went from one of the hardest places to work.
It was my first job out of college.
It was really rough from a work-life-balanced perspective
to now.
It's one of the best places to work.
They got an award for one of the best places
to work in America.
And they did that by creating a forum,
by creating a place to talk about the problem.
So Slack has a Slack channel where people can talk
about things that they want to improve at the company.
And the important thing here is not that everything
has to be acted upon.
Management can decide what's important and what's not
important, but employees need to be seen.

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So what does Slack management do?
In order to make sure that people felt heard,
they would use emoji.
They would send, like if somebody had a complaint,
they would post the iEmoji to show them,
okay, we saw that, or the check emoji to show them
it's been taken care of.
Right?
So it's a forum for people to talk about the problem
and feel like they're heard.
The third trait and the most important
is that management needs to exemplify
what it means to be indestructible.
So when you walk into Slack headquarters,
there's a huge pink neon sign,
I also have a picture of it in the book,
a huge pink neon sign in the company canteen
that says, work hard and go home.
It's part of the company ethos that people do their best work
when they're fully focused.
And then after work, they need time to be with their families,
to do other things.
And that was part of the company culture.
So psychological safety, a forum to talk about these problems
and making sure that management exemplifies
what it means to be indestructible.
So much of that I'm going to implement.
Nia, we have a closing tradition on this podcast
where the last guest leaves a question for the next guest,
not knowing who they're leaving a question before.
It's a new tradition since you last came on.
And the question that's been left for you is,
what is one idea that is important
that most people would disagree with you on,
that you feel needs to be said?
Oh, the Peter Teal question.
Okay, you asked me what I changed my mind on.
And I mentioned it a few times in passing,
but I've really changed my mind on the importance of religion
in that I'm secular.
I don't believe in anything supernatural.
But I think we as skeptics, I would say, to describe us,
whether you call yourself agnostic or atheist or whatever,

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we give up a lot.
We give up a lot.
And I've changed my mind on the fact that organized religion has a lot to offer us.
And this is something I'm really struggling with because I have such a problem with accepting the supernatural elements of religion.
But the benefits are amazing, right?
Taking care of people who you may not know directly, but are part of your community.
Having a place to go to that you know you will be taken care of as well.
Having rituals that mark the year.
Higher purpose.
Higher purpose, a forced disconnection and reflection, meditation, prayer.
There's so many things that I think we miss out on that I have a newfound respect for the benefits.
I think a lot of people get stuck with, yeah, but I can't believe the hocus pocus, right, deridingly said.
But we miss a lot.
And I think we should acknowledge that.
Thank you for writing such a great book.
Thank you for coming back onto the podcast.
You're an incredible person, and I can't wait to buy whatever you write next.
Appreciate that so much.
It's a huge honor.
Thank you so much.
Thank you, Neil.
Ladies and gentlemen, our newest brand partnership will come.
It's no surprise to regular listeners on this podcast.
The first episode of 2023,
I was joined by the incredible Professor Tim Spector to hear more about his work at a company called Zoe.
Using data to understand our bodies better so that we can live more fulfilled, higher potential lives.
Zoe was born from the truth that our overall health is impacted by our gut health.
By helping you to understand how your body is working, Zoe can help you to reduce your risk of long-term disease and increase your energy levels.

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For me, this is the future.
And that is why I became an investor in the company,
and that is why they are now a sponsor of this podcast.
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Whenever someone gets to the end of this podcast,
I feel like I owe them a greater debt of gratitude
because that means you listen to the whole thing.
And hopefully that suggests that you enjoyed it.
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could you do me a little bit of a favor
and hit that subscribe button?
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Thank you so much, and I'll see you again next time.