

## **[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Leveraging growth advisors, hiring well, mastering SEO, and honing your craft | Luc Levesque (Shopify, Meta, TripAdvisor)**

We talk about the 10X engineer,  
and we don't really talk about the 10X growth advisor  
or 10X growth person,  
but the same dynamic applies.  
You could argue it applies even more  
because the right growth advisor  
can have literally company changing impact.  
The advantage of a growth advisor is  
it takes a long time to understand a channel.  
And certainly, you know, people have to know their stuff.  
They have to be very good at their craft,  
their growth craft,  
but also they have to be exposed  
to a large set of experiments  
or an environment where they've just seen  
what works and what doesn't.  
Once a growth advisor has that,  
it takes years to learn it,  
but it literally can take seconds,  
literally, to communicate that.  
It's one of those weird disciplines  
where the right person at the right time  
can literally say a sentence  
that changes the trajectory of your company.  
And you can't say that for a lot of different disciplines,  
but this is one of them.  
Welcome to Lenny's podcast,  
where I interview world-class product leaders  
and growth experts to learn from their hard-won experiences  
building and growing today's most successful products.  
Today, my guest is Luke Lavec.  
Luke is currently the chief growth officer at Shopify.  
Before this, he was recruited personally by Mark Zuckerberg  
to help grow Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, and WhatsApp.  
He's also VP of growth and a GM at TripAdvisor.  
He's also been a growth advisor  
to companies like Twitter, Pinterest, Patreon,  
Thumbtack, and Canva.  
And in our conversation, Luke shares advice  
on how and when to think about getting a growth advisor,  
including how to structure the relationship  
and what to look for in an advisor.

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We also spent a ton of time on SEO, how to think about this as a growth channel, who it's well-suited for, and how everything is about to change in SEO with Bard and ChatGPT. Plus, Luke shares a ton of really interesting advice around the value of self-reflection, building routines, cold plunges, also a couple of amazing stories about working with Zuck and what he learned from him. This is such an insight-rich episode and I know you will love it. With that, I bring you Luke Lavec after a short word from our sponsors. This episode is brought to you by Mixpanel. Get deep insights into what your users are doing at every stage of the funnel at a fair price that scales as you grow. Mixpanel gives you quick answers about your users from awareness to acquisition through retention. And by capturing website activity, ad data, and multi-touch attribution right in Mixpanel, you can improve every aspect of the full user funnel. Powered by first-party behavioral data, instead of third-party cookies, Mixpanel is built to be more powerful and easier to use than Google Analytics. Explore plans for teams of every size and see what Mixpanel can do for you at [mixpanel.com slash friends slash Lenny](https://mixpanel.com/slash/friends/slash/Lenny). And while you're at it, they're also hiring. So check it out at [mixpanel.com slash friends slash Lenny](https://mixpanel.com/slash/friends/slash/Lenny). This episode is brought to you by Atio, a new type of CRM that's powerful, flexible, and built around your data. Traditional CRMs were built for a different era with totally different speed, scale, and data demands. Atio is different. It allows you to quickly build a CRM that matches your unique workflows and data structures. Within minutes of connecting your email and calendar, you'll have a CRM that's already set up,

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That's [ATTIO.com](https://atio.com) slash Lenny.  
Luke, welcome to the podcast.  
Thank you, good to see you.  
It's good to see you too.  
I want to start with a story that you shared once  
when we were hanging out in the past  
and something that I'll never forget.  
And it's about the time that you just joined Facebook.  
And apparently you had some kind of big presentation  
you had to give to the entire company  
or the executive staff.  
And then I just love the way it kind of unfolded  
and kind of gives you a glimpse  
into what it's like to work with Zuck and at Facebook.  
Can you share that story if that rings a bell?  
I remember the story.  
Well, basically, I had just started at Facebook  
and I'll use those two interchangeably.  
I remember it as Facebook and always will.  
Now it was three months in  
and was working on a new area for me.  
So came in, started putting together our thoughts  
on a strategy and was asked to do a presentation  
in front of the company with Mark on the strategy.  
So I whipped up a draft strategy,  
put together some plots and plans presented  
in front of the company and went well.  
And then every six months,  
there's something called the MT review of Facebook.  
And you basically product area leads  
will go in and present their strategy, how it's going.

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Again, I just joined three months before.  
So I walk in, no idea what to expect.  
I'm sitting at a table.  
You can kind of envision it's a big room,  
really big room with a bunch of tables set up  
in a big square with a little microphone.  
So I sit in there, there's Mark  
and all the executives sitting on the other side.  
And I sit down and it's quiet  
for what felt like five minutes.  
I'm sure it was not,  
but it's despite for a while just sitting there  
waiting for what's going to happen now.  
And at some point Mark kind of looks over,  
says, hey, we saw your presentation,  
saw your strategy.  
Now when are we going to start seeing results?  
And that was my introduction to Facebook.  
It was kind of my introduction to working with Mark  
and was a pretty kind of intense thing to go through.  
Again, I just joined the strategy  
was very much a draft at that point.  
But I think what it highlights is something  
that Facebook does really, really well,  
which you get very quickly when you join Facebook.  
And it's why there's such an execution machine  
and can build a lot of great product.  
It's because they focus exclusively on that magic word,  
which is impact.  
And that was kind of my first introduction to working  
with Mark and just that laser focus on, all right, got it.  
Now when are we going to start seeing impact  
and kind of moving from there?  
So it's something that is very much in the culture there  
and something that is so important.  
It's something of course that we focus on a lot at Shopify,  
but it's that difference between,  
I don't care how hard you work,  
I don't care what you're working on with the activities are,  
what are the outcomes?  
What is the impact you're having?  
And I actually really love that word impact

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and focusing on it because it's vague enough  
that it covers off any work  
that is impactful towards the mission.  
And it's precise enough to know,  
what does that mean when you say, are you having impact?  
Or what is the impact we're having?  
So it's a great way to approach things  
and that was my first experience there  
within a few months.  
And yeah, and we jumped in and started focusing  
on having a lot of impact from there.  
I love that story.  
There's a couple of things there.  
One is if I were in your shoes, I'd poop my pants,  
sitting there for five minutes waiting for,  
what are you guys?  
It's not happening.  
I'm happy to report.  
Okay, how did it go?  
How did you deal with it?  
Or I guess, how did you respond?  
Well, we, funny enough, already started having impact.  
So I was able to at least respond with,  
hey, we've kind of already started in a few ways  
and walked through where we were having impact  
and just focus on the strategy,  
what our plans for it were  
and where we want it to go from there.  
So that's, I think that's how I responded.  
Okay, great work.  
So something I've started doing actually on this podcast  
is I've started to keep a little posted of,  
here it is, of like themes that continue to recur  
across companies that are most successful  
and impact comes, it's like number one on my posted here  
is just like impact comes up so often  
as something that the best companies continue to come back  
to and focus on and put a lot of emphasis on.  
I guess, I don't know what the question is exactly,  
but is that just what you find in the work that you do  
with all the companies you work with?  
Just how important it is to come back to impact

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as maybe the primary thing?

Yeah, I mean, I think it's easy for a lot of leaders and companies to get caught up in how hard are people working?

What did they do?

And recognizing and rewarding activity.

I mean, everybody wants to have impact and the companies that truly focus on that are the ones that break through and really make a lot of progress towards admission. So that seems obvious, I think, when I say it out loud, but being in that culture

and having it really ingrained in everything you do and whether it's performance reviews or strategies or reviews with the executive team in all gravitates around impact.

And I think it's that laser focus on it that matters so much.

But I mean, I've certainly seen it go in other ways where it's more about working long hours.

And certainly there's a correlation to be clear between working hard and the impact.

But I find it's just such a precise way to think about how people are performing or what you're doing in terms of is your strategy working, is the direction you're moving in, having the intended outcomes that you want.

And yeah, I do think it's all about that.

And being a growth leader where everything's so measurable impact is something that can be very clearly measured and you know whether you have it or not.

So the most important thing that we work on constantly is reviewing what's our strategy, what are we working on?

Is that driving towards the top level North Star outcome we want, is that having the impact and then basically doing everything around that singular North Star.

So it's very, very important.

And I think it's more profound than it might seem just from the outside.

But if you've worked in different companies,

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you've probably experienced different versions of this too.

Yeah, I wanna spend more time on this,  
but before we move on,

you also have another Zuck story  
and correct me if I'm wrong,

but Zuck recruited you personally to join Facebook slash Metta.

Is that true?

And then if true, what was that?

What was that like to be recruited by Zuck so personally?

It was an interesting experience, very intense,

but also one of the reasons for it

was I was living in Canada and my family was there

and I had some strong personal reasons

why I couldn't leave Canada.

But yeah, we had a lot of discussions with Mark.

I won't get into the micro details of it.

That's more Mark's story to tell than mine,

but a few takeaways from going through that experience

as a leader, hiring is the most important thing

as we all know it's a craft

and a skill that I'm always working on refining.

I have my own playbook that I'm constantly tweaking,

testing out different approaches,

trying to find the best talent and assessing them

and trying to close them and bringing them on board.

So I learned a lot through that experience with Mark.

And a couple of things that stood out

were the first one would be that Mark

really involved the entire executive team.

It wasn't just me talking to recruiting or talent or HR

or just Mark, it was the entire executive team.

And that's something that I think a lot of leaders

don't take advantage of.

I've seen leaders, I've certainly done this at times

where you go it alone or you're working with recruiting,

but the reality is all the leaders,

all the execs in the company know how important it is

to bring in talent and they're always more than happy to help.

So that's something that I think more leaders

should do is really recruit all of their peers

and their leaders in the company to help close.

And that's certainly something that happened

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when I was in discussions with Mark and Facebook about joining. The second one which I had, I suppose never experienced before was that they made it very personal. I had these reasons why I couldn't leave. So initially I was excited by the opportunity, but I couldn't see myself moving at California for personal reasons. And through discussions, Mark basically involved my wife and involved my spouse in this, Andrea. And we flew down, had dinner with him and Priscilla and his wife and Andrea had ended up meeting with many of the executives at Facebook and really talking through what was holding us back, why we couldn't come, potential options and ideas for how we could come down, but involving somebody's spouse and family, I think is a really good idea because it's a very personal decision to change company. It involves more than just that person you're talking to, it involves their whole family. So that was something that I think is an important thing to have in your kind of playbook for hiring is really think about the whole person's family and involve them if you can. In fact, Toby did this as well at Shopify. He flew down here with Fiona for a mid breakfast with Andrea and reviewed a few offers when I joined Shopify. And then the third thing is just to be absolutely relentless and don't give up and don't let momentum drop. Took seven months for me to go from, there's, this is amazing, exciting, but there's no way I can make this work to, okay, let's move to Palo Alto. And Mark, the execs, a variety of leaders there were in discussions for months and months and months and never letting the momentum die. And that's something that I think is really important. No doesn't necessarily mean no. And in this case, it definitely wasn't the case. And I had the same experience with Toby at Shopify



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where we've been talking about working together for over 10 years now. And then finally, the timing was right and I was able to join the company. So just be relentless, involve the family, involve the spouse if you can, and recruit some help from other executives in the company. Those are some of the things that stood out and through my experience, but yeah, it was a pretty wild time in my life. Relentless is actually another word. I wasn't necessarily, I'm supposed to yet, but I feel like it's another trend across the most impactful and successful founders is just this like, I will not give up. I will keep at it. And so that's a really interesting example of that in action. I was gonna talk about this later, but maybe it's a good time to talk about now, which is around hiring. So you talk about you have this playbook for how to hire. And you mentioned to me that you kind of find that as you scale as a leader, hiring ends up being like the most important skill maybe, maybe one of the most important skills. I love to hear your take on just what you found about hiring as you've grown as a product leader. Well, I think you reach a point in your career where you realize that hiring is the skill you now need to become world-class at because you're no longer doing the work yourself. You're still, of course, involved in doing some of the work and getting your hands dirty, but the bulk of your team's success now will be the quality of the hires you make. And you truly need to be world-class at that. So yeah, I built this playbook out. I was in Canada in Ottawa when I sold that company at TripAdvisor and really started growing my team and becoming more of a leading into leadership at the time after that experience. One of the benefits of being in Ottawa

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and kind of off the grid, if you will,  
is it's a curse and the benefit  
is that you don't have a ton of people you can learn from.  
So it does mean you need to go to first principles  
and think things through from the ground up.  
It takes a little longer,  
but you come up with your own playbooks  
on how to do things.  
And yeah, I think you've seen my blueprint,  
which is a good example of that,  
where I have this blueprint I put together  
and when new people join the team,  
I show them my blueprint,  
which is basically a list of my quirks  
so we can really quickly align.  
That's something that just being in Ottawa  
and trying to figure out how to be a leader  
and avoid mistakes.  
I was like, wouldn't it be nice if you had a blueprint?  
When somebody joined,  
you can just tell them all of your quirks  
and you can just quickly calibrate  
on how it is to work together  
versus through awkward, long discussions  
over the course of a year.  
My hiring playbooks are similar things.  
So I think of it in three different chapters, if you will.  
There's finding talent, assessing talent and closing talent.  
In terms of finding talent,  
I do believe that the best predictor of future performance  
is past performance.  
So I'm looking for what I call signs of excellence.  
So I want to know top people generally  
have done multiple amazing things in their life,  
repeated success, not just once.  
Maybe it was work-related, maybe not work-related,  
but generally speaking,  
if you think back to the stars you've worked with,  
they've done some amazing things  
and that's why I always start when I interview  
or when I chat with people,  
I started talking about just trying to understand

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what has been your path,  
what have you done professionally and not professionally  
generally stars can stand out.

It's very rare that there's not something obvious  
that comes through.

So for myself personally,

I'm looking for three different signs of excellence  
to tell me that it doesn't have to be three.

The mental model I have is as you're talking to them,  
you're getting pluses and negatives.

There's red flags you're hearing  
and there's really great things  
and then at the end you can make an opinion  
of how good this person is.

Another great sign of excellence.

And this was just through reflecting on my team  
and stars on the team and thinking what makes them unique?  
What about them?

And one of them is when somebody's boss leaves the company  
and then comes back to poach them,  
that is such a strong signal  
because if you think of what just happened,  
the person left the leader  
who knows exactly how good this person you're talking to is.

They have the most knowledge  
of the performance of this individual.

They left the company,  
they've come back to poach them,  
putting their own reputation at risk by coming back,  
depending on the situation.

And they would never do that  
unless this person was really, really good.

So you don't wanna over pivot on one signal,  
you wanna look at the whole picture,  
but those are the types of things I look at  
to bring in top talent.

And I've got this whole playbook, mistakes I've made  
that I've learned from things to avoid.

And over the years I've put together this playbook  
that I try to follow  
and I'm always running little experiments  
to try to make it better.

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We're gonna link to that blueprint that you mentioned.

A lot of what you're talking about is probably more relevant to senior executive type people because you're looking for, or maybe not,

because you're looking for savings three.

Okay, so people early in their career could also have three, say, moments of excellence.

Yeah, I mean, just thinking off top, it depends on the type of person you're hiring, but have they, are they their founder?

Have they tried to do something?

Did they win an award somewhere?

Are they a gold medalist or something?

Have they done something that others have not that shows grit, that shows drive, that shows the ability to succeed?

And I've seen that you can apply that to any candidate you're hiring.

And the implication there is without that they're probably not gonna be stars.

That there's a strong correlation between having signs of excellence and them performing really well in this role.

Correct, exactly.

Yeah, it would be, I mean, I'm supposed as possible, but it'd be pretty rare that somebody would come in without some sign that they stand above the crowd.

And again, I'm talking about, you generally wanna hire the top 1% of candidates.

So when you're looking for the best of the best, you definitely are looking for those signals.

Awesome, okay.

So I'm gonna bring us back on the agenda that I had for myself,

which is I wanna start with talking about advisory ships and advising and growth advisors.

You've been a growth advisor for a long time to some of the most amazing companies out there, Twitter, Pinterest, Patreon, Canva, Thumbtack.

I'm sure there's others that you don't list that are more informal.

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Now you work at Shopify.

And so what I think about here is a lot of founders are often think about, should I bring on an advisor?

What should I look for an advisor?

I've heard stories of advisors being useless sometimes.

People tell me I don't need advisors.

So I guess the question here is just, what's your take on when it makes sense to bring on and consider bringing on a growth advisor?

And what should people look for when they're exploring and talking to a potential growth advisor?

A few thoughts.

In terms of when, I don't think you can probably come in too early, it's probably harder to find really good ones than it is to time it.

But generally speaking, I would say you don't wanna focus too much on growth until you have product market fit.

So make sure you have a product that users love that's either showing strong signs of retention

or has some good loop that you can see that you can start thinking about growth.

Let me follow on that thread real quick because I find some founders still want to have someone come help them with growth, even though they know they don't have product market fit, even though this tip comes up every single time when I'm talking to a growth person, like wait till you have product market fit before doing growth stuff.

So could you just add like a little bit of why that's important while we're on that topic?

Growth advice is generally always applicable.

And if you can start thinking about how to build your product early, even if it's pre product market fit, you're not gonna do any damage, but you may be wasting some capital on an advisor or a growth person too early.

The problem that I see is if you start growing a product that doesn't have product market fit, you're actually doing more damage than good because you have a product that is now being exposed to the market through growth levers

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and through optimization that is giving a bad experience with your product.

And you want that product that you know is tight and you know has product market fit to start building a flywheel and start growing.

You don't want it to be growing if it doesn't satisfy that need that you're trying to build out for.

So I can see it having more damage than good because when somebody tries something, they're unlikely to try it again.

And so that's the dangerous game you can get into.

So you're better off with a good product that's satisfying a need and then growing from there.

I will say to kind of play devil's advocate with myself and something that I've done actually in one of the products that built several consumer products and grown them, is that sometimes to know if you have a product, you need users to use it.

So there's like some subtlety in here, but I would say if you are trying to get users in to start playing with it at scale,

I mean, try to focus in on a market that is maybe off the grid, like pick a country that's, some English speaking country that's a bit off the grid that you can isolate your marketing to so you can start getting dozens or a couple hundred people per day coming in and giving you feedback.

I've seen that work too.

So I'd say wait till you have product market fit.

If you do start growing your product early because you need that signal from people actually using it beyond just focus groups and friends or small numbers of people,

try to do it off the grid in smaller markets that you can kind of contain the growth and get what you're really trying to get which is that signal on, is it working or not?

Awesome, okay.

I threw a soft track, let's get back on track.

So we were talking about when it makes sense to find a growth advisor and then what to look for

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in someone that you might wanna work with.  
I mean, what makes a great growth advisor is somebody who really understands what to do but also why certain growth levers work. It's that kind of deep understanding of levers of onboarding or whatever area they're focusing on that really makes growth advisors stand out. So when you're looking for a growth advisor, you wanna have those discussions to see like how much depth does this person have? And they've seen a playbook and they're just good at repeating the playbook or are they evolving, are they growing? And the best way to get to know that is to start really asking them questions about growth and growth advising and the certain things that they've done and why they think those have worked. This can be tricky if you don't yourself know growth. So I think one thing that I have not seen a lot of founders do that I would advise is if you have an advisor already, because this applies to finding growth advisors but it also applies to hiring growth talent. So if you have somebody you know whether it's already an advisor or somebody you know who knows growth, you can solicit their help in trying to flesh out whether somebody you're trying to hire is of high talent. So if you have an advisor, you can make that one of their roles is vet out any new talent coming in. And if you're looking for an advisor, try to find somebody that you know and trust who can do that first pass because for somebody who knows growth that you trust, it's actually not a lot of work for them to vet out, have talented someone else's. And it's an easy ask to make and something that if you have that persevere network or that work with you that you can leverage for. But I haven't seen that too often where founders take advantage of people they know

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or existing growth advisors to help recruit and vet talent.

Because it can be quite hard  
if you don't know the growth space  
to know if somebody's good or not.

That's a really interesting idea.

And it could be where you find someone  
that's too busy to work with you.

But maybe you could just ask,  
hey, could you please help me vet people?

And it takes a lot less time.

Yeah, I've never been asked that which is,  
I mean, I don't know if I'll start getting asked this now,  
but it does seem like that's a really simple way  
to add a ton of value.

And as a founder, I mean,  
even if you have to pay this person  
or whatever you have to do,  
but it's such an important hire to get right.

You know, we talk about the 10X engineer  
and we don't really talk about the 10X growth advisor  
or 10X growth person,  
but the same dynamic applies.

You could argue it applies even more  
because the right growth advisor  
can have literally company changing impact  
where they're either building or helping 98  
or helping to implement a growth loop  
that literally changes the company.

As we know, you need a great product  
and you need a great growth loop.

And it's usually just one loop that you need to get right.

Most companies have gone to where they are  
just off of one really strong channel  
that they've just dominated.

So it's important to get right.

Is there an example of that sort of impact  
that you've seen in your advisorship  
or other people's of just an impact  
from one conversation or a little bit of the help?

Definitely.

And I think what I would point to is  
the advantage of a growth advisor is



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it takes a long time to understand a channel.  
And certainly, you know, people have to know their stuff.  
They have to be very good at their craft,  
their growth craft,  
but also they have to be exposed  
to a large set of experiments or an environment  
where they've just seen what works and what doesn't.  
So no matter how good somebody is,  
if they haven't been exposed to an environment  
where there's a lot of experimentation,  
a lot of learning,  
it's very hard for them to internalize that.  
So once a growth advisor has that,  
it takes years to learn it,  
but it literally can take seconds literally  
to communicate that.  
So I've worked with some companies that you've mentioned  
and certainly have had impact very quickly.  
One example would be a company that I worked with,  
now a public company at the time they weren't.  
On day one, walked in,  
they presented their strategy, their plans,  
their funnels and their landing pages.  
And I could see very quickly  
that there was something they were doing  
that was a little off.  
And I asked them, why are you doing it that way?  
And they said, well,  
we think it just looks better that way.  
And I said, well, just do it this other way.  
And I remember this  
because it was such a short conversation.  
And then three weeks later, we connected  
and I heard they had rolled it out  
and there was a large impact that they had  
from this one change.  
And it's just a good example of,  
this has happened many times with the companies  
I've worked with, but it's a good example  
that it's not actually, once you know it,  
it's not hard to recognize it  
and to, if you deeply understand it,

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to give advice, but it takes a long time to get the base knowledge. So I don't do these too often anymore, but when I do advise, I take them very seriously. I focus exclusively on having impact. And I think that's really important because like you say, there's a lot of advisors out there. Some of them are great, some of them, you know, different qualities and you really wanna make sure that if you are an advisor, you wanna be in the camp of, you know, when this person comes in, they have a lot of impact and it takes time and focus and energy and alignment. And there's a bunch of things we can talk about that helps to drive that alignment, but having impact is the most important thing, whether you're an advisor or if you're hiring and because it's one of those weird disciplines where the right person at the right time can literally say a sentence that changes the trajectory of your company. And you can't say that for a lot of different disciplines, but this is one of them. There's that word impact again. Impact impact. The point you just made about how one conversation can have a ton of impact is a reminder of why sometimes the price of an advisor feels absurd or like for one hour, it's like thousands of dollars, but it's because obviously they spend a decade learning a thing and one conversation is all that work they put into it crystallized for you in the moment. Exactly, and it's something I've experienced several times in hindsight when you're like, okay, here's the needle in the haystack and then it's implemented and you can see hundreds of percentages, sometimes over a thousand percent lift when you get it right. It's exhilarating, it's great. I have something I used to say, which is, you want your impact to be so big, there's a slide in the next board deck

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on like trying to explain what happened.  
And that can happen when you're advising companies because you're able to share very quickly insights.  
But one way to drive alignment is not everybody can do this, not all advisors do it this way, but I personally love just when I do these, which is not that frequent, just purely doing equity.  
And cause I love the alignment in outcomes where the founder will be successful and you will be successful.  
So the incentives are really good to drive the right performance and the right outcomes that you want as a founder.  
So if you can do it, I would definitely advise founders to bring advisors in for equity if you can.  
And I think the same applies for your internal growth team. You wanna make sure that the teams are incentive advise not on activities, on doing stuff, because there's a lot of stuff to be done in growth, but really driving the outcomes that you want.  
And equity is just a great way of saying, hey, we're in this together, we're on the same side of the table, let's grow this company.  
I was actually about to ask you what kind of structure you recommend for an advisory. Is there anything else you can share about just like what you'd recommend a founder do in terms of compensation for an advisor?  
There's a couple of things.  
I mean, I do, I'm a big fan of equity because of the alignment of incentives.  
You should think about without getting into too much detail of the actual structure of the deals, but think about how you vest the equity.  
The last thing you want is an advisor holding back on sharing knowledge.  
The ideal engagement would be an advisor comes in, delivers as much value as possible quickly and then trains your team.  
And then maybe it's a one year engagement and hopefully they've learned

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because the advisor has been incentivized to share as much as possible and to train the team as much as possible. And then ideally you don't need them anymore after. So there's something there about structuring equity vesting. I'm a big fan of vesting earlier rather than later. So think about it in terms of structure you're vesting, commensurate with the value you want, which is very much front loaded. I'm also a big fan of three month cliffs, something I've done, I always do actually, is listen in the first three months, you'll know both sides if it's working or not. And you want to de-risk that on both sides because it really should be seen as a partnership between the advisor and the founder. And if the founder thinks you're not adding value in the first few months, I think they should just tear it up and both sides move on. It's not good for the founder to continue the deal and it's not good frankly for the advisor because they're not for some reason able to add value in that environment. So I love a three month cliff at the beginning where if it's not working in the first three months, you tear up the deal and both parties walk away and it de-risk the entire thing. And again, drives incentives in the right way where the advisor is 100% incentivized to add as much value as fast as possible. So that's another thing that I tend to do and I've done it for a long time. That's a really good tip. Basically don't do four year vesting for advisors, probably not even two year, but yeah. There's a bunch of ways to do it. Honestly, it's hard enough to find growth advisors that have capacity. So you gotta also say like, what can you do that the advisor is comfortable with? But yeah, I mean, just to be candid,

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I think you want to structure in a way where you're not dependent on the advisor over time. They're adding a ton of value. They're helping teach the team. They're probably bouncing around because your company's changing, your team's changing, your leaders are changing. But over time, and that can be, it can be years, but it shouldn't be indefinite. You shouldn't need an advisor forever. I've seen a scenario where there's desire to keep the advisor on almost as insurance. Like if something goes wrong, I just wanted to be able to pick up the phone. That can make sense. But I do think a good growth advisor is incentivized to share as much as possible, as fast as possible to have the impact, to train your team. And then whether you want to keep them on or not, long-term as an insurance policy or just to answer questions as things change, that should be a choice and not because if we lose the advisor, we're completely screwed. That would be a bad place for you to be as a founder. You said it's hard to find a good advisor, 100% agree. Any advice for people to help them find an advisor that might be the right fit? Yeah, I would say there's more of them these days than there were even just five years ago or 10 years ago. I would start with, depending on your situation, if you're a founder, I would start with your investors. I think VCs have an amazing network of advisors. I get, I don't know, a couple of requests a week that I'm not taking right now, but that from my experience and what I've seen, that's probably, especially the high-end VCs, the very talented VCs will have this network. And frankly, it's a great partnership as an advisor for you to have, you can help the companies, you can help the VCs and it helps you so everybody wins. Just asking other founders

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if they had good experience, much like hiring.

The third advice I would give is to find companies that are world-class at what you're trying to grow, what channel or skill you're looking at, and then reach out and see if there's a way to help that way.

That's actually how I got started.

I was a trip advisor and a prominent VC reached out, one of the companies they were working with needed some help on SEO.

Got connected, I was still in Canada at the time, got connected with them, had a phone call, had a significant impact through that one phone call.

And rather than joining as an advisor, I essentially helped them out pro-bodo in exchange for, I want to get connected in the valley, so I was in Canada, I want to start another company, I want to get connected.

So through that tactic where they reached out to a company that was known to be world-class at SEO, I think that was really smart on this VCs part.

And then maybe some advice up and coming growth advisors would be, that first one I didn't take a single shred of equity or money and just tried to have as much impact as possible and to help out this company as much as possible and then make sure that I was able to get connected to other people that I wanted to meet in the Bay Area and then kind of things snowballed from there.

I definitely want to chat about how to become a growth advisor because I think people listening here might be like, oh, that sounds pretty good.

Someday maybe I'll become a growth advisor.

But before we get to that, what are things that an advisor are best suited for versus finding someone full-time versus no one?

Like what are the ideal kind of problem sets for an advisor versus say full-time hire person?

I would say your ideal setup is always, your preference should always be to have somebody in-house. I'll start there because you want to have that

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as part of the culture.

There's so much more that they can do when they're in-house.

That being said, if you can't find somebody in-house, then bring on an advisor.

Even if you bring on an advisor, some advice to founders would be,

you want to surround your team

or at least one person that you've identified

who's just an amazing world-class doer,

even if they don't know growth,

with a set of growth advisors

so that they're learning,

that's being put through the culture of the company

and that that knowledge stays inside of the company.

So I'd say you generally prefer to go internal,

surround these people with great advisors

and then indentate it from there.

That would be how I approach it.

Okay, so two thoughts here.

One is I feel like this podcast is becoming

an interesting way to discover awesome growth advisors.

And I think over time I'm building this directory

of like who are awesome smart growth people

that are open to advising.

So that could be an interesting opportunity.

Just look at you, the folks on this podcast

and there's some great people that have been out here.

Definitely.

It's only working my way through all the amazing,

least smart growth people and product leaders.

The other is I've noticed that a lot of the best

growth advisors have worked with the same sorts of companies.

I find Eero comes up a lot, Canva comes up a lot,

Pinterest, like all these people

that have worked with say Pinterest,

that I hear about are just awesome.

Casey comes to mind, Melissa Tan,

who's coming out as a podcast.

I think she worked with them, Dropbox.

Anyway, so maybe one idea,

see who these companies work with as advisors

and that can maybe points you to people

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that are worth exploring.

I mean, that's a good idea.

The kind of goes back to something I mentioned earlier,

which is companies that have a lot of traffic

and that have a lot of users are great learning around

for growth people and for advisors

because no matter how smart you are, you need the reps.

You got to go to the growth gym

and put in the reps, which is experiments.

You've got to try things, things are going to work,

things aren't going to work.

And there's a discipline of like when something doesn't work,

you can learn almost as much as when something works.

So, but you need that traffic, you need that environment.

And that's why certain companies have

these great people coming out like Casey at Pinterest

and other people that have been at these companies

that have the traffic, have the culture to support it,

to support growth.

And I think that's, I don't think it's a coincidence

why some of these companies have

some great people coming from them.

The other tip I just thought about

as you were talking is everyone's launching

a sub-stack newsletter that is doing any sort of advising

because there's a lot of power in building an audience

and creating kind of awareness of what you do.

So I wonder if another tip is search sub-stacks

directory of newsletters for specific things

you're dealing with, like say go to market

or PLG or sales and you might find someone there.

I haven't done that, but that seems like a reasonable way

to do it.

We're all heading.

I'm not saying that the people on sub-stack have this,

but as advice to the people listening is

when you're vetting for a growth advisor or growth talent,

don't just wait it on the public halo of somebody.

That's a common mistake I've seen where, you know,

maybe somebody's done presentations at a conference

or somebody's done, I don't know,

but their Twitter following is broad.



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They can be excellent.

That's not a disqualifier immediately, but just make sure not to make the hire just exclusively on that.

I've made that mistake a few times and it's a common one to get into.

So make sure you're vetting properly, even if somebody with a large following that sub-stack or Twitter, that's I think an important thing to keep in mind.

1000% agree.

I always say that the best product leaders, the best growth people don't have time to sit on Twitter and tweet and write newsletters.

They're doing the job, working, building, growing, and maybe eventually they get out of that and start writing, but 1000% agree.

There's a lot of people.

What can you do?

Not to disqualify all the people on Twitter.

Some of them are tweeting about, but my point is just, just be, don't overpivot on the halo.

Just do your, look at their past performance.

What teams have they been on?

What environment do they have?

Do they really know growth?

And sometimes they do,

but I think it's a common mistake to, oh yeah, they have a large following.

Let's hire this person.

Well, 1000% agree.

Rarely does a celebrity kind of hire that seems really genius on Twitter and sub-stack end up being as amazing as you think.

Yeah, it does happen, but yeah.

It does happen, absolutely.

One last question around this topic.

People listening might wanna become growth advisors.

I mentioned this earlier.

Is there any other advice you wanna share just like if you wanna become a growth advisor someday,

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here's what you should think about?  
Yeah, I think the right mental model  
as a growth advisor is the same one as an investor.  
So the most important thing an advisor can do,  
aside from having impact and knowing their craft,  
is picking which companies to work with.  
Especially if you're working for equity.  
So I'll only speak to that,  
but you're basically putting in your time.  
You're picking a, you know,  
likely a smaller number.  
You only have so many hours in a day  
of companies to work with.  
And you wanna make sure there's a likely exit in the future.  
So for me personally, I have a spreadsheet  
like most big decisions that I make in my life.  
And over the years, I've just added criteria  
and questions to ask myself about the company  
and then reflect on, okay,  
is this kind of checking all the boxes for a likely outcome?  
Because you don't just need to be successful.  
You need to be successful.  
And for the company to be successful  
and for there to be liquidity of that.  
So you need to put yourself in the shoes of an investor  
and look at it as an investment.  
That is the arguably the most important thing  
because you can go and do a great job  
and then wait many years  
and potentially not see any reward for it.  
I think that's the nice thing about the equity structure  
and that you're tied in the same incentives  
with the founder, which is just great  
in terms of any relationship to have the same incentives.  
But you wanna make sure that there's a good likelihood  
of a decent outcome down the road.  
The other, if I can throw another one in,  
the other piece of advice I would give  
is it can take a long time  
for some of these companies to be successful.  
That's okay.  
You should expect that.

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In fact, you should just go in with that mindset.  
When I'm deciding to work with a company,  
I'm in there for 10 years and I know that.  
And I say that, I'm in, we're in this together  
if I choose to work with the company.  
But it does mean that the structure of the deal  
needs to reflect that.  
So you need to have a long tail at the end.  
So if you're taking options or RSUs  
and it's purely equity, make sure you have the time  
for that to happen.  
There would be nothing worse than putting in your heart  
and soul, having impact and then waiting  
I don't know, a couple of years  
and then your equity expires.  
So you make sure there's a long tail.  
I mean, it can literally take over 10 years  
for these companies to exit.  
And you should be okay with that.  
I think that's okay, you're taking some risk.  
They're taking some risk on you.  
And that's a great partnership,  
but you'll just need the time for that.  
So advice to growth advisors,  
make sure that it's asked for a long tail  
so that you don't end up in a bad spot at the end.  
And that incentives again are perfectly aligned  
between the founder and the advisor.  
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and Cameo rely on Epo to power their experiments.  
Wherever you work,  
running experiments is increasingly essential,  
but there are no commercial tools  
that integrate with a modern growth team stack.  
This leads to waste of time building internal tools  
or trying to run your own experiments  
through a clunky marketing tool.  
When I was at Airbnb,  
one of the things that I loved most about working there

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was our experimentation platform,  
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So I wanna segue to a different topic.  
You're kind of the, you tell me,  
but it feels like you're one of the earliest SEO people in tech.  
You helped grow TripAdvisor many years ago  
and it was mostly SEO driven.  
I think innovated a lot of SEO tactics and strategies.  
And then you help Pinterest, ThumbTac,  
other companies that are very SEO driven.  
You talked about how many companies grow through one channel  
and these are all very SEO driven companies.  
I imagine Shopify has a lot of SEO work  
that's happening right now with you there.  
And so I wanna chat about SEO.  
So I guess broadly SEO is like,  
it's like this amazing growth channel.  
It's like basically free.  
It continues to work after you stop doing any work on it,  
you know, for a while.  
Many founders think about, should we invest in SEO?  
How do we approach SEO?  
So maybe just as a first question,  
what are signs that your product and company is a good fit  
for SEO being potentially a huge channel for growth?  
Yeah, I've been doing SEO for a really long time.  
It's a lot of fun.  
Certainly being a supervisor was a great learning ground  
for that, that we were able to really innovate

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and try new things there in terms of the playbook that we built out.  
That was a lot of fun those years.  
Couple thoughts, the first one would be, I do think there's an SEO play in any company, maybe to different extents, but Google is such a large funnel of existing demand for your product or your product area that there's usually an angle to get some SEO traffic there. So I do think it applies to most companies. I would say there, if you're an early product that's never seen, that the world's never seen, it's a brand new thing. There might be some creation, some demand creation you need to do, but most of the time there's existing demand in Google where you can harvest demand or there's queries that are related to your topic that you can start ranking for to start building brand awareness. So there's always some angle. And then I kind of divide websites or online products into two categories. There's the ones which are smaller sites, small number of pages, very targeted at your product, and don't have this kind of loop of creating new pages automatically. This would be most e-commerce sites actually. We'd have a number of pages around the products, about us, those types of pages. That's one type of site. Let's say they have a dozen pages. And then there's other ones with thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of pages which are either user-generated content like TripAdvisor and Pinterest and others, or Marketplaces, like Thumbtack and other types of websites like that. Those are generally easier to see a huge amount of impact very quickly because there's such a large optimization surface and ideally it's growing

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and generating traffic automatically.  
Voice Thought of LinkedIn is just a great example of this where you have this viral loop where you would, if you recall when it was just starting, everybody was getting these invites from LinkedIn and those come and go, you get an invite, you register, you don't, that happens. But the byproduct is when people join, they create this beautiful landing page which is your profile that gets indexed. It's kind of like a viral loop, feeding an SEO loop that continues to grow. So that's a good example of user-generated content which kind of feeds on itself and grows. So those two categories, going back to the first category, if you only have a small handful of pages, the way to think about that is you certainly want to optimize those pages. Then you want to start creating content that speaks to your audience beyond that. So you need a content strategy, whether it's a blog or creating new parts of your site that address questions that your audience might have. But generally speaking, I think there's an SEO play in any company and there's just different tactics, strategies and approaches to get there. Awesome, I never thought of it that way, that there's kind of these two buckets. So the first bucket is like, you don't have a ton of pages that naturally are generated as a part of your experience. And the second is you do. And I guess in the second bucket, I think of Reddit and Glassdoor and Quora, TripAdvisor, great example of interest. In the first bucket is the way to generate pages. Basically, it's like editorially, like write content, have people write things for you. Is that generally the strategy? There's different ways of doing it,

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but a good content strategy  
is a kind of tried and true approach, definitely.  
And in that bucket,  
if you don't naturally have a ton of pages,  
can you primarily grow through SEO?  
Or is SEO always gonna be this minority channel  
and you have to find something else?  
No, it can be a big channel.  
And this is also about creating content,  
but it's not your users creating the content,  
you have to go create the content  
and have some high quality answer to a question  
that's being asked on Google.  
And I think one thing to keep in mind with SEO  
is entire industries are based off of single keywords.  
I remember when I was in the travel industry  
that literally companies were bought and sold  
based on one keyword rank.  
So it's not like, oh, it's a little bit of traffic.  
And I think this is a bit unintuitive with growth.  
A lot of people think of growth as linear  
or it's another channel or it's another thing.  
I mean, growth done right is exponential.  
It literally is company changing.  
When he's talking specifically about SEO,  
keep in mind the world is searching for that thing  
on that one, targeted on that one, that one keyword  
and likely you're clicking the number one search results.  
So getting that number one spot is not like,  
oh, that's a little bit of traffic.  
You can literally build an entire business  
around that first spot.  
So don't think that's, well, maybe it is commonly known.  
I'm not sure, but it's definitely something  
that is not obvious or intuitive, I think to most people.  
And if you have an entire SEO team working on one keyword,  
I don't think that's crazy  
because one or a small number of keywords  
can define an entire industry or a business.  
Is there an example of that sort of situation  
when keyword building a massive company?  
Yeah, I mean, there's a lot, I'm sure.

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I can speak to my own company that I sold to TripAdvisor.  
It was called TravelPod.  
It was a travel blogging website  
where you can think WordPress, but for travel,  
which I started early, it was the first site to do that.  
And I made the mistake of not knowing SEO or growth  
before I sold the company.  
And so that was a great learning for me when I went in.  
This is the story where we're looking to acquire another site  
and I thought the product was pretty poor.  
And I remember talking to the founder  
and thinking he'd asked me if we'd wanna acquire it.  
And the product's terrible.  
Why would I wanna acquire that?  
He said, you have there 10 times bigger than you.  
What?  
And that was when I realized, okay,  
we've been building a great product  
and great engineering culture and it's important,  
but you really need to know this growth stuff.  
So that's actually the moment I shifted to, all right,  
we have to really know these growth levers.  
And in that space, the number one keyword was travel blog.  
And so owning that was a big deal and we did not own it.  
And I think we're ranked number two for a really long time.  
I can't remember if we got it in the end,  
but that's just one example where,  
and there was many, many travel businesses  
where I always loved looking at a business  
and trying to figure out, what's their growth loop?  
Like, how did they do that?  
And it's not like, oh, it's great business  
that just grew up most of the time.  
It's, you know, price line crush it at SEM,  
Facebook crush it on a viral loop  
where you got tagged in a photo,  
you got an email and you had to go register  
because there's a photo of you.  
So you really wanna see.  
Trivize is a great job at SEO.  
And it's often, it's just one really strong channel  
that propelled the company forward.



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And in this case, it can literally come down to one keyword like we had at TravelPod. So maybe a good time just to give a people a mental model of the different channels slash loops that exist. So you've talked about SEO is one, paid searches one. What are the, what's like the collection for people to think about? And like, usually, as you said, one of these is the primary source of growth for a company. Yeah, there's a variety of them. I think you have to look at where the intent is right now. And it does change over time, but you have social channels like TikTok, Instagram, influencers are a great area to engage with there. You have SEO, you have search. I think chat, chat GPT is another upcoming one that we might wanna talk about a little bit where I do think we've never seen that kind of growth for search before. And that's a platform that we have to start thinking about. How do we optimize for it? And Google just announced there are recent changes. They're going to be putting in an AI box at the top of the search results. So how do you optimize in a world where it's not so much about optimizing for the platform, but teaching the AI what you do and why you're the best in the world at it. So that's another whole other area we could talk about, but that's a big channel. I think that that's growing. Viral loops are always a powerful thing if you can get them to work. That's more about psychology and channel optimization where you want people to be incentivized to share the product that you have with their friends and then to have their friends come back and register. So you can have one viral loop, you can have secondary viral loops, you can bolt viral loops on their existing products. There's different ways of doing this. And then just backing up, when I think about growth,

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I don't think about a specific,  
it's not growth equals SEO and Instagram.  
For me, growth equals whatever it takes to move the needle.  
So I get this question all the time.  
How do you build a growth team?  
What does a growth team do?  
And I say, whatever it takes.  
And that could be zero to one building a new product.  
It could be M&A, it could be SEO,  
it could be social, it could be onboarding.  
And I think that's a better framework to look at.  
And then if you look at it through that lens,  
then partnerships easily folds into that  
where I've seen a lot of businesses get very big  
on just really clever partnerships,  
either strategic or broad kind of affiliate based partnerships.  
So there's a lot of channels.  
I definitely wouldn't restrict the scope of a growth team  
to just a small subset,  
but have a very wide funnel in terms of,  
or at least strategy in terms of  
just test a lot of different things  
and go after the channels that work  
and pivot when it does.  
And then really lean into the one or two or three  
that really work because sometimes  
that's all it takes for business.  
Well, you definitely nerd snipe me with the chat GPTs.  
So let's just spend some time there.  
I think this relates to just this general sense  
that SEO is always changing.  
And it feels like this is an SEM, I guess in this case too,  
and chat GPT and Barret, I guess,  
is maybe the latest change.  
So what should we know there?  
Yeah, I think we're all still trying to figure it out.  
I was at Google IO last week or the week before,  
and as soon as I saw the search result  
with the big box of AI answers at the top,  
having done this for so long,  
I immediately knew the impact that I think is about to come.  
And I've seen this play out in travel

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where Google acquired ITA and did flight search and hotel search, generally is great for users and great for Google and the search engines, but makes it a little bit difficult for the publishers and the sites that are adding value to the ecosystem through being ranked in the search results. So what we're about to see is basically Google, what they showed was a big box on top of the search results that answers the query directly. So if you think about that, that means that there's a lot of queries right now that users are clicking through down on the organic links and getting their answer there, which will be answered directly in the search results. You've seen this play out over the last five to 10 years where more and more answers are being shown at the top. Every time something changes, entire industries are disrupted or changed, and I think that's gonna happen again. So there's different types of keywords. There's transactional ones, like e-commerce keywords and with purchase intent, there's navigational ones where you're trying to get somewhere and there's informational keywords, which is I have a question, I'm looking for an answer. It's pretty broad, it's a big area. I think that last category of keywords is particularly a risk. So if anybody listening to this is currently getting traffic on those, you should start thinking about what does that mean when things start changing? And I think the changes will be, will probably start seeing things shift to paid. You have to pay for that free traffic. And the second one is there may just be a case where those keywords just don't get many clicks anymore. You might drop down to a very small number of clicks, if at all, because questions will get answered directly in the search results. So it's a big shift. We have to see how things land, but that's, I think over the next 12 to 24 months

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if history repeats itself, we'll see that channel change.  
And we've seen this play out at all the different channels.  
They kind of evolve.  
Generally the, you can't blame the companies,  
they're doing what they have to do.  
ChatGPT is now 50% of my daily searches and not Google.  
So I think Google has to react  
and this is what we'll see.  
So from a growth perspective,  
definitely something to start to think about.  
Super fascinating, I think about my newsletter  
and now Google suck it all up  
and just tell you all the answers.  
Great, good news for me.  
Just kidding.  
And the publisher.  
Yeah, now, yes.  
I, yeah, and change is great, you know?  
Things don't.  
It's exciting.  
We haven't had a big, like just  
geeking out on growth a little bit.  
We haven't had a big platform change in a long time.  
So I'm like, all right, cool.  
We get to, let's go see what we can do here.  
How do you optimize this?  
How do you, how do you, you know,  
how do you get listed if you can?  
We're not sure where the placements will be,  
but that will be the new game.  
Yeah.  
There's actually a Lennybot.com  
that is a GPT bot trained on my content  
that there's a newsletter post about how it was all built  
so you could build your own.  
And so I think my new goal is gonna have to be  
to convince people to go to Lennybot.com instead of Google.  
Wish me luck.  
Hey, that's just gotta lean into it.  
Yeah, we have a shop.ai, this great AI based shopping  
engineer, I'll tell you, I bought so much on it.  
It's so good.

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The more you use these technologies,  
the more you realize how good they are  
and that something big is coming.  
It's not just, oh yeah, there's another change.  
I was summarizing the Google changes to some people  
and originally I was thinking,  
this is the biggest change in the last 10 years.  
And then when I reflected on the last 10 years,  
I thought, this is actually the biggest change  
since the inception of Google actually.  
I don't think we've seen something as profound  
as what's coming and you really need to get ready for it.  
Damn.

Yeah.

I've been using ChatGPT for helping me  
with interview questions actually  
and once in a while, there's like a really good one.  
Oh, that's cool.  
So thank you, ChatGPT, for bringing me good things also.  
Maybe one more question along these lines  
around kind of connecting advisorship in SEO.  
Would you suggest when you're starting to think about SEO,  
starting to invest in SEO,  
you might be listening to this feeling like,  
I gotta think about SEO.

Does it make sense to bring on, say, SEO advisor like you  
and you're not available currently, but other folks like you?  
Or are an agency that is really good at this stuff?  
Or bring on so in full time?

Do you have any kind of frameworks  
for thinking about which direction to go?  
It's hard for an agency or a pure advisor  
without internal help to do it,  
a really good job without internal talent at the center.  
So I would say, I would start with just hire somebody  
internally and give them the mandate  
to incentivize them correctly to go and own this channel.  
If even if they don't know SEO, my advice would be hire,  
get an engineer, get somebody who is just a relentless doer  
who wants to learn this and surround them  
with great advisors that I've just seen  
that work really well.

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There are some good agencies out there.  
Agencies will be working with multiple companies.  
So it's a little bit harder to get the same impact  
from an agency.  
It can work sometimes,  
but my preference is generally a last resort  
would be an agency.  
And I much rather have somebody who's internal,  
who knows the business, who knows the keywords,  
who knows who can have the knowledge internally  
inside the company permanently  
and help grow a team around them  
and have succession in place in a proper team  
so that you're not too dependent on this one person,  
but that would be my go-to.  
And then if you're really stuck, you can use agencies,  
but my default would be having somebody internal  
supplemented with agencies if you have to.  
SEO is very specific.  
I mean, it's a very tight channel  
that knowing certain things about it  
can have a big impact.  
And I think you do want people that have that experience  
that can bring that in from the outside  
to augment the internal teams  
or it'll take a really long time to learn it.  
Awesome, I was gonna ask that.  
So you ideally wanna find someone that's done it before  
that isn't just a relentless learner,  
but like is that plus has done SEO in the past?  
Oh yeah, ideally you hire an amazing SEO person  
you can bring internal.  
Second would be somebody amazing who can get things done  
surround them with advisors.  
And then in my stack rank will probably be  
third would be agencies.  
Awesome.  
And then the other kind of common issue with SEO  
is it takes a long time to show impact.  
Do you have just a rule of thumb of just like  
give them this much time to see if they can make an impact?  
I'd say a few things.

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I'd say if you already have content and pages that are pretty good and getting a decent amount of traffic, it doesn't necessarily have to take a long time. So that would be my first reaction. It can take a long time. Generally it takes a long time when you have to build new content. So the way to think about Google is it is going to take your content, it's going to show it to its users, people that are searching and it's gonna determine which piece of content is the best to rank highly. It's not just about little tricks and links and keyword ratios that those days are over. Those do matter, but it's not purely about that. And if you have a new piece of content, it takes time for Google to build enough trust to say, okay, I'm gonna start showing this to users now and then start collecting user feedback and then rank it appropriately. That can take some time. But if you have existing pages that are ranking eight and they're already on the first page, it just doesn't always happen. But I've certainly seen it. In fact, more common than not that you could have sometimes hundreds of percentages of lift very quickly. And it depends what you're starting with. It's probably the right way to think about it. So if I'm trying to summarize it, I would say 12 months is probably like max. If you can't see impact in 12 months is something wrong. If you have existing content, it could happen pretty early. Could happen on day one. Actually, I've seen that happen. It could happen if you have to build new parts of the site, it can take months. I've seen that happen in companies I've worked with where I think it would be like a quarter. We had to wait till we saw a big lift.

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So it's somewhere between three to 12 months.

Yeah.

Awesome.

That's really helpful.

Okay, so final topic slash final question.

You've had a truly incredible career.

You've worked with incredible companies, incredible leaders.

I'm looking at your site here in the side window and you're like, here's a picture of you and Zuck.

Here's a picture of you and Toby from Shoppoint.

And there's more.

And I'm curious what you believe has been key to your success and your career success that you suggest listeners who want to have some measure of similar success do.

It's probably a bunch of things we can talk about here.

Yeah, this is the obvious thing is like,

I think you've just got to love what you do.

You got to work hard.

You get that impact.

Certainly at the end of the day in growth, that's all that will matter.

If I think back to specific things that I do though, that are to pick one thing that's been very important for me throughout my journey is the art of self-reflection and coaches.

I've had coaches my whole career, but the macro theme is you're constantly iterating, experimenting and becoming the best you can be in your career, also as a dad and as a husband, but and support for your own personal health.

But that reflection is so important.

And I've leveraged many, many different coaches over the years and now do a lot of self-reflection through a morning routine that I have and that I've been doing for quite some time that has been a big unlock for me.

And the biggest, most important part of that morning routine is like dedicating an hour aside to really think about what's going well, what's not going well, what am I screwing up?

Why am I screwing it up?



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Which is often more important than what am I screwing up?  
And of course, what am I gonna do about it?  
But as long as you're learning and iterating every day,  
then you're just making constant progress  
towards your goals.  
And it's something I do that I love doing.  
I love thinking.  
So I literally can just sit there  
and think for hours actually.  
And I have a dashboard on all the areas  
that I'm focusing on with red, yellow, green  
and just constantly revving on what am I working on improving?  
What am I doing?  
What experiments am I running?  
And where am I doing well?  
And where am I not doing well?  
And how can I be better in all areas of my life  
including being a leader?  
So there's a lot of different things to it,  
but I think that's really important  
and something that I've learned over the years  
that is probably the most valuable to have as a skill.  
Okay, I definitely wanna spend more time on this.  
So you said you sit for an hour reflecting  
on what's going well, what's not going well.  
Is there more you can share  
about how you accomplish that?  
How you find time to do this for an hour?  
Yeah, it sounds crazy when you say it, but I do.  
So I wake up at five, I work out.  
So I do cardio, do some exercise.  
This is a great book called Spark,  
which is all around the neuroscience of exercise  
and really learned a lot from that  
in terms of having this great morning routine.  
It really boots you up.  
I kinda call it my boot loader.  
When I start in the day, if I go through my boot loader,  
I have a much better day.  
So exercise, stretching, meditation,  
and then do a cold plunge now.  
So do a bunch of different things.

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But then I do some reading, but I do carve aside.  
Yeah, one hour where I go through,  
and this is probably important.  
That's kind of where I've landed,  
but structured self-reflections.  
That's why I have this dashboard.  
I have certain areas that I think about what's going well,  
what's not.  
I track all the experiments I'm writing,  
and I'm just really passionate about,  
if you're gonna do something,  
try to do it as best as you can.  
And this is a habit that has allowed me  
to kinda sharpen my skills in certain areas.  
What are some of these things you're working on  
if you can share what's on this dashboard?  
How can people imagine what this might be?  
So there's a lot of personal stuff on it,  
but it literally is broken down  
between being a better friend,  
better husband, better dad, and then better leader.  
And so being on the personal side,  
I've been known to work a lot of times.  
Balance is always hard to find.  
And from being a dad,  
and then thinking about how to be better there,  
I realized about six months ago  
that I've never actually asked for feedback  
on how I'm doing.  
So I asked my kids six months ago,  
I asked both of them independently,  
what's one thing I can do to be a better,  
to do more of or do less of, to be a better dad.  
And they were kinda caught off guard by it.  
My son's 15 and my other son is 12.  
And I said, it takes some time to think about it.  
And after about a month, my son came back and said,  
Dad, I've got one.  
He said, I wanna spend more time with you.  
And so that was very helpful for me to hear.  
And I'm big on routines and habits  
to make sure the things that you wanna do are repeatable.

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And it's not one-off things.  
So ever since that day,  
I've now have a daddy date, if you wanna call it.  
But every two weeks, we do one-on-one time  
together with each of the boys.  
They get to pick what we do.  
This way that consistent, whether it's dinner  
or play basketball in the front.  
But it's all about feedback.  
That's one example on the personal side.  
This reminds me of a tweet I just saw  
where someone said that the only people  
that are gonna remember that you worked late  
for many nights is your kids.  
Wow.  
Wow.  
That's deep.  
Yeah.  
I like that a lot.  
No, it's a soon-to-be-parent that's gonna stick with me.  
Wow, I like that a lot.  
So it's tough, right?  
It's tough to balance it all out.  
It's very difficult,  
but you wanna excel at everything you do in life.  
And so that reflection helps be a check-in as well  
of how am I doing in all these areas.  
And I find the color coding is helpful for that too,  
of just doing a bit of a gut check  
and asking for that feedback.  
So this makes me think about,  
I was watching a Jeff Bezos interview  
and I asked him what his morning routine was  
and he said that he just likes to putter around.  
He likes to just sit around, talk to his kids,  
read the newspaper.  
Like he doesn't book any meetings in the morning.  
He just finds he just needs  
like a little flex time at the beginning.  
Totally.  
So I read, before I became a dad,  
I read somewhere that one of the most impactful things

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you can do as a father is just be there  
for dinner every night.  
So I have been there for 15 years every single night,  
but as a good reminder, it's not enough.  
Having dinner is important with your family,  
but in our case, there's more you can do  
and just getting that feedback  
and doing some reprioritization is always important.  
Speaking of dinners and maybe just as a last question,  
I know you do this really interesting thing  
where you have dinners with interesting people.  
You just kind of invite them to your house.  
I don't know if interesting is the right way to describe it,  
but just kind of interesting people, prominent people.  
Can you just talk about what that is  
and what you think about and what the benefits  
of doing something like that?  
I think interesting is the right way to think about it.  
I started this when I was in Ottawa  
with a bunch of founders there  
and it's become one of my favorite things to do.  
Honestly, it's like the bright spot in my month  
that I call them guilds.  
So the word be guild is the builders  
and that's how it originally started.  
So guild night is what I call it.  
And the idea is basically all interesting people  
doing interesting things  
actually want to spend time with each other.  
That's why I'm actually surprised more people don't do this,  
but I'll basically have interesting people come,  
usually five or six,  
and we'll sit around talking about specific topics.  
So I do one for consumer product.  
I do one for SEO.  
I do one for growth leaders  
and just have really smart, interesting people come  
and we'll talk about different topics that are relevant.  
Sometimes we'll pick a topic, so we'll have a group  
and then we'll say, hey, we want to talk about AI.  
So one of the advantages of being in the area  
is you can find three or four people

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that likely wrote some of the core code in Google or in AI and then they'll join in.  
People want to meet,  
people want to get together and have these conversations.  
So it's very exhilarating.  
I learned a ton.  
It's a lot of fun.  
I don't know why more people don't do it and it's a bit of work to organize, but it's also just tactically been a great way to meet fascinating people.  
It's helped a lot for recruiting, for if you need a back channel, now you know all these people that are in different industries, but business aside, they're very valuable business-wise, but they're just a lot of fun and they've become some of my favorite things that I do and I'm really surprised why more people don't do it because I think especially now that everybody's remote and we're working from home or most people are, it's more value than ever.  
So it's something I'm looking forward to continuing and always actually through my morning reflection thinking about what are new ones I can spin up who are interesting people that we want to break bread with.  
And I do think it's important that it's done at your house.  
If anybody's thinking of starting this, you can do it at a restaurant, but there's something about being in your home or being in somebody's home, five or six people having a great conversation about a topic that's mutually interesting and I think everybody values it and it adds a lot of spice to life.  
I think it's really important.  
Any other tactical tips for making one of these happen?  
So do it at your home, you cater.  
Do you, how many people, how long, anything else you want to share there?  
Yeah, so I think the most I've done is 10.

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That's a bit too much.  
Six seems to be perfect, six to eight.  
Eight at the max, I do get a catered  
so you don't have to worry about cooking the topic.  
It's something like a topic that is common  
so that everybody can rally around.  
I do think it's important,  
like I mentioned, doing it at home.  
Usually we start around six, go till nine or 10  
and it's just been a really good thing  
that I've learned over time is a really good thing  
to do to just make for a better life, frankly,  
to make a richer life with some great friends.  
And we say cater, it's just like ordering in basically,  
right, it's nothing.  
Yeah, you can just door dash some food.  
So you don't have to worry about cooking  
and I'm sure there's other things  
I've never really deeply thought about it  
but in terms of like what are the specific things  
I've evolved it over time but I don't cook anyways  
so it would be terrible if I cooked.  
So this is much easier to do it this way.  
And as long as you're inviting kind of interesting people  
everybody's going to want to come  
and spend some time and bring some bread.  
Well, with that we've reached  
our very exciting lightning round.  
I've got six questions for you, are you ready?  
I think so.  
I think you are.  
Well, question one, what are two or three books  
that you've recommended most to other people?  
So there's one that I've already mentioned, which is Spark.  
It's the neuroscience of exercise  
and that was, this is a great book  
and it's not one of these like, you know,  
exercise to stay fit, to live longer.  
This is really about, frankly, a few exercise  
and do it in a specific way.  
They have a kind of blueprint they lay out.  
It's good for just cognition

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and kind of horsepower and performance.  
So that's been a really important one  
and has been a big part of me  
building on my morning routine.  
The second one is one I picked up  
about, I think about a year ago or six months  
and I've recommended it, gee, I don't know,  
at least to a couple hundred people now  
because I recommended it to my team.  
It's called Smart Brevity.  
Have you heard of this one?  
No, but I love the sound of it.  
I've always been big on, you know, writing crisply  
and being very tight and not having like three page memos  
that you're sending off, especially now that we're remote  
and we're all doing Slack and email  
and different ways of messaging.  
How tightly you communicate, how crisp your communication is,  
is really important for, frankly,  
you getting your point across  
and also for the other person  
who's probably digesting a hundred of these messages.  
So this book is, it's a book on how to do that.  
It breaks down how to write crisply  
and the different parts of it  
and I've definitely seen improvements  
in the team since I've passed around.  
So that's a great book, if, frankly, for anybody,  
work or personal because we're writing so much  
and communication is so key.  
So that's the second one.  
The third one is a golden oldie.  
It's one that I've read many, many times  
and I recommend from a growth perspective.  
This one you've likely heard of as Influence by Kelmini.  
I got it back on my bookshelf there.  
Yeah, it's a great book.  
And it's because it's really the underpinning  
of so many different product and growth principles  
that you can apply.  
That's the classic that is good to reread at least once a year.  
So that's those are the three books.

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I'm gonna extend this a little bit.

I'm gonna add two books that are building on your two books or the first two books, I guess.

One is Peter Artea just wrote a book called Outlive.

I've got it right here.

Okay, and it's exactly the same kind of premise of just how important exercises and there's a whole,

I think there's a quote in there

of just like the only thing proven

to help you live longer is exercise.

And then Smart Brevity, there's another book that I'd recommend if people want more on this topic called Nobody Wants to Read Your Shit.

And it's by the guy that wrote The War of Art and Backer Vance.

And I forget his name off the top of my head,

but it's like, nobody wants to read your shit.

Here's what you need to do for people

to want to read anything you're writing.

Yeah, they want to scan, they want to read.

Yeah, that's great.

I'll pick that one up.

Nobody wants to read your shit.

Exactly, what a title.

That's a great title.

All right, back on track.

What is a favorite recent movie or TV show that you've really enjoyed?

You know, I don't watch TV much

and I haven't really watched any movies in a while,

but I do watch a lot of podcasts on YouTube.

And Andrew Huberman's got, of course, a great series.

I watch, I think everyone who puts out,

so I don't know if that counts, but that's-

Absolutely.

Okay, so I watch that.

And then, of course, the all in podcast is always fun.

So I make sure to watch those when they come out as well.

A lot of fun and informative.

So those are my two, I would say.

Great picks.

What is a favorite interview question that you like to ask?



**[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Leveraging growth advisors, hiring well, mastering SEO, and honing your craft | Luc Levesque (Shopify, Meta, TripAdvisor)**

Teach me something about growth that I don't already know.  
Because, and you can apply this to engineering product,  
any other area, because it really gives you a sense  
of what this person thinks is the top of the stack  
in terms of the smartest thing they know,  
whether you know it or not, is irrelevant.  
But sometimes you actually do end up learning some stuff,  
but it's my favorite question  
because you can really engage in a conversation around,  
okay, this is the thing you think is so unique  
that maybe you've come up with this learning yourself  
or you've created this tactic  
and then gives you a sense of how much they know the craft.  
So that's my favorite question.  
What is a favorite product that you've recently discovered  
that you just really love?  
I've got a cold plunge that I bought that I love.  
It's the, something called the Renew Cold Plunge.  
It's cold, but super convenient.  
And I do that every morning and I just love it.  
Any advice for cold plunging  
that sounds very painful and hard?  
I usually start going to hot tub, warm up,  
then I go in the cold plunge and back in the hot tub.  
That's an easy way to get started.  
But I will say, I jumped in yesterday and today  
without going to hot tub, it was very painful,  
but I felt so much better after.  
So I might be changing up my approach,  
but I'm just kind of experimenting with different things,  
but that would be some advice and then just go slow.  
Start it, not too cold  
and then slowly make it colder over time.  
But it's a pretty good,  
I think it's a pretty good thing to add in so far.  
How long do you spend in the cold plunge?  
It varies right now, I'm doing five minutes.  
Five minutes at, I think it's 53 degrees.  
So it's just, I started at 68,  
it's slowly bringing it down.  
So, but you do have to go slow  
because I brought it down even further

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and kind of caught me off guard and kind of a little dizzy.  
So you've got to find your sweet spot.  
Damn, very Huberman inspired.  
Definitely it was part of the source there.  
I know people would hear a lot about cold plunges.  
I guess, what have you seen as a benefit  
just while we're on this topic  
for people to like seriously consider doing this?  
So a couple of things.  
Mood afterwards is so much better.  
You get this, this great multi hour boost from doing it,  
especially like I mentioned, not doing warm before  
or waiting 10 minutes and waiting 10 minutes after,  
before you warm up, after you get out, great mood boost.  
It also helps a lot of sleep.  
So if you do it at night,  
which is a little bit difficult, it helps a lot with sleep.  
Those are probably the two biggest things.  
And you do get to a point on there now  
where I kind of look forward to it  
because you know how good you'll feel afterwards.  
So when I'm thinking about it, I know it's painful.  
It doesn't make it easier,  
but I do look forward to it now.  
It's a pretty cool thing.  
Oh man, gotta get one now.  
Yeah.  
Okay, two more questions.  
What's something relatively minor  
that you've changed in your product development process  
that has had a big impact on your team's ability to execute?  
One change that comes to mind is,  
you know, it's common to hear discussion around,  
yeah, you need to experiment.  
You need to have rigor.  
You need to look at results,  
iterate based on those results.  
That's pretty much common knowledge  
is how all, you know,  
all good companies that execute growth do it.  
See the subtlety is that experiments are great,  
but they're also, they can be slow.

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You have to look at the results.  
You have to analyze how things went.  
You have to learn what's going on.  
You have to build the experiment.  
So there's, there's a cost to an experiment  
and not everything needs to be experimented.  
And that's not something that I generally hear  
first teams talk about.  
It's usually, hey, we need to experiment.  
So one thing that we're definitely focused more on lately  
is this idea of, you know,  
sometimes you just need to yolo it  
because it's a better product experience  
or you just kind of know what's going to work.  
And, you know, if you're yoloing 40 things  
and three of them work and you can look at pre-post  
or you can look at holdouts,  
there's ways of making sure you're,  
you know, cause major damage,  
but the speed can outweigh the costs and time  
it takes to do experiments.  
So that's one change we've recently implemented  
that's been pretty impactful.  
Final question.  
So we met actually a long time ago in Montreal  
or maybe it was in Ottawa in Canada somewhere.  
And I think it was through an organization called C100  
when I was starting my company back in the day.  
And so my question is,  
what is your favorite Canadian food?  
You know, it's funny.  
My favorite Canadian foods are from Ottawa  
and there's a lot of shawarma,  
Lebanese shawarma everywhere.  
I know it's not traditionally Canadian,  
but Canada is so multicultural.  
So I'll make this count.  
I love a good shawarma  
and it's so hard to find a good shawarma in the Bay Area.  
So we've still been looking here  
but my favorite Canadian food  
or pseudo Canadian is shawarma.

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If I had to pick one purely Canadian food  
and this is related to Montreal where we first met  
it's got to be a Montreal smoked meat sandwich.  
Excellent choices.  
You're making me very hungry.  
I'm going to go get some shawarma,  
buy me a coal plunge.  
Luke, this was amazing.  
We talked through everything.  
I was hoping to talk through advisorships, SEO, hiring,  
building habits, coal plunges.  
Two final questions.  
Working folks finding online  
if they want to reach out and learn more  
and how can listeners be useful to you?  
You can find me online at lukelevec.com.  
So firstname, lastname.com  
and how can they be useful to me?  
Listen, we're always looking to hire the best of the best.  
So if you want to work,  
get an amazing company with an amazing team  
doing very impactful work and learn the craft of growth,  
please reach out.  
We're always looking to bring on amazing talent.  
So that would be the one way.  
Awesome.  
Luke, thank you again so much for being here.  
Thanks.  
Great to chat.  
Bye everyone.  
Thank you so much for listening.  
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