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you if you're you're in there. This structure really is about defining a movement. And that's very different from, Hey, I'm going to solve your problem. Welcome to Lenny's podcast, where I interview world class product leaders and growth experts learned from their hard one experiences building and growing today's most successful products. Today, my guest is Andy Raskin. Andy helps CEOs and company leaders align their teams around something he calls a strategic narrative, which, as you'll learn all about in this episode, is essentially a simple story that helps people understand why they need your product. And with that helps you align your sales, marketing and product teams, along with your fundraising and even your hiring efforts. Andy has worked closely with some of the most successful founders and companies out there, including companies like Gong, Dropbox, Uber, Salesforce, Square, IBM, and many others. In our conversation, Andy explains why most people are pitching their product completely wrong, why focusing on the problem you're solving for people is no longer an effective pitch, and how the strategic narrative helps you frame your solution in a much more effective way. Andy also shares a ton of examples of the framework of action, why focusing on categories and category creation is so limiting, signs your narrative needs work, and so much more. Enjoy this episode with Andy Raskin after a short word from our sponsors. This episode is brought to you by Koda. You've heard me talk about how Koda is the doc that brings it all together, and how it can help your team run smoother and be more efficient. I know this firsthand because Koda does that for me. I use Koda every day to wrinkle my newsletter content calendar, my interview notes for podcasts, and to coordinate my sponsors. More recently, I actually wrote a whole post on how Koda's product team operates, and within that post they shared a dozen templates that they use internally to run their product team, including managing the roadmap, their OKR process, getting internal feedback, and essentially their whole product development process is done within Koda.

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Andy, welcome to the podcast. Oh, thanks Lenny. So great to talk to you.

So you're quite known as someone that helps CEOs optimize their pitch, their story, their strategy, which we're going to get deep into. But before we do that, can you just give us a little glimpse into how you found your way into this line of work?

So I started as a coder. I was a computer science major undergrad. A friend and I had an idea for an app. So this was like during the dot com years, so Windows app. And we coded a little prototype, and we started, we put it out there, we started getting some users, and we thought, okay, maybe we can get some investment. So of the two of us, I spoke English fluently, so we decided, okay, I'll write the investor pitch. So I wrote the pitch, we sent it out, and the reaction was really bad.

And one VC wrote back and said, listen, I rate every plan I get on a scale of one to 10, and yours is a one. And then next to the one, he wrote in parentheses worst, in case we thought, like maybe that was the top of his reading scale. Yeah, brutal. And but then lowered down, so this was back when they would like, you'd send the hard copy of the plan, and they might mail it back with comments written in, and he had written in not a compelling story. And a few weeks later,

I'm walking by this Barnes and Noble, and there's a sign in the window that says, for anyone who wants to tell a compelling story, okay, that's me. And there's an arrow that's pointing to these books. And they turn out to be screenwriting books. And I didn't know anything about this. So I started reading these books. And it strikes me like, a movie is a pitch,

like, you know, what is Star Wars a pitch for? It's a pitch for, you know, be good, like care about people, trust the force, you know, in their terms. But I don't have a couple of hours, you know, I'm pitching a business is very different, you know, I'm not writing a 3x screenplay. So like, what applies, what doesn't apply? I mean, these are questions I think I'm still asking.

But I did my best to kind of take some of the learnings of how the movie was structured, it was very different from how my pitch was structured, and kind of restructure it. And we did that, and we sent the pitch out, and we start getting more interest, like it's really clear. And then we had a term sheet, I think a few months later. And I'm like, what is this story thing that we didn't change the product? I was basically the same business, just sort of how we talked about it. That was really interesting to me. And I mean, over the next like 10, 15 years, I thought about like, hey, maybe I could do consulting with this, like CEOs have heard about this would like ask me about it. But I still was like, no, no CEO is going to like budget a line item for the story, you know, like that's not a thing. So I just didn't do it for a really long time until eventually I was proven wrong about that. And how many years ago was this at this point? So this was like 98 when I was pitching that company.

Amazing. I think there's a couple of interesting tidbits about this. One is that interesting opportunities arise when you're doing something you're excited about. So you had this startup, it didn't work out, but like, you've you had a problem that you solved for yourself,

and that led to another bigger opportunity. Yeah, total road. So that's interesting. And then also some of the best opportunities arise from solving your own problem, not having not planning to start something with it, but just like I have a problem.

Yeah, I think that's the same with you, right? Like you started writing about stuff and like, boom, like that became the thing. Absolutely. It was not quite boom, but eventually, eventually became boom feels like boom from outside. That's yeah, that's that's how it goes.

It always feels it always feels overnight for everyone else that isn't right. Exactly. Yeah.

Okay, so let's get into it. So you help CEOs at this point come up with what you call a strategic narrative. And you help them not only come up with this strategic narrative, but you help their teams align around this strategic narrative. So let's just start with what is a strategic narrative?

Yeah, you'd think like I've been doing this for like 10 years, I'd have a very snappy definition of it. And I don't know if I'm really happy with like I've ever found one that totally gets at it yet. The one thing I say is like it's this one story that the CEO uses to drive success in marketing sales, but also product that it becomes like a North Star strategic North Star for product roadmap for fundraising, for recruiting really everything. And what I think is really interesting is a kind of qualifier is that this story has a certain structure. Kind of like I said, when I found those screenwriting books, I sort of shifted the structure.

And the traditional structure, the way I learned how to pitch in business school, I think the way most people did it is what I call the arrogant doctor. So you have a problem, a pain, I have a solution, you know, a treatment, and I'm going to tell you why it's better than all the other treatment. Not to say it's not better, but just this is the structure of it. And it kind of sets you up for bragging. Like let me tell you why it's so great. And the structure that I read about in these movies was different. In the movies, every movie starts with some kind of shift in the world, in the character's world. And I call this shift the shift from old game to new game. And the archetypal example of this, I think in the business world, is what Benioff did with Salesforce. So he comes in and he says, hey, software is over. Like, meaning software in the sense that we're going to own it and maintain it. And there's this new world called the cloud, a new game, like the new rules, everything has changed. And that's the new way to win. And we're going to help you if you're in there. This structure really is about defining a movement. And that's very different from, hey, I'm going to solve your problem.

I think the Salesforce example is an awesome example of your approach. If they were thinking about it in the old way, what would Salesforce have done? How would they have pitched it if not for everyone's moving to the cloud, you're dumb if you're using desktop software?

Well, I think they would have just come out and said, hey, CRM, by the way, was already a category. I mean, Siebel was the huge giant of that space. There were already even companies doing it online, doing it through the web. And so they would have come and said, oh, where easier to install than faster to get up and running than Siebel? Or we have this much functionality compared to, I think it was at NetSuite or some early Salesforce-like thing that was out there.

They would have done these comparison things. And Benny up, I mean, he's a pretty proud guy.

I think he did still say, hey, we're the number ones here. But that wasn't what they led with.

They led with this story about this fundamental paradigm shift. And are you in or are you not in?

And what they did was instead of just saying, hey, we're better, then they said, hey, all those

others, those Siebels, they're part of that old game. You want to play that software game? Be my guest. Go buy Siebel. And of course, we know how it played out. So the crux of the approach is instead of problem solution, you should go do this. It's the world is changing. Here's where it's going. And we're going to help you get there. And I want to go in a little more depth of the framework. But before that, what are some other examples to give people a sense of like, oh, I see, I understand what this might be. So another great example and no coincidence. So it is Zora. So Zora is the company I wrote about in this post called The Greatest Sales Like I've Ever Seen. The CEO of Zora, Tien Suo, was employee number 11 at Salesforce. So he learns this from Benny up. And he's pitching, you know, hey, in the old world, businesses operated on transactions. You sold things to people outright. In this new world, he calls it the subscription economy, where people want the benefits of those things without necessarily having to pay for them. And of course, gives all these examples of all the winners, you know, in this, look at all the winning companies are all basically going to this new model. And, you know, and so he's pitching someone like Ford. And you can imagine they're going to Ford and pitching, you know, a subscription for car service, which is quite different from just Elise. And they're starting out with this, you know, this is the big shift. Another one team I worked with early on, and I think they agree like their story came out of this work was Gong. So Gong, you know, everyone probably knows by now, like they, you know, they take the video recordings of all your sales calls and they stick AI onto it and come out with all these insights. And that story is, you know, hey, goodbye opinions. Used to be a world where we sales have run opinions. Hello, reality that now all the winners are going to are adopting this new mindset where we really have to see what's really going on. In the Gong example, let's say what would they have done if they were going like, here's the problem, here's the solution, here's what we're going to do for you. Yeah, I mean, that's kind of what they were doing when they started out. And I'm not saying like that that didn't work totally. I mean, already by the time they started doing this, like they they were starting to become a big company. I remember Amit Bendoff said to me, listen, Andy, you know, they were around like Series B, I think this is around 2018. It's like, we're going to be a huge company. The question is how huge? And, you know, I think that this narrative, like along the lines of like a Zora sales, or if we get this right, this is going to be a multiplier on our growth. So, you know, I don't remember exactly the pitch before him, but it was very much like, hey, we're going to record your calls, we're going to get insights from them. They're better than the insights you could get from Salesforce. There wasn't this kind of unifying kind of movement ideology that put it all in context. And what was really interesting was one thing I don't think they'd be upset if I shared and maybe it's known, like, you know, initially they were seen as a tool for like sales operations, you know, for someone who's going to record the calls. And what this narrative did for them, I mean, I think it was already starting to happen, but what it really coalesced was this is a tool for sales leadership. You talked about Zora and the post you wrote, and I imagine many people are sitting here like, oh, shit, this is the guy that wrote that post that everyone's always sharing with me about how to make a deck. And I wanted to ask how impactful was that one piece of writing for you and your career, just like as a tangent? I had written some other posts on Medium, but in particular, Medium

Medium has changed quite a bit. But back then, I found that I could write stuff there and get really like a lot of people who were interested in what I was interested in would sort of come in and create some noise about it. So I was already doing this kind of work for a couple of years, but that post immediately got something like 2 million views around the world. And I started getting inquiries from teams all over the world. And it was, I think what really allowed me to know, okay, I could do this work that that CEO's would budget a line item for this. Because I think if you really understand that post, it's not really about a sales deck. It's really about this story that Tien and that the CEO is telling everywhere and that is showing up in the sales deck and structuring it that way. And I think that's just another example that comes up a bunch on this podcast, just the power of writing and the power of content. And there's, yeah, you're shaking your head. Yeah, totally. I mean, I had a little mini career as a journalist, as a freelance writer. And I really loved that. I actually, I took a class in New York called How to Write a Magazine article. I was sort of mid-career, sort of curious. And the class wanted to be more about how to sell a magazine article. And I found I really love that, like pitching articles. But one thing that was always a downer for me, it was like, there's always this editor sort of deciding what's going to be out there. And when you work with a great editor, it's great if they make yourself better and they're priceless. But still, there's this intermediary. And what started to happen, I think around, when I started writing around 2013, 14, you start to see these platforms like Medium, even LinkedIn, where you can just write and have this audience. And I think no way I could do the work I do if that development hadn't happened first. I'm taking us off track, but I want to go a little deeper with this. I find that there's kind of two paths to writing online. One is your path where you write one piece that just blows up like crazy. The other path is more my path where I just write consistently for a long time and both work. And most people try to get your path and they never succeed. It's really hard to make something get too many views, but you can go that path. You know, this is like you said earlier, like, hey, it seems like boom, but really it did. So that was probably the 30th or 40th piece. And they were gradually getting more and more traction. There was one I wrote before that about kind of dissecting Elon Musk's pitch for the Powerwall, the battery that they sell. And that one got maybe like a few hundred thousand views and also was a big jump. And then, you know, the next one got, you know, some paltry number. So what I find is like, yeah, there's this a while where you're writing and it feels like you're talking to nobody. And then sort of gradually it grows and you'll have these peaks and but then, you know, over time is where the magic is. Okay, I'm really glad you're pointing that out that it rarely is just you write one thing and boom. Yeah, great. I'll also say, sorry, because I worked in a magazine, I haven't done a newsletter because that idea of like having a deadline all the time and like constantly having to we used to call the magazine feed the beast. Like, I feel so free not to have that. So for now, at least I haven't done that. I know that well. So let me take us back on track. And yeah, let's talk about just the high level framework here. So you talked about the it starts with this idea of tell people, world is changing during this movement. What's like the simple way to think about this, the pieces of this strategic framework? A lot of times people will contact me say, hey, I tried it, didn't work. And well, one, one very common thing, at least earlier, was they would basically just take this war a deck, they get a hold of it and just like put

their logo on it. And so that's not gonna work. One thing is, you know, we're not just saying, hey, the world is changing. And there's sometimes the world is changing and there'll be used to be and there's a long list of things. And then now it is a long list of bullet points, right? What's really, I think key is naming it, like naming that old game, the examples you saw, software, cloud, transactions, subscription, opinions, reality, this very, very concise naming is really key. And it's hard because in making it compact, you're losing completeness. So, you know, you can imagine you're in a meeting, someone says like, hey, how about we do transactions to subscriptions? And so I was like, well, I don't know, there's a lot of things I don't really subscribe to subscription economy really. So we're always kind of overstating it in a way, but it's not a problem. Like, you know, I don't think people say like, oh, you know, that's wrong subscription kind of because I still go to the grocery store and buy things, right? So anyway, that's the first piece. The second piece is what I call naming mistakes. And there's a few ways to do this. But one that's really great if we can do it is to name the winners to show that winners are already playing this new game. So for instance, with Zora, they're saying, hey, look, look at all the new winners, like this is like 2015. So like Airbnb, Box, you know, all these companies, they're already doing this subscription thing. And by the way, overall, they show this scary stat about the longevity of Fortune 500 companies, it's getting smaller. And so it's a little disengaged. But basically, they make this case that, hey, companies are dying, the ones that are winning are doing this, right? And so to the extent we can, we want to make this life and death, just like a movie, right? And this is again, I'll make the parallel to Star Wars. So Luke spends like the first 15 minutes of the movie belly aching, like he wants to be a pilot, he wants to go out and have adventures in space. So Obi-Wan comes, he says, hey, we got this mission, this princess, we got to read and all this stuff. Let's go out and let's go, I'll teach you to be a pilot, we'll go and have adventures in space. What does Luke say? He says, ooh, you know what? I can't really get involved, I gotta go home. It's late. Who does this sound like? The reluctant buyer. So yeah, I want to be innovative and all this, ooh, you know what? I don't have a budget this quarter. So how does George Lucas change Luke's mind? He basically kills the aunt and uncle. Sorry, spoilers. It's been 40 years though, but if you haven't seen it, you're probably not going to see it. Kills the aunt and uncle, now it's pretty clear they're coming for Luke. Now the stakes are life and death. Probably he's going to be dead, but there is this other path that Obi-Wan holds out for him. And whenever I work with teams and I talk about this, so they're like, okay, I guess we got to then kill the prospect and uncle. And basically, yes, I mean, figuratively, we got to show them that the future is not going to just be sort of okay. People talk about making it emotional. And I've always wondered, what does that mean? Literally, what is the definition? And this is for me the definition is that the prospect doesn't see the future as sort of okay. They see it as split between a very negative outcome and a potentially very positive outcome. The third piece is what I call naming the object of the new game. I used to call it the promised land message, but I've changed it to this because I found that it's sort of a little more fruitful. This subscription economy transactions, it can get a little highfalutin and sort of big, right? But on the website, when we just have to boil it down to a couple of words that's going to be clear right away, what can we say? And I find that what's the object of the new game? It really

boils it down. It's kind of the rallying cry of the movement. So the example with Zora, the object for a while was turn customers into subscribers. Very simple, it just sort of flows from it. Airbnb for a while had this one live anywhere. If you think about- So it didn't belong anywhere.

Well, actually it was-

Oh, it was like a human.

Right. It was belong anywhere and then it switched to live there.

I mean, I have the chronology wrong, but it was the two of those things. You know better than I do, right? But either way, I mean, I think they're saying very similar things. Hey, there's this

new world where you don't have to live in hotels, you can stay in people. What's the object of that game is to belong anywhere, to live there, right? And I love it when it works that way where it's almost like an asymptotically unachievable thing. You're never literally going to live there. And if you think about it, this buyer mission statement is this rallying cry.

I think of it really as the mission of the company. I mean, what is the mission of Airbnb other than to help people live there if they're going to be customer focused and all that?

The fourth piece is, okay, well, this object of the game, winning this game, it better be hard, because if it's not like we don't have a, like why we even exist, just like with the movie, like if Luke can just go destroy the Death Star, then no movie. So there's got to be sort of obstacles in the way, things that are preventing them from it. So saying, okay, you want to turn customers into subscribers. So where's Zora, where they go next and say, okay, well, how are you going to measure lifetime value? Because now you have this always on thing. How are you going to measure preferences and how they're changing over all these new kind of challenges that didn't exist before. And then, and these are like the opposite, these are like the, you know, the monsters and Lord of the Rings or, you know, the Empire and Star Wars, these are the obstacles. And I think about them because they sound like problems, you know, this is what people would normally say, oh, these are the problems we solve. But by setting up this story thing first, we've got to re-package them as obstacles to a new goal state that we've already positioned as life and death. So they take on this much more emotional meaning. We understand why they matter. And then, of course, the last piece is now talking about, well, how are we going to overcome these obstacles? How, you know, what are the, in the narrative people in the movie business, they call these like the magic gifts that the main character gets to go, you know, help them win. What are the ways, now we can talk about that and success stories and all the rest of the stuff. So there's some obvious parallels to the hero's journey here. I imagine that was a source of inspiration. And the Star Wars, I think, is like the epitome of that journey. Can you talk about just how related those two are, how you think about that? Yeah, I mean, so the hero's journey is this, this book that comes from, I think it's Hero of a Thousand Faces, is a book by Joseph Campbell, sociologist. And he looks at myths over different cultures and different times. And he finds this kind of common structure that he calls the hero's journey. I mean, there's some controversy about that, about his book, you know, is it very male oriented, sort of take on things and a bunch of things. But, you know, even at that aside, I found when I would talk about hero's journey and stuff, it's just like, it didn't really tell me what to do. Like, okay, yeah, I gotta do this pitch. So, you know, in the hero's journey, there's like refusal of the call. That's actually that one thing where Luke like doesn't, says he doesn't want to go and where the buyer says,

you know, hey, I'm, I don't have budget. But I don't know, it was just like too theoretical for me to really, when I use it, people seem to sort of glass over it. So I just don't really talk about that at all. But yeah, I mean, that's behind a lot of this stuff for sure. Yeah, that makes sense. Because I think people hear about that all the time when they're like, become better storyteller, tell your story in this hero's journey. And it's like, I don't know what I'm doing. Yeah. Also, I would say, you know, there's storytelling as a skill kind of thing, which is a great thing, you know, you learn how to tell stories better, blah, blah, blah.

I'm not really interested in that in my work. What I'm interested in is the one story and the structure of that one story. And this one story, it doesn't really have, you know, the world is moved from transactions to subscriptions. Like, there's not a main character in that story who's like having a problem and getting, you know, it's almost as if what's happening is, we're present, we're turning the person we talk to into the main character by, by creating this, by, by spelling out the shift, we're like changing their world. And we're asking, and we're saying, hey, you, you got to, you got to change. And do you want to come with us?

Yeah. And it's almost like you're putting them into the hero's journey, like you can win. Exactly. I love that. So let me just try to summarize what you shared this five step framework. So you start with, here's a new movement that's happening and you want to name it. You want to name the stakes and there's winners and losers and here's it's already happening and it's really important. Then you want to name the object of the new game, like turning customers into subscribers, then show the obstacles, here's why it's challenging and then talk about how you're going to overcome these obstacles.

Yeah. And by the way, the naming of the, the object of the new game, I find it often is really nice to do it as a question. So, you know, so we asked, so, so, hey, there's this shift from transactions to subscriptions and look, everyone's doing it. So we asked a simple question, what would it take to turn every customer into a subscriber, you know? And this way, we're kind of bringing the, the person we're pitching to along, almost like they're coming along with us as a co, I don't know, adventurer in, in crafting this story. I love that.

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will get an exclusive 4% APY on deposits over \$1,000. Learn more at eco.com slash Lenny, that's [ECO.com](https://eco.com) slash Lenny. Maybe just to reinforce this even more, what if we go through the five

steps and just with one company as an example and just talk about what each of those were for them?

Okay, great. So there's a company called 360 learning. I don't know if folks know this, but this company has raised over \$200 million. They're in the space of corporate training software. So big companies, they have to train their people on all kinds of stuff.

So you want to go through that one? Yeah, that sounds great. Okay, great.

So the story, and by the way, Nick Hernandez is the CEO, and Nick's been on my podcast, so he's talked about this. So they for a long time were pitching themselves as collaborative learning. So they have features that let people sort of collaborate on courses and all kinds of stuff. And Nick is often pitching CEOs, of course, his team as well. And he told me that it was sort of like kind of falling a little bit flat. Like people, collaborative learning, okay, whatever, you know, how are you different from this learning platform, this learning platform.

And so when we work together, you know, this collaborative learning, it's almost like a category name or a descriptor or something. They was so embedded that I decided like, I don't even want to like take it out, but can we define it in terms of like a of the story? So the story they came to was, hey, used to be that companies train their people through a basically a mindset of top-down learning. There's going to be some like learning guru at the company,

they're going to get all the courses, they're going to, you know, put it all together and like sort of set out this training material to everybody. And what's happening now is winning companies are approaching this differently in this, they're adopting this approach we might call upskill from within, which is, you know, if you look at like Google, like there's this page where I think you can go, it's a public, but you can like connect with like Google's AI experts, they literally turn their internal experts into like champions that are educating not even just the company, but even external people, they've created this culture of our own people are going to be the educators. So that's the shift from top-down to this upskill from within.

And of course, I just even started to do the second piece, which was like, hey, there's look at the big companies who are doing this. And then I think they showed, hey, you know, you're not doing this, look, training is becoming very expensive, it's people don't care, people, this is the downside. So we're creating these sort of stick. And also I think he

had something about, you know, how training now like companies, like if you don't adapt, like if you can't get these skills to your people, like if you're a car company and you can't get these skills around, you know, electric cars, you're dead, you know.

So Nick was in France and he saw this poster from a recruiting poster for McDonald's. And it said, hey, if you work at McDonald's, you're going to learn from everybody else on your team.

And it was like, wow, there it is, right? So it's another example we used as a kind of winner example. And so then the question became, you know, how, I can't remember exactly, it was something like, how do you upskill from within? Like, what would it take for you to turn your experts into like champions of learning in the company and turn them into stars and all this, right? And then I'm going to forget here what all the obstacles were. But I think it was things like, well, how are you going to make it possible for anybody to create a course? You know, people who don't even know how to, you know, how might have expertise in electric engines, but you know, don't know how to create a course, how that happened. How are you going to make sure that

there's still like the learning department, they're going to keep control and can, you know, all this, you can imagine all the different kind of questions. And then of course, now 360 learning starts talking about all that stuff. And what Nick has told me, I'm actually going to be on on a webinar with Nick, where someone asked me, like, could you bring in a CEO who could talk about, you know, this stuff, not just you blabbing on about strategic narrative? And so Nick is going to join it, join it. And we had a dress rehearsal the other day, and he was telling me like, it's just like, when he starts with this, now, he doesn't even get the question anymore of like, well, how are you different from this other learning platform, you know, which used to always be the thing. And it's just a much more seamless like, okay, yeah, talk to our learning people, get this, get this going. So it's just sounds like it's been really effective for them.

That's actually what I was going to ask next is what kind of impact have you seen with someone shifting their pitch and story from this doc? What was it the arrogant doctor approach to the strategic narrative? Yeah, I mean, it's always this kind of thing I hear. I mean, of course, it's very difficult to say, to measure this. I mean, like, what was the value of the strategic narrative for gong and its growth, you know, was it was it 3x versus one at 2x? I don't know who knows, right? But the things I hear from CEOs, a few things, one is that, yeah, when they're pitching, they're not pitching features out of context, they're pitching now a movement, you know, which is a lot better place to be, I think, you know, you're in a way, you're not pitching product product is like a prop for making the story come true. Very important prop, but there's this higher level overlay that becomes the focus of the conversation at first. Of course, we're going to get into product and that that helps sell. Once we have this story, then everything in marketing can be all about this story, you know, with Zora, when they, if you look at their website, well, when they first started doing this, like maybe 80% of the content is not hey, let me tell you about how Zora is so great or here's our new release or whatever. It's here's how music companies are embracing subscriptions. Here's how luxury goods companies are embracing. You know, it's like all these kind of almost trend pieces that become unlimited fodder. And again, you're not touting your, it's less salesy, right? Another thing I just hear always, I just interviewed a CEO this morning for my podcast and this is the first thing he actually said was it becomes the strategic North Star for the product. So what he was telling me, and this was actually a little unusual, I asked him, like, why did you come to me at first? And of course, I've asked him that before, but he said something that I, this time that was like a little different from what I heard before. He said, you know, we're constantly getting feature requests through sales, through customer success. And we had sort of no like way bar for to decide like, well, what do we take on? What don't we take on? And this clearly has become our bar. You know, if you think about it for 360 learning, you know, does it help us upskill from within? It's in does it not or it's prioritized, you know, does it not less prioritize? I mean, Bendoff told me this directly. He said, you know, exactly the same thing. We used to, he said, we get a lot of requests for features, and a lot of them are basically about opinions, like some way to record opinions. And this is gone.

We're not going to do those. And gone, yeah, we're not going to do those.

Are there any companies out there that maybe aren't clients that you see as like, wow, these guys are nailing it, and they're doing a great job of the strategic narrative?

Well, one that really comes to mind is, I mean, it's been out there for a while, but Drift, you know, Drift comes out with essentially like a chatbot for your website, which might be like the 30th chatbot for your website. And they don't say, hey, here's why our chatbot is the best one. They start from a completely different place, which is, hey, used to be people would sort of wait around for you to get back to them. You know, it was a world of sort of later of, they called it the world of forms, you know, you put up a web form and you expect someone's going to fill it out and maybe wait a few days while you take your sweet time deciding if they're going to, you're going to get back to them. And there's, and, and David Cancel and David Gerhard started from right at the beginning saying, now we're in a world of, of now where they, where buyers are, they, I think they showed this woman, I remember this woman sleeping with her phone, like that's your, that's your pros, your prospect, like there's always on and they're going to expect you to be engaging with them right away. And they called this conversational marketing. And, you know, they really went with that and created, I think, a whole movement and they broke away from all of the other, you know, chatbots. Awesome example.

So earlier you threw out this word category and I've noticed you haven't talked about category and category creation too much. And I think that you're kind of not a fan of this idea of creating a category and focusing on category. I'd love to hear your perspective on how that all relates to the stuff you recommend. Lenny, are you trying to get me in trouble? Like that guy, that guy in your podcast who, who attacked jobs to be done? Apparently. And let's do it. Let's see what kind of trouble

we can get into. I would, I would soften it a little bit and not just because I don't want the ire of the category design folks, but I really would soften and say, I wouldn't say I'm not a fan of creating category. Oh, look, I think the, you know, if you look play bigger, which has been become kind of the, the Bible of that category creation thing, you know, if you look behind that, they're going to, what, what do they say the category is? They say it's a narrative. It's a, a story about how the world was to, to how, how it is. And, and, and so what I find though is that when people think about category creation, they tend to just focus on like, okay, well, it's this category name going to be that we got. What are these three words that are, or two words, whatever, that are going to sort of magically make us seem like we're totally different from everybody else. And, and a, I think that's not really possible. Like these three words aren't going to do it. Take gong. I mean, already other companies were using this term revenue intelligence,

right? With gong, it certainly becomes a thing because I think they have this opinions to reality story behind it. You know, one point, I, again, I asked Amit, he said, yeah, he, because he had really, I remember he really struggled a lot. What should we call it? What should we call it? He came up with, with, with that one. But then when I asked him later, he's like, yeah, you know what? In hindsight, we probably could have called it like strawberry intelligence. It didn't matter. It was really the story that, that was sort of mattered. I don't, I think he was exaggerating a little bit, but, and I think the category people would actually agree with this. I think they would agree with like, Hey, you're the, these three words are, it's sort of a, a shorthand for this movement of old game, new game narrative. But I guess that, I guess I feel like still by calling it category and category name, like we're just focusing on those three words

so much. And what happens often is, is CEOs will, they'll kind of come up with this little category. Like, like what happened with, with Nick at the 360 learning with collaborative learning, we have this name, but we don't know how to tell the story around it. And that, you know, so my feeling is like, well, let's, let's focus on the story. So that's why I talk about strategic narrative and, and movement creation versus category creation. You know, if someone decides that your movement is a category, great bonus. I see. So essentially, your approach is category can play a part of this, but there's a bigger question you have. What's the story? What's the movement? What are the obstacles and categories and element of that potentially? I mean, I always almost see them as orthogonal, like, you know, with HubSpot, you know, HubSpot had this narrative around inbound, you know, it used to be just outbound. So now we're going to have inbound. And that, that wasn't really a category. They're still, I think if you, back then they were probably known as marketing automation. Now they're probably known as CRM because they broadened. But this movement is the thing that's sort of the constant and in some ways orthogonal to whatever category they're in.

Is the strategic narrative framework right for essentially any company or is there like a sweet spot? I've noticed most of the companies you've been talking about are B2B SaaS. So I don't know, maybe like if there's a spectrum of perfect fit for strategic narrative framework and then like not a fit at all, what's like, what's along that spectrum?

Yeah, well, you can see it. I mean, it takes a little time, I mean, to tell this story. And it's a kind of, you were kind of framing it a little bit and we're telling it in lots of different channels, right? So I think it does really play well in sort of like this enterprise sales context because also we have a group buyer there. So it's not just one person who's doing some research. There's like this whole group has to sort of have a united a uniting story. So I think you're right that in noticing that the companies that this tends to resonate with tend to be B2B enterprise sales technology, I think because often the product is very complicated, that arrogant doctor stuff comes from an age when the things people were selling were like products on shelves that didn't change much, cans of soup at the supermarket or like a car and the dealership. Even software back then, shrink wrapped in a box doesn't change. B2B software, this stuff is changing by the minute. And does it even make sense to make a claim to say like, oh, we have these features and they have those features there for a bit? I mean, does that make any sense? That said, hey, I was looking for like a sports watch, like a Fitbit and yeah, I'm comparing specs and I'm doing all that stuff.

And so that mode of buying is still happening. So yeah, when like consumer products companies contact me, I usually say no. Occasionally, they still say, okay, yeah, we'll build this, we still want to have this narrative. But yeah, I think it has the most value, most impactful right away for B2B enterprise technology companies. Just a few more questions. What is just, what's a sign that you should spend time in this area that something is broken in your strategic narrative story pitch? Well, I can tell you what I hear from CEOs when they contact me, like why did I, I always asked like, what's happening? Like, because that idea I had, no CEO is going to budget a line item for this. I'm basically asking like, why was I wrong? So a few things they tell me, one is that the company is maturing from a point, a stage where they've been successful, but that success is one CEO put it this way as like, was brute force of the founders. So the founders are in every meeting, they're in every product

discussion, every sales call. And that's shifting the company's getting bigger. Usually I'm seeing this around like series B, where the company is getting so they can't be in every, every sales call, every market. And they're looking to kind of transmit all the good stuff and some direction in a way that people are going to remember and all that, everything from how we pitch to what the product should be and all that. And they see this as that. There's another kind of point that I see people contacting me at, which is where they're growing. It's usually a little bit later, where they've scaled tremendously successfully. Now we're either acquiring or building out whole new product units. And that old story we told is just, it's just not big enough. And we got to expand it to something bigger. This is the example of like one trust, which I'll have on my podcast starts out with just sort of, I think data privacy around the regulations that people have to be able to say, don't track me, things like that. And then they buy these other companies. Now we have this much bigger, bigger offering. So how do we tell the story? And then I guess the third one is some form of pivot, where, hey, we were telling an old story, but we're whatever, the market changed or whatever, and we want to go in a different direction. So say a founder is listening to this and they're like, okay, I realize I need to do this. I haven't spent enough time on this. Something's not working. This could be a huge unlock for us. What are the first couple of steps they could take to start to figure this out? And I imagine at some point it's like, go talk to Andy, he'll help you through this. Is there stuff you can do on your own? How do you go about? Well, a lot of folks have emailed me over the years like, hey, well, I told you before, there were some who emailed me like, hey, try it, it didn't work. But many, many more have emailed me, hey, I tried it, it did work. Thank you. And so, yeah, just try to lay out that structure and try it. I mean, even when I work with teams, I adapt what my people might call sort of lean approach. Like I want to get that thing out there into sales calls. You know, we're not rolling it out to the whole sales team right away, but getting it out into some sales calls and get a sense like, hey, is this resonating or people giving the nods? Ideally, by the way, one way I look to test it, is it working? It's like, when we talk about this shift and the stakes and the, do they kind of say like, yeah, let me tell you how that's playing out for us? Or in my, yes, I'm seeing that, let me, sometimes I'll literally, I'll train salespeople to ask them that question. Like, am I crazy or are you seeing this? And what do they say? And, you know, you can usually tell, like, if they're in and it's qualitative, but I really like that kind of testing to see if it's working. And I think anybody can do that. Is there a template or a guide you have online for folks to follow other than maybe just listening to this podcast and reading? Is there a post that's like, here's the framework defined and go follow these steps? I mean, I guess the closest is that the greatest sales deck I've ever seen post, which is this Wara deck. But even there, I really, people have asked me, like, for a framework, like, and, and like, you know, presentation companies that could we have your, your template so we could like make it available to people will revenue share with you or something. And I am so against this template, like, every team I work with, it's different, you know, it's not like the same number of slide. Sometimes we can lay out this shift in one slide. Sometimes it just feels better or the team likes it better, whatever, if it's a few and we're sort of getting people into it. Sometimes it's no slide. So I am really hesitant to sort of recommend any template. And what I'd say is like, these are principles for,

you know, for building it, not, not any prescribed formula.

If they do want to reach out to you while we're on this topic, what's the best way to contact you? Can I move me on LinkedIn? That's usually a good one. I am and I'm usually posting things on LinkedIn

that I've learned from working with other teams. Awesome. Last question before we get to a very exciting lightning round. I saw speaking of LinkedIn, you posted how in a working session with companies that the second session is always this like low point they all go through and everyone's starting to get discouraged and pain. And first of all, I love the expectation setting you're like, this is going to suck initially and it'll get better. Why is that the low point? And what is it that they focus on in that second session? Well, apparently I'm not doing enough of an expectation setting because like what that post was about was like this, this woman who would, so when I work with a CEO, I always ask them to create what they call strategic narrative team of up to four people. And usually those are leads of like marketing sales, whatever. In this case, the CFO was a really important person in this company. And so the CEO wanted her as part of this team. And she said to me at the end, she's like, you know, I would love what we got to, I was asked what worked, what did it work? And she's like, love what we got to that work, great. What didn't work was like, you told us that this second session was going to be bad, but I don't, I think you could have drilled home more like exactly how bad. So, and then I asked her actually, could I, could I have that quote with your face on a slide that I now present to future team? She said, she said, yeah, you can do that. So the way I work, the way I work it is in, I have a kickoff session where essentially I'm, I'm, I'm asking people on the team, like what are these pieces? What is this old game, new game shift? What, what, how do we talk about when we set the stakes and everything I just talked to you through. And you know, we have like five people in the room, there's going to be a, like we're going to come out of this with notes and notes and boards and boards of ideas of like this stuff, right? And so then two things happen. One is I asked the team to start interviewing customers about how they see this shift and, and sometimes the customers will literally give us the words and that can be helpful in sort of aligning if we have differences. But, but I also start working with the CEO one-on-one and we start when we build a first version of this thing. And it's the second session where we present this first version to the team and think about what's happening. Like the team has just given us like millions of gold ideas and like truly they're all, and in order to make something sort of clean and powerful, the CEO and I have had to pretty much throw out all of them, you know, save one or two, right? And there's going to be feelings about that first of all. Second of all, you know, if this weren't easy to just like get all the, you know, interview everybody, come up with it, they would have done it, right? So it's going to be wrong. But the good news is this is where the team gets to weigh in. I also ask what's working, not working in this thing. And when we learn how it's not working, that gives us the juice to then me and the CEO go back to the drawing board. We plan on this in advance. We're going to go back to the drawing board and then bring up something good. So, you know, having a shit draft is like a million times more valuable than having all these great ideas. But it's also really painful. It's painful not only for them, but for me, like no matter how many times I say this, I want it, I expect they're going to love it in that first one too. And I'm really pissed off when they don't. But luckily now I've done it enough times, like I know that's going to happen. I was just watching a documentary about Annie

Lamont who came up with the shitty first draft concept for writers that I stick to. I'm a firm believer in that. Yeah. As you're talking, one last thought that I had is, see, to work with CEOs and founders, I feel like this could be just as useful to product leaders, product managers, working on a product that they're launching. Just like, what is the movement where it's happening? Here's why this product is important. Do you find that too?

Absolutely. And very frequently, like the product leader or chief product officer is part of this group. And what I'd say though is that, you know, the reason I, so when I looked, after I did this work for a few years, I looked back and I was like, which are the ones where, which are the engagements I did where like I can see it. And it just, the narrative is like really this true North Star for everything. And it was always the ones where the CEO was, was leading it. Not just like in me, but like literally the person who called me who was like in, you know, working on the drafts with me and like going through like, and so initially I didn't, I didn't insist that it would be the CEO doing that. But eventually I started to, and I think even for a product leader, like you're going to want the support, you don't want to be just telling that story in product. You're going to want that supported from, you know, this war person who gave me the initial deck. He said, you know, it was like I had, it was like I had air cover and I was just going down and knocking down deals on the ground. You're going to want that air cover in marketing, sales, recruiting, everything. And, you know, how much better is it if it's, if it's really driven by the CEO and you have that. Amazing. Is there anything else you wanted to touch on or you want to share before we get to our very exciting lightning round?

No, except I love category design people and it's really just, it's really just sort of terms that I like that are, you know what, forget it, scratch that part. I thought that was funny.

Oh yeah. Okay. Okay. Yeah. We could leave it in. We could leave it in. You could even leave this in where I'm telling you to scratch it. Sounds good. I was actually going to joke that I was going to cut this out and leave you hanging. Okay. No, you could do that. Yeah. Category design people love you. Don't, don't hate me. Thank you. Great. I love it. We're going to be okay, I think. Okay. Well, with that, we've reached our very exciting lightning round. I've got five questions for you. Are you ready? I'm ready. I haven't seen the, I saw the quit, you sent them, but I didn't really look at them. So I'm, I'm just going to tell you what I said. I'll go off the outside.

Excellent. The best version of this. What are two or three books that you've recommended most to other people? One of the books that I read initially in that, from that Barnes & Noble, it was Story by Robert McKee. I think a lot of people know about it who are sort of interested in story stuff, but it's, it's kind of a bible of people who are doing like screenwriting and stuff. If you know anyone who's in Hollywood who are like thought about going to Hollywood, like they know about this book. I love a book called Out of Shear Rage. It's really not about what I do or anything, but it's the author is Jeff Dyer. Jeff, he's a, he's written a lot of books that are kind of essay memoir. And this is a book about him trying to write a book about D.H. Lawrence. So it's all about procrastinating and like, oh, like him, I'm supposed to write this book. I think I'm going to, I'm about to go on a trip somewhere. Should I bring the collected works of D.H. Lawrence on the trip? Cause that'll help me start the book, but maybe I shouldn't because it's not going to, then I could come back refreshed without having, you know, basically it's all that. It's all this sort of like in the head. I just really enjoy that book.

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

Station 11. Station 11. That was just so beautiful to me.

Trippy. It was a trippy movie. Didn't expect to go where it went.

Yeah. I usually ask what's a favorite interview question you like to ask. And I don't know how often you're interviewing people, but does anything come to mind when asked that?

Well, I can tell you one thing I ask when I speak with CEOs is I like to ask what role this narrative played in your leadership. What is it playing? How does it work in your leadership?

It's always really interesting for me to hear that. So often hear things that I don't expect.

What's a favorite product you've recently discovered that you just really like?

I recently got a Fitbit. I think I made it earlier. I was like looking for a product like that. And so far, I'm really loving it. Amazing. Have you tried other versions of Fitbits or that's the one that's working? I also ordered a Polar at the same time and wound up returning the Polar. Basically, it was just a little clunkier on my wrist.

So I went with a Fitbit. Why, do you have one that you recommend instead?

I just have the Apple Watch and I've never tried a Fitbit and it gives me all this stuff that seems cool, but I've never gone further. I got the Fitbit like a week ago and I actually still am on the fence whether I bring it back to return it for the Apple Watch. So I'm enjoying it, but we'll see. Okay, final question. You're an expert on presentations and I imagine you spent a lot of time in decks. And so just what's like one small change people can make to how they put together a deck or a presentation that will make their presentation a lot better? This is the one thing. Make the title the takeaway of the slide so that the person looking at it has to do zero work to take away. So example, you'll sometimes see like the problem or the team replace like the team with our team is veterans of whatever industry or every single slide. The takeaway, it's a takeaway not a label and it'll make everything flow a lot better.

You did a killer job answering the lightning round questions without having a peek at what they were going to be. Andy, this was incredibly insightful. I'm going to go start working on my strategic narrative for my podcast and newsletter. Two final questions, working folks find you online if they want to reach out, learn more, maybe consider working with you and then how can listeners be

useful to you? So I mentioned LinkedIn as a way to connect with me. That's fine. My website is AndyRaskin.com. I also have a podcast where I talk with CEOs. So if you're interested in hearing like more details about actual use of this, it's called The Bigger Narrative. My mom introduces every episode. I call her. I sent her the interviews in advance. I call her an interview about what she thinks people will get out of it and that conversation becomes the intro to the podcast episode. And what was the last question? How can listeners be useful to you? Useful to me. Just you know, if you try any of this stuff, let me know. Like worked, didn't work, you know, have this question. I would love to hear that stuff. Amazing. Andy, thank you again for being here. Thanks so much for having me, Lenny. This was really fun. Bye, everyone.

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