

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

There are day-to-day stresses that are normal and we just have to put up with, you know. But then there's the other stuff that's kind of the flashing red alarm.

Again, you can go back to animals, it's like when there are fundamental functions, when there are core behaviors of diet, exercise, playfulness, socialization, sleep, when those things get disrupted, it's a sign that there is something going on here that you need to take a look at.

And so the same is true with people.

If your sleep always sucks, if your relationships are constantly strained or frequently strained, if your physical health is failing, you know, there are so many ways that that can be measured. So there's really no excuse for that to say like, oh, I just didn't know.

I'd say it's to look at those things, like when those are suffering or when they're really out of whack, it's undeniable that there is something that is detrimental to your well-being that's going on right now and your body is telling you, like, stop, something needs to change.

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 Andy Johns.

This is going to be a very different type of episode and maybe the most meaningful and important episode of the podcast.

Andy was a legendary product and growth leader at Facebook, Twitter, Quora and Wealthfront, where he was VP of Growth and VP of Product and then President, and as you'll hear was in line to be CEO Wealthfront until he came to realize that this path was not right for him.

And after a lot of internal reflection and hard self-work, he changed his entire life's path to becoming a mental health advocate and helping burn out high achievers and also veterans with their mental health journey.

In our conversation Andy shares his personal story, what true burnout looks like and when you should pay attention to your mental health, talks about the process of deep personal transformation

and the four steps involved in making lasting change in your life.

He also shares how to actually allow change to happen in your life, tactics for moving down this path, and a lot of advice and real talk on mental health and tech.

There's a lot of struggle happening in the world right now, including in tech, and so I hope this conversation helps you with your own journey.

You can check out Andy's work at Clues.Life.

With that, I bring you Andy Johns after a short word from our sponsors.

This episode is brought to you by Mercury, who I also happen to use for my business checking account.

I've tried a lot of business banks and there's nothing even close to the experience you get with Mercury.

I moved cash over from another bank and it literally took less than half an hour to set up the account and wire money over at no cost.

They kind of make you want to use the site more often, which I've never felt with another

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

banking site.

Mercury is banking engineered for the start of journey, a modern solution to help your company become the best version of itself.

And Mercury isn't just a place to hold and send money.

It's software built to help you scale with safety and stability, whether you're a team of two or a team of a thousand.

Mercury also goes beyond banking to provide you with access to the foremost investors, operators, and tools.

Mercury.com to join over 100,000 startups on Mercury, the powerful and intuitive way for ambitious companies to bank.

Mercury is a financial technology company, not a bank.

Banking services provided by Choice Financial Group and Evolve Bank & Trust, members FDIC.

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 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 wrangle 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 a roadmap, their OKR process, getting internal feedback.

And essentially, their whole product development process is done within Koda.

If your team's work is spread out across different documents and spreadsheets and a stack of workflow tools, that's why you need Koda.

Koda puts data in one centralized location, regardless of format, eliminating roadblocks that can slow your team down.

Koda allows your team to operate on the same information and collaborate in one place.

Take advantage of this special limited-time offer just for startups.

Sign up today at [koda.io slash lenny](https://koda.io/slash/lenny) and get a thousand dollar startup credit on your first statement.

That's C-O-V-A dot I-O slash Lenny to sign up and get a startup credit of one thousand dollars.

[Koda dot I-O slash Lenny](https://koda.io/slash/lenny).

Andy, thank you so much for being here and welcome to the podcast.

Thanks, Lenny.

Happy to be here.

So, I've been both looking forward to our conversation, but I've also been dreading it a little bit because I know it's going to be incredibly valuable, but I also think it's going to get very heavy.

And I think it's important to get heavy sometimes, especially with the kind of stuff we're going to be talking about, but I just wanted to share that.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And I'm looking forward to that.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

I think one of the things that has been a change for me over the last several years is that I prefer to move forward in my life, being completely honest with who I am, not hiding any aspects of myself, including the stuff that in the past I'd be afraid to share. Well, on that topic, I'd love for you to just walk us through the path that you've taken. Basically, you're kind of like me.

In a sense, you're helping companies build product, drive growth, work with some of the best companies in the world, and then things kind of took a turn.

And so, could you just start with kind of a brief overview of what happened?

Sure.

So, you know, the short background is I spent about 17 years working in the world of startups and I think on the whole, it was a successful experience.

I managed to land at a handful of really good companies and had a great experience.

But along the way, despite having built somewhat of an impressive resume, I guess you could say, I was also struggling quite a bit in terms of my emotional, psychological and spiritual health.

And so, in some ways, it feels like the cliché that as my career sort of reached its pinnacle, that from a professional, from a financial perspective, I was at my highest.

But when it came to other aspects of my life, I was arguably at my lowest or close to my lowest.

So, you know, even though I had those successes, there was a lot that I needed to work through that was under the hood, which I eventually came to understand very, very deeply as a result of turning inward and doing a lot of work on my own, my own path towards self-understanding and healing some deep emotional wounds.

In a post that you worked on for my newsletter back in the day, you kind of share this story of, I think maybe it was at Wealthfront where you were giving a big presentation.

Maybe share that story.

Sure.

I can share that.

It actually goes back to, this is 2010.

I was at Twitter at the time.

I was in my late 20s, and again, my career was going really well as starting to string together a series of successful experiences.

And I was suddenly hit with near-constant panic, panic attacks, depression.

I was having a very, very difficult time sleeping and just managing my emotions as a whole.

And it got to the point to where there were several occasions while I was at work where I could tell that I was about ready to have a breakdown of sorts, and I would just grab my laptop, throw it in my bag, and pretty quietly just walk out of the office, even if it was 10 a.m., and I'd only been there for an hour or two.

That happened on multiple occasions.

And there were some occasions in which I was set up to go and speak to the entire company during an all-hands session, and it was something where I just had to come up with an excuse and bow out of it, because at the time I was already completely overcome and overwhelmed by this near-constant panic I was experiencing.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

But I had a really good poker face, so I don't think most people could see it. But to give a little bit of an explanation and sort of tie the first question together with this, there were two major things that contributed to me having a pretty cute case of burnout and needing to step away from my careers.

I knew it.

The first was just the slow and steady accumulation of the pressure, the stresses, the anxieties, the emotional ups and downs that came from having such a strong commitment to my career, and frankly, an addiction to achievement as a way to feel good and to feel whole.

But I was so focused on my work that I had slowly become the frog that was boiling in the pot, the typical analogy, but you don't realize how bad things are getting because it's happening to you slowly until it happens quickly.

And so on one hand, I was not only struggling emotionally and psychologically because of the pressures of the career and climbing the ladder and just the sort of common existential angst that comes with being at a startup and not knowing what the future holds.

But what I later came to understand was that I was also starting to experience and to address old emotional pain that I'd buried for a very long time stemming back to the death of my mom when I was 10.

And she was severely mentally ill.

She was bipolar, had bouts of psychosis, and it spent time in and out of psychiatric hospitals.

I remember going to those hospitals as some of my earliest memories as a kid.

And so there was a lot of disruption in my childhood, a lot of neglect, some occasional abuse, and then it culminated with the loss of the most important female figure in my life when I was 10.

And of course, like anyone else after that, I was in a lot of pain emotionally.

But as a kid, you don't have the tools or even the capabilities to effectively process something as significant and traumatic as an experience like that.

And so my mind did what the mind of most children will do, which is it finds a way to bury it or to ignore it.

And the thing that I latched onto that made me feel better was that any time I hit a home run or scored a goal or got straight A's and was just basically a stellar student and a stellar athlete, I was showered with love not only from my family, which is fantastic, but from society at large, especially within the world that we live in.

And so I learned very early on that if I wanted to feel good, I needed to achieve.

And that if I wanted to love myself and be considered lovable by others, I needed to achieve.

And that pulled me out of a darkness that I was in for several years as a kid.

And I'm glad that it did and it led to an excellent experience in high school and college and then well into my 20s.

But eventually those emotional wounds are going to come to the surface.

They're going to come up for error.

And when they do, it's going to be difficult and that's what happened with me.

So it was really two things coming together at the same time.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

It was the growing pressures of an escalating career within the dynamic industry, but then also I think the natural maturation of my mind and of adult development such that it was time for that old pain to come to the surface.

And when it did, it was very disruptive and it's something that I'm still continuing to work on to this day.

I imagine many people listening either resonate with some of this or just like this is exactly the life I'm living.

I know you work with people now helping them through these challenges, especially in tech. So two questions there.

One is just you've done polls around this.

Just what percentage of people in tech have you seen struggle with these sorts of things on some degree?

For the last two years, I've been doing a lot of writing and most of my writing is really just been me opening up and sharing this personal side of what was going on behind the scenes. And along the way, I've been able to connect with at this point hundreds of folks in the tech industry who are dealing with their own forms of burnout or their own deep existential questions that are coming to the surface and they're trying to understand them.

And so from some of the surveys I've put out from my own anecdotal experience and from some proper research that's been conducted by experts who focus on entrepreneur and high performer well-being, I'd say that it's a fair estimate to say that at least 50 to 60% of tech employees who have just to give it a bit more nuance, who have sort of been in the saddle so to speak for a minimum of five to seven years, they're experiencing some form of psychological and emotional distress.

And it may be minor enough such that they think it's sort of just day-to-day anxiety, but it's often much more significant than people realize because again, it sort of creeps up on you slowly and then all of a sudden it hits you quickly.

And we're going to dive into what this looks like and ways you've found to be helpful to people.

One last question before we get there.

You walked away from a pretty senior, incredible role and in the post that you wrote, you shared kind of the salary you gave up in that giving up.

Can you just talk about what that last role was and then what you had to give up to kind of change career paths and go into it?

Yeah.

So one of the things that I did towards the tail end of my career is I became a founding consumer or founding partner of the consumer arm of an early stage venture capital firm. And most folks know that especially once a fund gets big enough, it can be a high-paying job.

Suddenly, I found myself in a position where I was making high six figures per year into early seven figures and when I look back on it in retrospect, I had put in so much effort to get to that point really going back to when I was 10 years old, having always been the straight A student and captain of whatever team I was on.

From the age of 10 to basically 35, I was switched on constantly seeking to perform at the top

of whatever my field was.

And so I got into that point first as an executive at a high-growth startup that was wealth front and I became president and was next in line to be CEO before I had a health scare with my heart that led to me stepping away from the company because I knew I couldn't take on the CEO position.

But then here I was six or seven months later again, so very subconsciously driven by the desire to succeed because underneath that was the sense that I wasn't lovable unless I was succeeding.

And here I was after a heart attack scare at the age of 35, sweeping out under the carpet. Like I'd swept so much stuff under the carpet and choosing to join on as a founding partner of a venture capital firm, which is not an easy job at all, especially when you're starting a new firm up.

In a lot of ways, it's a company in and of its own, so it was another startup.

It was my sixth startup in a row.

And so three years into that though, even though I was working on my own mental health and my emotional well-being, I had convinced myself repeatedly for so many years that everything was okay and that I could continue to put my head down and run through these walls, these professional walls, and keep going.

But it got to a point where that was no longer the case.

And in fact, it was the culmination of conversations with my doctors and with the experts that I've been working with where I ended up actually spending 45 days in a mental health institute myself.

And it was something that was extremely difficult to do.

It was something that certainly contributed or was really the tip of the sphere of me stepping away from my career of realizing that the only reason I was continuing to push forward despite how poorly I felt on the inside was because of stuff that had happened to me when I was much younger and because of the fallible nature of the human mind and how it wants to interpret experiences in ways that can become so self-critical and self-damaging.

And so yeah, that happened for me roughly three years ago.

And needless to say, my life has changed quite a bit since then.

And I'm happy to chat more about that.

But that was a difficult decision to walk away from my career at the peak of it.

But I guess the takeaway, and then I'll stop for a bit, is it's important for people to understand that there are formative experiences in our lives which put us in positions to where we form adaptations in order to survive, just like my attachment to achievement and how my self-worth was entirely tied up in that.

And I needed that when I was younger because I was heartbroken, I had lost a parent.

And that adaptation that I formed saved my life when I was young, and it gave me a great childhood after that and a great next couple of decades.

But these adaptations, if you're unaware of them, and if you're unaware of the subconscious drivers that are responsible for them.

They run the risk that they go too far, and that these adaptations which were initially beneficial to you and to your life, they reverse course in a sense, and they become detrimental

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

to your present state and your future development.

And so my stepping away from the career, stepping away from the high salary, and stepping away from everything I'd worked so hard to obtain, was an action that I took in recognition of the fact that that early life adaptation had now gone awry and was responsible for my life heading in a negative direction, and it was time to change.

And the gift of your experience going through all that is that now we can all benefit learning from that.

And you spend your time these days helping people get over a lot of these challenges that they have.

Can you just talk about what it is you spend your time on specifically and then let's unpack the process that you've come up with to help people through this?

Now when people ask me what I do, I say I do mental health advocacy.

And I do it in a few ways.

One is I sit on the board of a nonprofit called Heroic Hearts Project.

And what we do is we raise money so that we can pay for military veterans of PTSD to get access to alternative therapies, namely psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy.

It was started by a handful of veterans.

I was lucky enough to meet a few of them a couple of years ago.

And given my own personal experience with PTSD stemming from my childhood experiences, it was I was bonded together with these men and women of the armed forces who had in many cases not only their own personal trauma, but also war trauma.

And so that's one organization that I'm thankful to be able to work with and help out.

I also write my newsletter and have created a new website that I'm toying with.

In general, my writing and the content that I put out is focused on the unhappy achievers.

The other folks like myself who are out there, which there's quite a few of us, I write in order to express my personal experience because I think there's many others that can relate.

So those are the things that I've been working on and a little bit of coaching with some of the high performers as well.

Throughout the website, in case people want to check it out while we're talking?

The website that I'm playing around with is called clues.life.

Clues as in questions, clues not in truth.life or facts.life.

I call it clues.life for a reason because if there's one thing that I've learned in my own personal journey is that given the immense heterogeneity of the human population and how we're all born unique and then we're made further unique through our own individual life experiences, the thing that's clear to me is that if somebody is going through their own struggles, at the end of the day, they have to find the philosophies, the tools and the methods that work for them.

You can read plenty of studies.

You can read the books.

You can listen to what others are doing, but at the end of the day, you got to personalize it to yourself.

That's why I called it clues.life because I'm building this library of mental health information that allows people to navigate all of this information in search of their

own clues.

Awesome.

I'm looking to that in the show notes, but it's an easy new world to remember.

Something you spend a lot of your time on as you've talked about is helping people through deep personal transformation.

That's the way you describe it.

Is involved in that process of someone going through deep personal transformation?

I love this question.

Most of the conversations I have are with folks who are going through significant change.

What's involved in that?

It can happen on a spectrum where everyone's process is unique.

We don't know all change and unfold in identical ways.

Some can go through subtle shifts.

I've heard this referred to as a microtransition where, for example, they may be working at a tech company, but the specific company they're working at, they have no real values connection to it.

Part of their suffering is the fact that they feel that the work that they're doing doesn't really matter or they don't feel a connection to it.

Switching to work at a different company that's aligned with something that's consistent with their values, that may be enough for somebody to go through a small transition and then find themselves in a happier place.

The transitions that I talk about are the big fundamental ones, like the transition that I've been going through myself.

What's involved in that?

I think that there are four parts just to give it a simple general framework.

Step one is it begins with suffering.

These large transitions in life rarely take place in the absence of suffering.

Step number one is suffer.

Usually the deeper somebody suffers, the more significant the transition that may follow.

There's a reason why in the 12 steps community, like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, you name it, there's a reason that rock bottom is in the vernacular because rock bottom tends to proceed to somebody getting sober.

Step one is suffering.

Step two is seeking the truth behind why we suffer.

Once the suffering gets so bad in somebody through some sort of spiritual intervention, a legal intervention, the intervention of friends and family, whatever it may be, they decide to change.

In order to change, you have to understand the truth as to who you are and why you are the way you are and why you're suffering.

The answer lies in understanding the truth.

That is usually a long process, digging through the subconscious mind, digging through your history and your past, digging through your relationships.

That takes a lot of time.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

It takes a lot of time to remove the mental blocks that we might have spent decades developing such that we don't even see these patterns that we play out regularly.

First, you begin with suffering and then second, you seek the truth for your suffering.

What I have found, and that leads to step three in the process, is that once you discover the truth of your suffering, the real root cause of it and where it came from, that's when you move to step three, which is you begin to experience and to practice self-compassion and self-love, because inevitably what you discover through this process of seeking the truth is that your suffering isn't necessarily your fault.

Maybe you're suffering because of things that you experienced or had to go through of which you had no control over.

Nonetheless, it's common for the mind, especially the mind of a child, to interpret those less than nurturing experiences as, this happened because of me.

What sits at the core of their suffering is not only a low sense of self, but a shame regarding who they are and who they believe themselves to be.

When you dig deep enough into your own self-understanding, eventually you'll discover that that's not

true, that it isn't your fault, that these things swept you up like a wave and you were just along for a ride of which you had no choice.

When you understand that and you start to feel a sense of forgiveness and to begin to love yourself for the first time, you make this switch where then you're willing to live in a way that is more consistent with self-love and self-compassion.

For me, for example, stepping away from my career at the end of the day, I wasn't running from something.

I was running back towards myself.

That was an act of kindness towards myself.

Going into a 45-day hospitalization, that was an act of love.

What ends up happening is the truth fuels that process of self-love.

When you begin to live in a way that is consistent with valuing yourself and understanding that it's not your fault, then that's when you move to step four, which is compassion towards others.

Because by understanding yourself and realizing the true nature of why you are the way you are and forgiving yourself because you understand it's not your fault, guess what?

You see the same thing in everybody else.

This is what is meant when folks sometimes say we're all adults or we're all children walking around in adult bodies.

We're just acting out the things that were done to us in the past because when I think of the human mind, there are many ways that you can describe what the brain is, but one way that I describe it certainly is that it's autobiographical.

It tries to predict what's going to happen next based on what happened in the past.

It's a prediction engine.

That's what it does.

That's why I say it's autobiographical because the way that you present yourself to the world as an adult is a reflection of what happened to you in the past.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

The messages you were told, the ways you were conditioned by society, maybe the traumas you experienced.

That's the process as I see it of deep, deep, deep transformation.

It's that four-step process of the suffering, the seeking of truth, the living in a way that is compassionate towards oneself and then living in a way that is compassionate towards others.

When you do that, you change.

Think of that as the horizontal foundation through which the rest of your external life is built, the place you choose to live, the partner you choose to have, the friends you have, the career you have.

All of these things are erections on top of a foundation of identity.

That identity is what is completely rewired when somebody goes through that four-step process.

As a result, everything that's built on top of that identity, it doesn't necessarily have to change, but it might.

That feels like a reason somebody wouldn't want to go down this journey of, I don't want to change everything about myself.

Yes.

This is the power of the human mind at work or what some refer to as the ego.

As soon as the ego senses that something wants to challenge it and to undermine its authority, it finds a way to push it away.

It finds a way to ignore it because it is a very difficult process.

This is, I now understand what some philosophers described as death before dying.

This process of change that I've been going through, it's been the death of the old me, the death of Andy whose identity was entirely attached to succeeding.

That old Andy doesn't want to let go.

It's been around for a few decades.

It believes that it's there to protect me.

This is a survival mechanism that's somewhat gone awry within the context of modern life. It doesn't want to let go, but that's what I've been doing.

That's the process I've been going through is slowly but surely finding a way to take my fingers off the steering wheel and to let that old sense of self die.

In doing so, create the room for what's next, whatever that may be, and I'm three years into the process of discovering what that will be.

Thinking through these four steps, suffering sounds like people just do that naturally potentially and I feel like it gets hard at the understanding the source of that suffering.

I guess one is that true or do people try to resist that suffering and are just like, nah, it's okay, it's okay, and they white knuckle it.

I think you're pretty spot on with it.

This dips into a lot of the ancient Eastern spiritual traditions of just this recognition that life involves suffering.

One way or another, there's going to be suffering.

I think of it as there's two types of suffering.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

There's the necessary suffering like we're going to get old and our bodies are going to hurt and we're going to have physical ailments and toothaches and shit's just going to happen. We're going to lose the people we love, all of us, and the 80 to 100 billion Homo sapiens that lived before us, gone through the same thing.

There is necessary suffering in life for the sort of mandatory suffering and then there's the unnecessary suffering, which is the suffering that is almost entirely, and I think the argument could be made, that it's entirely made up in our minds.

This is the superpowers of the human mind, gone awry, again, sort of in the modern context. There's going to be a lot of suffering one way or another.

I think if there's a goal or objective, it's to minimize the unnecessary suffering.

The seeking of the truth part is very difficult.

It takes years, you know.

There's a reason that, again, in some of these spiritual traditions, let's take Buddhism, for example, there's a reason that there's so much structure and discipline and there's a daily method that they adhere to because it turns out it takes daily practice in the same way that if you want to get extremely fit and climb Mount Everest, that's not something you do by just getting off the couch.

It takes sort of a dedication to it and I think that the seeking of truth takes that kind of dedication and that's, again, why I believe that the first step is almost always suffering because to undergo that process of personal transformation, which can be very difficult and it can feel like you're in a life raft and you've just pushed away from the shore, completely untethered, uncertain of where you're floating.

In order to work up the courage to get to that point, things typically have to get pretty bad.

You say, I can't fucking do this anymore.

I'm not going to live like this.

Something's got to change and so so much of that seeking of the truth is actually at first driven by intense fear.

Fear of going back to how bad things were and feeling that bad again.

Maybe the process changes tone when you move past the fear stage and you understand yourself enough and then you start to look forward optimistically towards the future where instead of just being driven by fear, you're also pulled forward by a vision for the future that inspires you.

That eventually comes, but to begin with, yes, this process of discovering the truth is very, very, very difficult and requires a personal commitment.

It's not something anyone else can do for you.

With that context in mind that it's very difficult, I imagine many people listening or like, yes, I have a lot of suffering that I'm going through.

Life is hard.

Work is hard.

Work is too crazy, especially product managers and founders that listen to this podcast.

I know.

To all the VPs of product out there, I'm so sorry.

I've been in our shoes.

With that, say someone wanted to go down this path and understand the truth of what is the source of this suffering that you even describe as unnecessary and made up.

What would the first couple of steps be of knowing that it's going to take years potentially of how to actually try to understand this?

Commonly in the West, the first step that makes a lot of sense is you turn to somebody who's trained in helping you figure out what those truths are, which is a therapist or a psychologist or a psychiatrist or a counselor.

Sometimes people turn to religious or spiritual leaders because they can be quite gifted in this as well.

That's the most common step.

That's the first step that I turned to when I was just completely stricken by panic and terrified that I might harm myself.

I said, I'm going to figure out what the hell is going on because I can't live feeling like this.

All I needed to do was reach out to a therapist.

That is a wonderful first start because if anything, they're not going to have all the answers, but they can act like a router where as they're helping you understand yourself and they're really understanding you, they're thinking about who might this person also benefit from speaking with.

Let's route them to this person that specializes in body-based work, somatic work.

Let's send this person to somebody that specializes in nervous system management through breath work or other things.

Seeking a therapist is a pretty good first step.

Any advice on how to figure out who the right therapist or wrong therapist is for you?

I know you've actually shared somewhere on LinkedIn once that there's also a lot of disagreement within the mental health community of what is the right approach and what's the right solution.

Yeah, it's kind of like speed dating at first because I would argue that the most important factor is that you feel safe.

Think of animals can teach us so much about what it means to heal ourselves.

Think about magic going to the pound and you go in there and there's a bunch of dogs that have been picked up off the street or that have been abandoned and the vast majority of them, they're a nervous wreck.

Their tail is down in between their legs, they're punched over, they might be shaking.

Their nervous system is completely overwhelmed.

That is not the time to teach a dog tricks.

When the dog still can't come out of the corner of the kennel, it's not the time to teach it out of the set and once that dog can make it into the arms of an owner that it feels safe with and loved by, that's when you see the dog transform and change and that's when you can teach it a lot because it's open and receptive to it.

That's number one and my advice is speed date if you've got the opportunity to and try out a few therapists and just go based on intuition.

What just feels right to you and you're going to want to fall into that feeling of comfort.

Now, a quick asterisk on that, of course, if you're in real distress, if you're in a bad place, just see whatever professional you can as soon as possible.

That's what I did.

I was fortunate to wear the first one that I saw was also fantastic.

I ended up seeing many other specialists over the years, but that first one, she was wonderful.

It's essential that you feel comfortable with them.

I would also say this one's a little controversial, but you're going to want a therapist that is at least as intelligent, if not more intelligent than you because I think part of that openness to learning from them and to feeling somewhat comfortable, but also feeling inspired and kind of looking forward to it as if sometimes they say things that make you say, oh, shit.

Wow.

Wow.

I never thought of that.

That was smart, right?

That was a wonderful insight.

I don't think if you respect their intellectual abilities, then it's going to be difficult for them to help you.

They may not be able to communicate on the same wavelength.

So you really want to look for that intuitive feeling of something that is safe and comfortable.

Ideally, if you can, find somebody with some intellectual horsepower that matches your own.

Honestly, I think the rest after that is just implementation details.

If someone maybe isn't ready for a therapist and that's something about that just kind of holds them back, is there another route that you would recommend people take or was it just goes straight to a therapist?

Absolutely.

If you're not in a state of distress, but you feel like there's something to be figured out, there's an ancient technology, not as pen and paper.

At the end of the day, the seeking of the truth involves the seeking of a deep sense of self-understanding.

If you can get into the daily practice of being able to sit down with pen and paper and write to yourself, to ask yourself questions, to really sit there and evaluate the thoughts that are running through your head.

It is possible for somebody to, I'll use the term, I won't get into it, but to reach some state of bliss or enlightenment or some real spiritual awakening, it is possible for somebody to do that entirely on their own with just pen and paper and a quiet room.

I know people that have bribed at a deep place of self-love and self-understanding through those methods.

I know a lot of others, including myself, where the writing to others was really the writing to myself 15 years ago is a way for me to continue to understand myself more deeply.

I think pen and paper is deeply, deeply overlooked and underrated as process.

And say you get a pen and paper, is there some sort of guide or framework or something

you'd point people to you to think through what to think about and how to approach this?

Yeah, there are different ways of doing it.

Some advocate for a completely unstructured approach because what you want is, you don't want to turn it into assignment, you kind of want to feel your way into it.

If something is bubbling up in your mind, just spit it out, don't analyze why it's coming up, just allow it to flow.

That method certainly works.

Sit down with no agenda and on some days, you'll write one sentence and that's enough.

And on other days, you'll write 10 pages and that's also enough.

There's some magic to allowing the human mind to just work and to not interrupt it through some analytical process.

On the flip side, if you want a little bit more structure, one thing you can do is I'd like to start with, if the goal is to understand oneself, then one of the quickest ways of doing that is to quickly write down a list of simple bullet points of the most recent situations you can think of where you became most acutely reactionary and emotional.

You could have been having a political conversation with somebody and they said something that really just, you know, you felt like you just wanted to reach out and strangle them.

You could have felt deeply insecure in a social setting.

Just run through those scenarios where something disrupted what might have been your current state of presence and calmness.

And when you identify those situations where there was some strong reaction, that is very revealing because that wasn't a conscious thought process that led to the reaction.

That was a knee-jerk reaction.

That was a reflex.

If there's a reflex, then there's something that's underlying the reflex.

And the question to then ask is, why did that happen?

And then from there, it's kind of an unstructured process.

Keep asking, keep digging, keep asking, okay, if this happened, why did that happen?

Well, and then write a little bit.

Well, is that really the reason why?

Was there something else?

Like just keep working at it until you hit the truth.

And you'll know what the truth is because it always feels either deeply uncomfortable or it feels like an epiphany.

Wow.

For you, that was recognizing that it was about your mom.

There were many parts of it.

Yeah.

At its core, at first it began with a simple truth, which was, I went into the therapist, I was describing what I was feeling.

I was describing the uncontrollable thoughts and mental imagery that I was experiencing in my sleep disruption, in my pounding heart and everything else.

And she said, yeah, you're having panic attacks.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

And just knowing like, oh, there's a thing and it's called a panic attack.

And starting at that basic truth was enough in the moment to just take a little bit of the edge off.

And so this journey along the way is like there are dozens of truths and then hundreds of truths.

And then every now and then it's punctuated by the big, oh, holy shit, I never saw that coming kind of truth.

And it's kind of just what the experience is, you know, that I had many, many truths about myself that I discovered before I hit some of the fundamental ones that were at the core of my subconscious.

Starting in that thread, what are signs that you're in need of this sort of transformation versus work is just stressful?

Things are hard.

I have some challenging meetings, which a lot of people go through on and off.

I've had a lot of this.

What are signs maybe you're burning out or something that requires like, wow, I really need to dig a lot deeper.

There are day to day stresses that are normal and we just have to put up with, you know. But then there's the other stuff that's kind of the flashing red alarm.

For me, and a lot of the research and literature supports this too, is again, you can go back to animals.

It's like when they're fundamental functions, when they're core behaviors of diet, exercise, mindfulness, socialization, sleep, when those things get disrupted, it's a sign that there is something going on here that you need to take a look at.

And so the same is true with people, you know.

If your sleep always sucks, if your relationships are constantly strained or frequently strained, if your physical health is failing, there are so many ways that can be measured.

So there's really no excuse for that to say like, oh, I just didn't know, right?

I'd say it's to look at those things.

When those are suffering or when they're really out of whack, it's undeniable that there is something that is detrimental to your well-being that's going on right now and your body is telling you like, stop, something needs to change.

So that is number one to look at, look at the fundamentals, you know, reflecting on my own situation, like, you know, I almost had a heart attack at 35, and I got the classic talk from a Stanford cardiologist saying like, you're just going to be another 40-something year-old CEO with a broken heart, you know, the years of really poor sleep, the number of teeth that I had broken that I had to have fixed multiple times because for years, my grinding was so bad that I had to, now two times over, had to completely redo all the teeth, all my molars and then most of the front teeth as well.

And I just continued to move forward, even though my body was, again, throwing out all the signals.

And for anyone who's listening to this, especially for the folks who haven't, like, go get the book, *The Body Keeps a Score* by Düsselvander Kolk, you know, he's an expert clinician who's

worked with trauma patients for decades.

And the entire book is basically one big message saying like, hey, when mental health presents itself, look to the body because it's the body that is keeping the score on the score.

It's the body that's the scoreboard and it's the body that is actually holding on to all of this shit you've been carrying for years and eventually the body breaks in the form of chronic disease and illness and so on and so forth.

Today's episode is brought to you by Miro, an online collaborative whiteboard that's designed specifically for teams like yours.

The best way to see what Miro is all about and how it can help your team collaborate better is not to listen to me talk about it, but to go check it out for yourself.

Go to [Miro.com](https://miro.com) slash Lenny.

With the help of the Miro team, I created a super cool Miro board with two of my own favorite templates, my one pager template and my managing up template that you can plug and play and start using immediately with your team.

I've also embedded a handful of my favorite templates that other people have published in the Miroverse.

When you get to the board, you can also leave suggestions for the podcast, answer a question that I have for you and generally just play around to get a sense of how it all works.

Miro is a killer tool for brainstorming with your team, laying out your strategy, sharing user research findings, capturing ideas, giving feedback on wireframes and generally just collaborating

with your colleagues.

Actually used Miro to collaborate with the Miro team on creating my own board and it was super fun and super easy.

Go check it out at [Miro.com](https://miro.com) slash Lenny, that's [M-I-R-O.com](https://miro.com) slash Lenny.

We've talked about the suffering step, then the understanding the truth of what is going on.

Say someone sits down in a room, writes out what's going on, has this epiphany of like, oh wow, it's really this moment in my childhood that really led me to need to achieve and do all these things.

The next step is self-compassion and recognizing that it's not your fault.

That sounds very easy on the surface, like, okay, I understand this is not my fault.

I know it's not that easy.

How do you go about actually deeply doing that steps?

It's likely this deeply internalized self-belief.

You can think of that as one of the deepest groups in the neural pathways in your mind.

That was the case for me.

So deep that you don't even realize that it's there, it's omnipresent.

It's going to take time to rewire that because what you're effectively trying to do is take an internal narrative and edit and rewrite that thing.

This internal narrative is probably at a foothold in you for years or decades.

It's reasonable to believe or to understand that, okay, if I have not had a high opinion of myself for 30 years, that's not going to change overnight.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

For some people, what kind of miraculously does, that's not the norm.

For most others, including myself, it starts with that truth stage because with truth is the awareness.

Okay, I understand that I have a low sense of self-worth and I understand that it plays out in all these ways.

I have the awareness of it that now when I'm doing something that is a conditioned behavior or a conditioned response born out of that deep self-belief or that negative core belief, then when I spot it, there's an opportunity for me to intervene.

It starts in the simple ways.

For example, I had a boss once where he would come over and he would give me praise all the time.

He was a wonderful human being and I think I was doing a good job.

One day, he swung by and he said, hey, amazing job.

My response was, oh, yeah, I did my best.

Then he looked at me and he said, hey, say thank you or you're welcome.

That's it.

It gives you a compliment.

Just say thanks, accept it.

It's become a pattern of mine now that if somebody gives me a compliment, I look him in the eyes and I say thank you and I really try and embrace that little moment because it's in all of those ways where you identify these little patterns, you intercept them and you choose to make a change to how you're conditioned to behave in that moment. If you do that consistently enough and you keep practicing it and you keep it up every day, then you're developing a new internal narrative through all those little actions and it accumulates in ways that are pretty powerful.

Every now and then, there's things that you can do that are more of like a brute force method of driving at home.

Some may find it through a vipassana retreat, a seven to 10 day silent retreat, which is agonizing if folks haven't tried to be that quiet that long.

Things bubble up.

You confront the stuff in your mind that in our day to day is easy to just keep it under the hood.

Some find that through psychedelics.

Some find that through somewhat extreme physical feats like there was a period in time where I didn't realize this at the time, but not only was I building my career, but I was running ultramarathons.

Looking back at that, I was like, yeah, there I was, another desperate attempt to feel worthy, but I also recognize now that that was medicine for me.

Me going out onto a remote mountain range for five hours every Saturday and just running well beyond the point of discomfort was consistently cathartic for me.

I would cry at the end of almost every single one of those runs.

It's just a recap.

It's in those little moments and sometimes in those big moments too, but it begins with

the awareness based on truth and then the daily practice.

How long does this process often take for people that you've worked with?

There are some famous figures that you can turn to.

For example, Eckhart Tolle, he wrote *The Power of Now*, which he's probably most famous for.

He's a great Western spiritual teacher of Eastern traditions and he went through immense suffering himself.

Actually, the suffering was so great that for him it led to a somewhat sudden and spontaneous collapse of his sense of identity.

Doctors would probably say psychosis and what he actually had was a spiritual liberation, liberation from his mind.

But he described it himself in reading his book and listening to some of his lectures and talking about his own journey.

He wrote this at, I think, in the first chapter or the preface of *The Power of Now* when he described the suffering that he was experiencing and the sudden collapse of his sense of identity and then waking up the next day and feeling this deep sense of peace and freedom for the first time in his life.

But then his journey continued to unfold.

He eventually started to research to try and understand what had just happened to me, what experience did I have and sort of dot, dot, dot, seven years later, he woke up one day and realized he was now a spiritual teacher, seven years, and it's not that the journey had ended, but to use a metaphor of two mountains and a valley, like that first mountain in his life when he got off of that mountain and he entered this valley between the first mountain of life and the second mountain of life, the valley that he was in, that sat between the old sense of self and then this new sense of self as a spiritual teacher, that valley was seven years for him.

There are many other examples I can pull up like that, including Siddhartha Gautam, my Lord Buddha himself.

That wasn't a couple of weeks or a couple of months, his journey towards liberation from his own mind, if I can recall, that was also a seven or eight year journey.

These big shifts on a cosmic universal scale, it's instantaneous, on the scale of 13 billion years, it's instant, but from our perspective, it feels a lot longer than that.

I want to close the loop on these four steps that you shared and the one we haven't talked about yet is the last one, which is building compassion towards others.

How do you go about that just broadly?

I know we're not going to solve that problem for people in a podcast.

For me, my experience was that it kind of happened automatically.

When you do the first three, it is the result, it's the thing that comes out of step number three itself, because again, when you dig deep enough and you keep searching for the truth, you're like, you know, like Captain Ahab going down with the white whale and *Moby Dick*, that is what that book is about.

It's not about a fisherman going after a whale.

This is the author himself through a story talking about his own journey of emotional

and spiritual liberation.

There are many people that would, experts and historians that might disagree with that.

And I would disagree with them.

That is the story of seeking the truth at all costs to liberate oneself, including being willing to die for that whale metaphorically, because at the end of the book, they don't really reveal, did Ahab actually go down with the whale and never come back?

Maybe he did.

Maybe he didn't.

And so when you have suffered enough and the search for the truth becomes the only thing that matters, and that truth leads you to understanding that like, it's OK, I can accept myself for who I am, and it's not all my fault.

When that has been done in earnest, and when you feel those moments of love for yourself, it suddenly changes how you see everybody else.

For me, step four was the easiest because it just happened.

It happened after eight years, nine years of my own on and off mental health journey, but it finally happened.

People who are listening to this say they're a VP of product, and they're like, I don't want to become a spiritual teacher, I want to stay on this path, I want to have a successful career, I want to continue to make a bunch of money.

How often do you find there's a path to stay on that path with a rejiggering of how you see the world?

Or does it, if you're suffering enough, does it almost always lead to something completely different in your experience?

Again, it's a spectrum.

What I've experienced is that the vast majority of people who feel some tug to undergo a process of change, I'd say 90, 95% of the time, pretty confidently, I can say that those changes are more of the micro transitions.

It's OK, let me change my job.

Let me downsize my house.

Let me break up with my partner.

Still hard things.

And for them, that may be all that is needed and necessary.

There's no moral judgment on my side about everyone's got to dive into the deep end.

That's certainly not the case, and I'm not advocating for it.

I honestly don't even know if it's a choice.

There's a part of me that, based on some of the experiences I've had, sort of believes that it was somewhat preordained and that this was going to happen for me.

But it's in the minority of cases where the radical transformation of one's sense of identity takes place.

It's not common.

My general sense is it's definitely less than 1% of the population.

And I suspect that's just kind of the way things are.

And one of those ends up being Buddha, and one of those ends up being Andy Johns.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

Yeah, or another popular figure in Western spirituality is Pema Chodron, who she's got a lot of great books. One of them is titled When Things Fall Apart. So in the first books I read, When Things Fall Apart for me. And the first story, actually she used to live in Berkeley, I think. But an American woman, she was married. First marriage didn't work out. She got married again. Second one didn't work out. It ended in somewhat sudden and expected and catastrophic fashion. And here she is with a few children and a broken heart again and deep emotional suffering. And that suffering was so great that it led her to ultimately say, I must pursue these teachings and this spiritual tradition that I'm starting to wake up to in the Eastern traditions, Buddhism in particular, because she had suffered so much that she needed to find liberation from that. And in her case, that even meant separating not all the time, but a significant portion of her time away from her own children, who, if I recall correctly, were sort of early teens, sort of timeframe. But now I think that Pema Chodron is the only female Buddhist nun in all of North America and is a very well-known spiritual teacher. And I also think her journey was somewhere around seven or eight years. And again, that's just the valley between two mountains. Truthfully, the journey continues for the rest of your life. But just another example I wanted to share. There's some obvious reasons why going down this path is difficult. Why making change is hard. What else would you say holds people back from making a big change in their life? And maybe on the flip side is just how do you allow change to happen? A significant thing that holds people back from change is the inertia of civilization. Because we all experience a fundamental conflict in our life because when we're born, we have many needs, but there are two substantial needs that are immutable in everyone, especially children. The first need is the need for love, acceptance, and connection for mammals. We have one of the longest gestation periods of the entire animal kingdom. And even when we're born, we're helpless, we can't survive. We need nurturing for many, many more years afterwards in order to survive. And that goes hand-in-hand with our need for connection. So we're biologically hardwired to need to be accepted and connected because it is perhaps the most essential thing to survival, more essential than water. And so we're born with that need. Yet at the same time, we're also born as unique individuals. I read a study where the scientists sort of estimated the probability that two sperm or two egg would be genetically identical.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

And for context, I think the average man generates in their prime somewhere around between 10 to 100 million sperm a day.
So we generate a lot of sperm in our lifetime.
And the math that they came up with was that the probability of two sperm being identical is roughly 10 to the 15th power,
which is a million times greater than the number of stars in the Milky Way galaxy.
And there's somewhere between 100 to 400 billion stars in the galaxy.
So it's a million times greater than that.
So all that is to say is, when you were born, you were unique.
There's never been a you before, ever.
And it's going to be a really, really long time or another dimension before another one of you shows up again.
And then further through the socialization of life, we all have unique experiences.
And those experiences are passed through this unique prism of our own mind and genetics to where we're further accentuated as individuals.
So we're born with this fundamental need to be connected and to be loved.
But we're also born with this need to be ourselves and to express ourselves.
What ends up happening, though, is the world that you're born into eventually conditions you away from the unique individual that you were.
And that is the function of society.
Society operates because enough people choose to agree on the same beliefs and ideas around the style of education, of raising children, of city planning, of millions of things.
And so society is the substrate of society or the adhesive of it is shared belief.
And so that's why I say the inertia of civilization.
Or I should have said the inertia of society is because you're born into a world that begins to condition you at a very early age to act a certain way and not act a certain way.
Believe some things and don't believe others.
Why am I a San Francisco Giants fan?
Well, because I grew up in a Giants family.
It's not like I was two years old and I picked the Giants, it doesn't work that way.
What ends up happening, then, is in this begins again, really young, you're two, three, four, five years old in the world around you.
Namely, the adults in the world start telling you who to be.
And it begins to challenge or run into conflict with that individuality.
But because our fear of not being accepted and loved is so great that what do we end up doing?
We choose to push down our individuality in exchange for being accepted by the pack.
Beginning with our parents and then our friends and then our teachers and then our bosses and all of the other sort of dimensions of society.
And so we lose who we were before the world told us who to be.
It's actually a Carl Jung quote.
The world will ask you who you are and if you don't know, it'll tell you.
And so I would say that that is the number one reason why transformation doesn't take place.
It's because a long time ago, we made that exchange to forgo our individuality in order to be

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

accepted by others because of that deep primal need for love and acceptance.

And in order to undertake that process of personal transformation, one of the truths you have to realize is that truth.

That truth that you are in large part the way you are because of what the world told you to be.

And it's making the choice consciously to then say fuck that and I'm going to go against the grain and I'm going to now tell the world that I don't want its influence on me anymore.

And I will like Moby Dick or like Ahab going down with the white whale.

I am willing to die to return to my individuality and to break free and to be who I want to be in the face of the currents around us regarding the messages around how we should think live acting fuel.

So that is the thing that prevents transformation.

The simple thing is you could say fear.

But what is the fear?

That is the fear.

It's to say I'm going to walk my own path now and I'm going to be who I want to be and I'm going to discover who I was before the world told me who to be.

And by doing so, I run the risk that I'm not going to be accepted anymore.

That's that's terrifying.

And because it's so terrifying, I imagine that's why the suffering is so important to really feel that because otherwise, why would you go down that path feels very hard.

Yeah.

And that gets to my point earlier around, I'm not entirely convinced that this is an act of free will on my part.

There have been moments of me intervening and acting with free will.

But I believe that there are also undercurrents that would fall into the realm of superstition for a lot of folks that this is the path that was laid out in front of me.

Even before I was born.

Kind of along those same lines you wrote in one of your writings that at the end of the day, you're on your own to find what ends up alleviating your psychological suffering.

Can you speak to that?

Yeah, that really ties in with this point of the uniqueness of people.

You have to find what works for you.

For some people, it's going to be the ice bath thing.

For others, it's not.

You know, last year, a quick anecdote.

I spent a month working at an animal sanctuary in Northern Thailand for abused animals and neglected animals.

And this place is amazing.

They take in anything and they say, we'll find a way.

And that's what they do.

So they have hundreds and hundreds of animals, including a large herd of elephants.

It's just pretty amazing.

And there was a worker there who I met and just by the expression on his face, I could tell that this was a liberated man.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

This was somebody who had figured out something that was contributing to his deep sense of peace. And so I wanted to talk with him.

And so I said, hey, something tells me that you figured out the secret to life and I'd like to chat. And so we talked and it turned out that half the time he was a farmer.

He had a small little farm, you know, an acre up on a hill in the mountains. And he'd work at his farm half the time.

And the other half he would then go and work at the animal sanctuary. And he was a practicing Buddhist.

And one of the things he said to me really stood out. He used a simple analogy.

He said, everyone's trying to make it to Bangkok. The problem is they're getting to Bangkok by following somebody else's road. The whole point is to find your own path to Bangkok.

And he was making that same point or a similar point of, you've got to find your own way. That is the message.

And for me, I take that as maybe the most fundamental message. And looking back at the story of the original Buddha himself was sure the teachings, the traditions, everything that's formed around his teachings has power and merit to it.

But I look at what he did. He was born as a prince into a royal family. Something wasn't right and he was seeking the truth behind this anguish and this unfulfillment. And there was something inside of him that said, I must seek the answer because this can't, growing up in this sheltered life as a prince, this can't be the answer.

So he left it all behind, including his wife and child. And then he lived as an ascetic for years, nearly dying, close to starvation. He did that for years.

And then eventually realized, well, that's not the answer either. And then he sort of famously made his way to the Bodhi tree and sat under it and meditated for 40, 41 days.

I can't recall what it was, a long time. And then he had his enlightenment and out of that came one of the teachings, which is known as the middle way.

It's not about being a prince. It's not about being poor. There's something in between. He found that was his path to Bangkok. You could walk that path and maybe it'll teach you something. Or it'll lead you nowhere because it's not your own path.

I think that's the point. Andy, what a beautiful way to wrap up our conversation before we do. Is there anything else you want to share that you want to leave listeners with? And then also, I'm just curious how you're doing these days.

Sure, sure.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

Well, let me answer the first one.

A message to leave to folks.

I would imagine that there's a lot of high performers, successful folks out there.

Some of you, you may feel like you're on the verge of answering a call towards a new chapter in life or towards finding a way out of whatever situation you're in that you don't want to be in anymore.

The thing I guess I would say to you is that having undergone some change myself, all I can promise you is that it's going to be in some ways the best thing that's ever happened to you, but also the worst thing that's ever happened to you.

But those are the experiences that define a life.

And if you feel that call inside of you to seek a new way of living, just know that you're not the only one out there doing it.

And there are others out there such as myself and that I can always be reached.

So I wish you a happy journey and just know that things are going to be okay.

Now, the second question, what am I up to nowadays?

How are you doing on this journey?

You know, I'm good.

I still have my ups and downs.

I've arrived at an interesting part in my journey where it's something that I'm practicing now.

And I still don't quite have the hang of it.

And I'll use one more metaphor.

You know, I think the way that I approached the first part of my life was as if life was a big mountain to be climbed.

Where, you know, you're trying to head up Everest under this assumption that once you get to the top,

you're going to have this bliss that will sort of persist or that will make you feel that you had a life well lived.

And that that was the answer.

But what I experienced was that once I got to the top of one mountain, then I had to find the top of another and another and another.

And although you see and do some amazing things along the way, at some point, it's too exhausting. At some point, you may really get yourself into trouble and you might not survive.

The vast majority of people who die on Mount Everest actually die on the way down, not on the way up.

You don't save anything for the return home, I think is the point.

And instead of pursuing my life now as a mountain to be climbed in the hopes that reaching the top will make me feel good again.

I'm instead trying to float down river.

So for example, if you go whitewater rafting, they'll give you a little safety crash course at the beginning.

You know, they'll say, here's how you paddle and here's put your best on.

One of the things I'll ask you is what do I do if I fall overboard, especially if I fall overboard into the rapids or the cold water.

And this is maybe the most important thing they teach because commonly what happens if you're in

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

sizable enough rapids and you fall overboard, the tendency is to freak out and to fight the current.

And when people freak out in the water, especially when the water is choppy, that's when they get in trouble.

The thing they teach you to do is instead you sort of go into mummy mode, right?

You lay back, you cross your arms across your chest and you stick your feet out like you're a mummy.

And you do the opposite of fighting the current.

You allow the current to take you where it's trying to take you.

And for me, I actually find that I believe that that's a more fitting metaphor for life.

It's possible that there's something amazing for us downstream.

So long as we're willing to surrender and just let go, to turn off the intellectual mind a bit, to quit trying to plan as if you can predict the future,

to quit thinking about all the edge cases and trying to optimize our life, which I think is a bunch of bullshit.

It's possible that if you just relax and you instead pay attention to the signals around you, you feel where the current is trying to take you, maybe towards a potential life partner, maybe away from an oppressive work environment, maybe towards a place to live that is more common and peaceful.

Whatever it may be, if you really tune in with yourself and pay attention to that current and you relax into it,

you'll arrive at a destination that you were meant for.

And in a sense, that's what I did that has sort of brought me to this conversation today, instead of talking about investing in companies and what have you.

I've been trying to connect with people on an entirely different level and help them make their own way downstream, so to speak.

So for me, nowadays, that's kind of how I'm living.

At the moment, I'm actually in Vietnam.

I just got here about 10 days ago because it seemed like the current of life was taking me here right now.

It's likely that it's just the next lily pad towards wherever else I'm heading to, but I guess I'm in the mindset now where I'm willing to just surrender and see how it unfolds.

And the metaphor for that is they lost your luggage on the way to Vietnam and we had to push back this recording a week.

Yeah, that's right.

My luggage was half a world away from me.

So when that happened, what could I do?

I just said, okay, well, I have shorts and a shirt on me that I can wear for the next three or four days.

And that's what I did.

Amazing.

Andy, I think this might end up being one of the most meaningful episodes of the podcast.

I think it's going to end up being a Trojan horse where people are coming here for advice on optimizing their product and growth,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / When enough is enough | Andy Johns (ex-FB, Twitter, Quora)

and they'll be thinking their whole life, hopefully in a good way.

Maybe cause some suffering, maybe help people through suffering.

Thank you, Andy, so much for being here.

Two final questions.

You said people could reach out if they're going down this path and maybe need some help or advice.

So what's the best way for people to reach out?

And then how can listeners be useful to you?

Sure.

A couple of ways.

You can find me on Twitter.

My username is clues.life.

So C-O-U-E-S-D-O-T-L-I-F-E.

You can also find me on LinkedIn, search for Andrew Johns.

You'll find me on there.

And you can check out my website, clues.life.

It's a basic MVP, but it's sort of an art project that's in process.

And so those are a couple of ways that you can reach out.

And in terms of ways you can help, you can't always tell who you're helping.

And when I sit behind my laptop and I write and I send my messages out into the world,

other than getting some thumbs up here and there,

you don't always know what impact you're having.

And sometimes it's good to hear, you know,

because again, for me, this is part of me rewriting that internal narrative where I'm trying to do more work

for the benefit of others as opposed to what it does from my bank account.

So, you know, if part of this message has been beneficial to you,

it would certainly put wind in my sails to hear that.

So that would be one way to help.

What a great answer.

Yeah, so let's blow up the YouTube comments and send you some DMs and LinkedIn messages if people find this valuable.

Yeah.

Andy, thank you again so much for being here.

Yeah, I appreciate it. Thank you.

Bye, everyone.