

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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Jacob: Hello everyone, welcome to another episode of The Future of Work podcast. My guest today is a repeat guest from over a year ago, Seth Godin. He is the creator of altMBA, author of numerous bestselling books. He actually has a new book coming out I believe in November, called This is Marketing: You Can't Be Seen Until You Learn To See. Seth, thank you for joining me again.

Seth: Thanks Jacob, it's really a pleasure.

Jacob: So before we start talking about the book, it's been over a year since we last talked. So what have you been up to in the last year? I'm assuming you have not taken any full time jobs working for anybody else since the last time we spoke.

Seth: Well I don't get offers very often, so that could be one of the reasons but we built out the marketing seminar which has had 6,000 students so far. I feel like we're crafting a future of education by living it out loud and building it and it's really thrilling to watch that work. We've had over a thousand people graduate the altMBA since last time we spoke, which is thrilling to see. I wrote a book which is the first full length book I've done in five years or so, and I managed to go swimming almost every day. So that's a good, I've been busy.

Jacob: That's a productive year for sure, and then congrats again on the new book. It's coming out in November, is it November 18th or 8th?

Seth: 13th.

Jacob: 13th, I knew that.

Seth: Yeah, so it's right around the corner. I also forgot to mention, I've got more empathy for you because I also have a podcast now called Akimbo. It's listened to by a lot of people but more important, it's resonating with them and it's fun to make. So that's been fun.

Jacob: Well, how are you enjoying being on the opposite end of the podcast microphone where you are now the host?

Seth: Well, I'm the host, but I'm also the guests. There's no guests on my show and it's also very short, 20 minutes at a time. What I tried to do is make a podcast similar to the conversations I have when people come into my office to have a coffee, where we explore an idea that I've been nursing and thinking about for a long time. I just recorded one about the wedding industrial complex, I've done ones about some costs and about status roles. The goal is because there's so much desire for bite size information, I didn't want to make a Tweet or Snapchat. I wanted to do something where in 20 minutes, maybe you'll be able to think a little differently about something that's been on your mind.

Jacob: Very cool. Then well, not to jump ahead but this is one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. You're constantly doing new things, so marketing yourself. I definitely touched on that. One thing that I learned that I was quite fascinated by after going through your book is that you have 233 Grateful Dead albums, and you about why the Grateful Dead which I thought was a really great story. So maybe you can talk about why Grateful Dead, what makes them so unique?

Seth: Yeah, I think it can inform a lot of the way we understand things. So on one hand, if you don't have a lot of familiarity with the dead, you think, "It's just a hippie thing, and it was a micro thing and whatever." In fact, they were the number one live grossing band in the United States, more than 10 different years. More than The Rolling Stones, more than Paul McCartney, more than Van Morrison, number one. They did this while only having one top 40 record in all of the years they made music. So how do we explain this? How do we explain the fact that there's a small group of people who have hundreds of Grateful Dead records, and most people who know nothing about them, and what is the relevance of that to how we think about work and how we think about marketing?

Well, it turns out the Dead were way ahead of their time. The reason is, instead of trying to find listeners for their music, they spent all their time finding music for their listeners. They understood that the smallest viable audience, the true fans were way more important than chasing the masses. They understood that making average music for average people wouldn't make them happy, nor would it make their fans happy and that if instead they said we stand for something, we are not easy to replace because we're the one and only. Then some people, people who got the joke, people who liked it, people who wanted to go on that journey would follow them. It turns out that the world has lined up more around the Grateful Dead and their model, than almost any other cultural creator I can name, because there aren't three TV networks anymore.

There's a billion networks because everyone who's on the internet is their own network and that means there is no mass market. There is no way to reach the average. The average aren't listening to you, and the same thing is true with employees and the same thing's true with the people you might want to serve as a company. What we have to do is find the humility to seek out the smallest viable audience, not the arrogance to assert that we're for everyone.

Jacob: Which I think makes a lot of sense. It's interesting because I actually just jotted down a question here as I was listening to you talk, and I was curious to hear your thoughts on how has all of this changed. How do you think marketing or even just personal branding has changed since you first got involved in this decades ago? Have you changed your mind on anything that you wrote about 20 years ago versus now?

Seth: Well, I wrote a book that almost no one has ever read called Guerrilla Marketing Yourself. Jay Levinson and I did a bunch of Guerilla Marketing books together. I helped him get into the idea of not just writing every word himself. In Guerrilla Marketing Yourself, I described so many of the things that are true in our world today and it was a really long time ago. It's probably 25 years ago. The idea which I haven't changed is you will be judged. You might not be judged by everyone, but everyone who interacts with you will judge you, and they will judge you without knowing you. They will judge you without knowing the truth of you, but we have to judge other people because we don't know how to live with strangers. So we make assertions and assumptions about people.

So you get to make a choice, and that choice is on that first day you go into work, are you going to be judged? Yes. How will you be judged? How will you present yourself that when you run an ad, you're marketing but when you wear a suit, you're marketing. That when you send a memo, you're marketing. If you send email to people in all caps, if you throw a tantrum, if you speak up in a meeting, if you don't speak up in a meeting, all of these things are marketing. The more people we interact with at work, and I think it's fair to say that everyone at work interacts with more people than ever before, the more people we have to market ourselves to. I think it should be an intentional act, not some accidental thing and I don't think we should let ourselves off the hook by talking about being authentic because that's just a cheap place to hide.

Jacob: That's interesting as well because when most people think about marketing, they always think about marketing a product or a service, but rarely do we spend enough time thinking about ourselves as the product, and we're basically marketing ourselves all the time like you said. Why is that especially important now and going forward?

Seth: Well, if you worked for a company in Buffalo, New York in 1948 that had 12 employees, you were going to work there for 40 years and you were going to need to engage with 12 people. So you could take your time and be "whoever you are," and that would be fine but now you've got 100 people following you on this channel. 300 friends on that channel. You are making sales calls, you're interacting with people in zoom calls and in Skype. You're writing memos, emailing with dozens of people, of course they're measuring you and judging you. One of the examples I give in the book is about a startup called Witchsy. It was started by two women and it was a tech startup, and what they found was that they weren't getting any traction.

They weren't getting conversations with the media, they were having trouble hiring programmers, people weren't answering them. So what they did was they invented a third partner, a make believe person. I think his name was Tom and they intentionally made him a man. What they would do is CC him on emails, and what they would do is invite him to conference calls. It turns out and this is horrible and misogynistic and shameful, that when there was a man in the thread and when there was a man on the

call, people paid more attention to them. People were more likely to listen to them. Well, that's not fair but it in this moment is true. So what they did, what they chose to do was say to people, you know what? We know that you're sexist and we know that you might ignore us, so we're going to play your game right back at you, and use that to earn attention from you at first.

It's my hope that we don't have to do things like that for long, and I think current changes in our culture are helping but I bring up the story because it's proof that in every interaction we're having, we're marketing ourselves.

Jacob: You mentioned that being authentic is like being let off the hook, and we hear about this all the time. Organizations are always talking about this when they pitch culture to prospective candidates. They always say you can be authentic, you can be transparent. Why do you think that is maybe the wrong approach, or letting people off the hook?

Seth: Well, because they are lying. I mean, if you authentically want to go to work naked, you can't do that. If you authentically feel like eating pickles and belching during a meeting, you can't do that. We make choices all the time as grown ups to do things that aren't "what we feel like" in the moment. We constantly make a calculation. Ever since you've been two years old, as soon as you were out of diapers, you've been making calculations about what you could say, or do that would change somebody else's mind. So I don't even know what authentic means. I know what consistent means. Consistent means you made a promise to me about how I expect you to behave, and you keep that promise. I think we need brands, and we need coworkers, and we need bosses, who are consistent so that we can function but authentic, just because you feel like berating me and having a tantrum, doesn't mean you should.

Jacob: It's almost like you can wear any color you want as long as it's black. So we're ... I think you're right, a lot of companies always say be authentic, be transparent, but do it within the confines of how we're telling you, you can do it. So it's I don't know, it's a weird ... I've never really thought about it much, but I think you're right. There's something to that's a little weird. The other thing that freaks me out a little bit is you said that ever since you're two years old, you start calculating. I have a daughter that just turned two and so now I can't get this image out of my mind that she's constantly calculating, and trying to figure me out. So thank you for that creepy image.

Seth: Well, wait a second. Is that creepy? Let's be really clear. What's your daughter's name?

Jacob: Naomi.

Seth: So has Naomi ever started crying?

Jacob: Of course.

Seth: Of course and what you'll discover for example, is Naomi trips and falls and lands on her knee, and then she quickly looks around to see if anyone's looking. If no one's looking, she's backup playing and having fun but if someone's looking, maybe there's a tear or

two. Why is that? Because she has calculated that in that moment, getting some attention to her booboo will make her feel better. So yes, it's a calculation on her part to cry. Crying, serve no other function, but to get dad to come.

Jacob: That is true. Yeah, actually very smart two year olds, man. I suppose I did that when I was a kid as well. So if this idea of authenticity and transparency is maybe the wrong approach, what do you think would be better for organizations to do?

Seth: Make promises and keep them.

Jacob: So instead of saying we're authentic or transparent, you would remove that language altogether?

Seth: For sure. I mean that language is marketing language and it's marketing language that doesn't actually work, because what it's saying to a millennial or job seeker is we're going to use a bunch of weasel words that you don't even know what they mean. If you're the kind of person that wants to work in a place where people use weasel words, this is that kind of place. Whereas if you say everyone here works between 10 and 12 hours a day, we tell each other very directly what's working and what's not. We measure your deal flow and deal flow is excellent, we pay you more, give you a better office and fly you on vacation. If it's not, we fire you. So what kind of person wants that job? Well, the kind of person who likes those odds, who wants that sort of working environment because when you think about it, that's what school was like, right?

School said, we're going to give you these books, we're going to give you these tests and if you do X, Y, and Z, you'll get an A and if you get an A, you get this as a reward. So when we go to work, we're mostly looking for the consistency that comes from people we trust, and the reason we trust them is because they keep their promises. As soon as you say, "Well, we're a family," then what you've basically said is either I will never ever be laid off and I'll get to come for thanksgiving, or you're saying you're a liar because it's not a family. It's work, and be really clear with me about what the promise is. Tell a story that resonates with me, and maybe the right person will show up and challenge you to keep your promise.

Jacob: That's another thing that I keep hearing about as well in marketing messages where we treat employees like a family. We've heard about The Alliance, even a book that was written several years ago and I actually, I haven't worked at these companies, but I really wonder if they actually treat you like a family when you're in there. I'm guessing it's probably not the case, yet they like to say they do.

Seth: Well yeah and again, words matter because words remind us of other things. Now the challenge here is what if the person you're saying we're like a family, comes from a broken home with an abusive parent that had to move from city to city, because someone was always in trouble. Do you want to remind that person of a family? So when we, if we say to people, we don't seek to maximize profit, we seek to maximize employee satisfaction at the same time we meet our profit goals and here's how we do it, now you're making me a specific promise. If you do, circling back to where we

started, if you hire the former chef of the Grateful Dead to cook lunch at your place, you're going to send a message to people, and that's what Google did.

That was a marketing move that it was a really cheap way to get a whole bunch of high paid engineers to sign on to this little company, which is there are other places it'll give you snacks but look at this. We're going to spend a \$1 million or \$10 million on our food, what does that say? It's a message, it's a signal.

Jacob: When people are starting to think about how they should market themselves, and maybe you're just coming out of college or maybe you've even been in the workforce for a while, where do you even start to think about how to market yourself? Is there a step one, step two, step three, so that you can figure this out for yourself?

Seth: I think it begins with what promise are you willing to keep, and this is the problem with Tinder, because the thing that might get you a swipe right might not be the thing you want to live up to for the long run. So making a promise to a prospective partner or to a boss that you're eager to keep, guarantees you a better career than pretending you're something you're not and then hoping they don't fire you later. So if you want to be that person who does extra homework, who is always yearning to make an impact, who's aware of the situation, then don't just apply by mailing a resume to a post office box because now you've signaled something else. You're the kind of person that should apply by using LinkedIn and other data to triangulate who are the three key people, and then you should figure out who are the seven people you know who those three people know.

Then you should figure out how to get intros from those three people, or seven people to those three people so that you're welcomed with open arms. If you can keep that up after you get the job, it's going to be a great match but too often, particularly young people have been brainwashed by the system we call school, and that system is built on the question will this be on the test? If you're showing up at work with a will this be on the test attitude, you're probably going to get a will this be on the test job.

Jacob: That probably explains why so many people are disengaged in the jobs that they have, because that's the kind of thing that they've been trained for.

Seth: Exactly.

Jacob: All right. So I guess like you said, the first step is to figure out what promises you want to keep. I'm sure for a lot of people, it's something along the lines of I want to be dependable, I want to be seen as innovative and creative and a hard worker but for a lot of people I'm sure they're also thinking, I also don't want to be seen as somebody who is just a people pleaser. Somebody who's a cog to the organization. So how do you balance the brand that you want to build for yourself without giving too much of yourself to the company, if that makes sense?

Seth: Well, so this is a fantastic question and let's deconstruct it a little bit. If we look at some of the great marketers of our time like Nike, like Apple, like Starbucks, I mean make

whatever list you want. They're not great marketers because they ran great ads. They're great marketers because they wanted to make a change happen. So Starbucks wanted to turn people who are disconnected into people who had a third place to meet and to talk, and they wanted to do that at the same time they turned pre caffeinated people into caffeinated people. So they're different than Dunkin' Donuts. They don't compete with Dunkin' Donuts, they stand for something else. Apple seeks to turn people into folks who have good taste about digital transactions. Then once you've used a Mac, it's really hard to go use a windows machine, because good taste is infectious.

Harley- Davidson turns outsiders into insiders, and you're part of something. So we know what marketing is, it's about making a change happen. So if your mindset is, I don't want to make a change happen, I just want a job, then you're just going to get a job and you should market yourself as a cog in the system. If you're one of those people that want to make a Ruckus, that want to get the best part in space at work, that want to move up and they want to be able to point to their increasing authority and leverage and contribution, then that's the marketing you do. You are marketing yourself to the organization as somebody who if you give her a project, she will change that project. Something's going to happen if you let her in the room, and there's not room for everyone to be a linchpin, to be the one that we have trouble living without but it could be you and that choice is your choice.

It's diametrically opposed to the mindset of I don't want to give myself over to the company, and I just wanted a job. So you're either doing one of the or the other one.

Jacob: You probably need to be pretty consistent with it too, right? I mean, you can't flip flop and I want this, but maybe I'll try this. It sounds like you really just need to be consistent with how you're presenting yourself.

Seth: Exactly, because the way you present yourself is a promise. So if you're making the promise of I'm going to ask good questions, then you got to keep asking good questions. If you stop asking good questions, you've let me down because I hired you as the person to ask good questions.

Jacob: What if you're scared? I don't know if this is true for a lot of people or not, but some people and I've talked to some of these people, I'm sure you have as well, that they want to market themselves but they're scared of how they're going to be perceived amongst their peers or inside of their organization. They have ideas, they have things that they want to do, but they can't get over that fear factor of being seen. Any tips or advice that you might have for that?

Seth: Well first of all, if you're not scared, you're not trying hard enough. Being scared is a symptom that you're doing it right, not a symptom that you're doing it wrong because I guarantee you when they launched the iPhone, or they launched Nike Air, or they launched Bernie Sanders political campaign, they were scared. They were scared because you're reaching, you're making a big promise. So if you're serious about making this impact, of course you're going to be scared. The second half of it is, you can't make the fear go away. You can dance with it, but you can't make it go away because it's a totally separate part of your brain. That part of your brain is illiterate and it's instant,

and all it knows is I want to survive. So what you can learn to do is say to yourself, "Good news, I'm just that right amount of afraid. I must be onto something."

It's that work that gets you out of the mindset of I'm in school, because school peer pressure says, "Don't be a goody-goody. Don't be a teacher's pet, don't try too hard." Well guess what? There's someone competing with you who's not going to play by those rules. So because they are going to try hard because they're going to make big promises and keep them, because they understand that being the irreplaceable linchpin is way better than being the replaceable cog, they're going all in. So if you want a good job, you got to have to go all in especially because you're afraid.

Jacob: From what I hear is also hard in the U.S. for a lot of people because as you know job markets are constantly turbulent. The first thing a company does when they get in trouble is they let go of thousands of employees, and so it's very hard and my wife went through this as well. It's so hard to commit yourself full onto an organization, where you always have that little voice in the back of your mind that's just thinking like, "If something goes bad at this company, I'm going to be the first to go." Do you think we should just disregard that voice and just go all in and just see what happens, or is it good to be a little, I guess skeptical and cautious?

Seth: People used to say to Tom Peters, "Why should I bother training all my people? If I train them and they get more skills, they'll just leave." Tom said, "Well, which would you prefer that or you don't train them and they stay?" So for the point of view of the company, there's this wonder of well, is this person going to let me down? From the point of view of the employee, it's the same thing, will this company let me down? Will I get laid off? Yeah, maybe. So given that that's the case, what's the alternative? Stay there as a cog in the system and maybe you won't get laid off, or act like it matters and bring your best self to work and maybe you will get laid off. Which is a better outcome?

Jacob: Yeah, simple enough. I mean there's not a complicated rocket science behind it. Part of a marketing and branding yourself is also this dealing with trolls, I'm sure you've had your fair share of them. People that have listened to the podcasts have no, I've shared my wonderful stories with trolls were I've had people create fake Twitter accounts about me, messaged my wife who was my girlfriend at the time telling her to break up with me because I was bad for her career. People leaving angry comments on my blog. My wife's still gets the occasional troll from the same kind of group of people. When this first happened to me, I got very defensive and I would respond to every comment and engage with every debate publicly, privately, all over the place.

I wasted so much time and so much energy doing that, then now we just ignore. So I'm curious first, have you had to deal with your fair share of trolls, the haters that are out there saying that Seth is crazy, he doesn't know what he's talking about? How do you recommend other people deal with it because as you start to build your brand and market yourself, you're always going to get those people out there who say you're nuts?

Seth: Well, I'm sorry this happened to you. I guess I'll say a couple things. The first one is I don't use Twitter and I don't use Facebook, and I have a hard time thinking about why most people would professionally if they could avoid it. Facebook and Twitter don't

work for you, you're not the customer. You're the product and it's all amplified and optimized to make you feel insecure enough that you'll come back one more time to see what people are saying about you behind your back. So unless you got a really good reason, or if it's really making you happy, think about that. Number two, I know you've written what? Three books so far?

Jacob: Yes, three working on the fourth, coming out at the end of next year.

Seth: Congratulations. When was the last time you read your Amazon reviews?

Jacob: Well, whenever I get new ones I occasionally go on there and I respond to them and say, "Thank you for the comment. I appreciate it." If I get a bad review, sometimes I'll go on there and say, "I'm sorry you felt that way about the book. I'll take your feedback into consideration." Maybe every month or so, I'll go on there and just take a look.

Seth: Right, so here's my advice. Never ever read the Amazon reviews again, because you're never going to write that book again. Reading all the one star reviews is not going to make you a better writer. The people who are writing one star reviews aren't writing a one star review because they didn't like your book. They're writing a one star review because they're not the kind of person that could have liked your book, that they are not the generous critic who is there to coach you through and edit your work to make it better. What they're announcing to you is it's not for me, and the right answer is I'm sorry, it's not for you. Thanks for trying. That's it, because someone who doesn't like what you're doing, the thing is they don't know what you know. They don't want what you want. They don't believe what you believe. That's just true. It's true about everything.

That in any political debate, there are people on the other side and we could say to ourselves, "How could they possibly believe what they're saying?" The fact is they don't know what you know, they don't want what you want and they don't believe what you believe. We can honor them by giving them permission to have that completely different set of beliefs. That doesn't mean they have to come over for dinner, it doesn't mean we have to write something for them. It doesn't mean we even have to work with them, but once you acknowledge that there are people who do care about you, who are happy to give you actually useful feedback, that's worth listening to. That's priceless, but the trolls, shun the nonbelievers. Just shun them.

Jacob: Ignore, don't pay attention to.

Seth: What are they for? They're not helping you.

Jacob: No, they're definitely not there to help. There's no ... I haven't had a positive troll yet hound me all over the place, keep telling me that I'm amazing. It's usually the exact opposite. So yeah, I agree. I mean that's what I've been doing is I learned the hard way after spending probably a couple of years just battling it out with them to totally ignore. It's interesting that you mentioned about Facebook and Twitter, because I found, now keep in mind that when I went off on my own around 10 years ago, I didn't really have

any connections. I wasn't doing much speaking, I didn't have a lot to build my brand. So I actually very heavily relied on social media to do that on Twitter, on Facebook, on LinkedIn. I mean even to this day, I'm still all over the place sharing working business content on there. It sounds like from your perspective, I don't want to say you're not a believer in social media, but you don't think it's as effective perhaps?

Seth: Well, we need to be really clear about what the word brand means, because I'm not using it the way you're using it. I think a brand is a short hand for the perception that people have of what to expect from you. It is the sum total of the promises that go with what it means to interact with Jacob or with Seth. You don't build your brand on social media. You build your brand in the shower when you're thinking about what you want to stand for. You build your brand by becoming the change agent that you sought to become by making the change in the world. Now may be that when you appear in social media, it is a souvenir of your brand, a shadow of your brand. So if I'm blogging every day, people are seeing a glimpse of what I stand for but the act of using it as a media channel to "get the word out," that's way overrated.

That's not really what's working. What's really working is you touched someone who was already enrolled in your journey, and you touched them with your work in such a way that they told someone else. So as that word spreads, that interaction is carrying with it a tiny piece of your content DNA, of your passion to make a change happen. If you pick a change that resonates with people, then you'll do fine. So Nike, a long time ago, picked a DNA of saying we will help a certain kind of competitor compete at a better level, and we will challenge those competitors to go deeper within themselves. They didn't persuade anyone to be like that. They said, for people who are like that, we are happy to be a narrator for you. We're happy to challenge you, we're happy to be a souvenir for you, a label, but their brand is not their Twitter account.

Jacob: Very true and I'm sure you saw the recent use of their, what was it? Two days ago their Colin Kaepernick ads that are now all over the place. They've definitely been taking some strong stances on things. What were the most effective strategies that you've implemented for yourself when you first started out? So when you first left that last full time job that you had, what did you find to be most effective in building that brand for yourself and what didn't work?

Seth: The most effective thing for sure has been the daily blog. Even if no one read it, writing something every single day more than 7,000 posts in a row has been a gift to me by me from me, because it forces me every day to think deeply about what I stand for, what I believe in, what I want to share, what I want to teach. The gimmicky stuff I did in the early days, I had a custom tie made with the names of all my books on it that I could wear at the booksellers show. The wine tasting event that I sponsored to try to get a bunch of people to change their mind about a project I was doing. These short term gimmicky things, they were all a waste and that what has really paid off is consistently and generously showing up with the narrative of what I'm trying to teach. I don't need to say to people, you can hire me to speak. I don't need to say to people, I've written a book. They'll figure it out if they like my ideas.

Jacob: You say, and people have asked me this, they say has Seth really blogged every day. How often do you, have you skipped a day at all in the last few years?

Seth: The last day that's missing doesn't really count because at 11:00 the night before, I wrote a piece honoring Steve Jobs when he died. So I don't count that as missing a day because it was seven hours early. So no, I've tried to keep it up and now it's probably been eight or 10 or 12 years in a row. Before, I used to blog three times a day and sometimes our blog every once in a while, but it's been a persistent, consistent thing for at least a decade.

Jacob: Where did these ideas come to you from? So today, I haven't read your blog today yet, but when you wrote today, where did that idea come from? How do you keep getting this stuff to write about?

Seth: The answer to where do you get ideas is really simple. I have never met someone who didn't have ideas, never once. Never once have I met someone who woke up in the morning and went, "[inaudible 00:35:15], I have talker's block." Everyone has something to say, but most of the time what they have to say is banal, it's unoriginal, it's not helpful. So they don't write it down, they wait for something perfect. They wait for something inspired and that's their mistake. Turns out the way you get good writing is by doing bad writing. That the way you get better at your work is by doing your work. That your daughter knows how to walk now, she's still not that good at it. So she stumbles now and then, but she's never once said, "I am never going to be able to walk because I'm not good at walking now."

That what she does is she walks and she gets better at walking. Well the same thing is true with writing, or blogging, or contributing, or speaking, or making PowerPoint slides. You do the bad stuff over and over and over again, and once your brain realizes you're not going to give up, it puts some energy into it, it comes out with good stuff. So first show me your bad work, show me you're lousy blog posts. Show me your weak ideas and then we can talk about making them better, but first you got to do them.

Jacob: Yeah, I definitely fall into that category of trying to wait to get something solid and well thought out, but it sounds like that's probably not the most effective strategy. What about now?

Seth: No, I worked with Isaac Asimov years ago, and Isaac published 400 books in his lifetime back when it was difficult to publish a book. He did 400, and the way he did it was every morning at 6:30 AM, he sat down on his typewriter and typed until lunch. Every day, whether it was good or not. He just typed and he let the editors figure it out later.

Jacob: Well, I had no idea you worked with him. He's one of my favorite, I'm a huge science fiction fan so I love his Foundation and I Robot series. I had no idea you worked with him.

Seth: Yeah, the robot poster is sitting right over my desk as I talk to you. He and I produced that product in 1987, when I was 27 years old. It's a murder mystery VCR game, where

you watch a cheesy movie and it has 256 different endings that you have to figure out. Siskel and Ebert gave it two thumbs up on broadcast review which was the peak of my movie career.

Jacob: Man, that is so cool that you had the opportunity to work with him. Sorry, are you a science fiction fan yourself?

Seth: Yeah, I read every science fiction book in the Clearfield Public Library from Asimov to Zelazny, every single one of them. Then when I was at Spinnaker, I did Ray Bradbury, I worked with him on a product. Arthur C. Clarke, Michael Crichton I worked closely with on a product. It was a dream come true for a 24 year old to hang out with those guys.

Jacob: Man, that is so cool. Why science fiction? I have my reasons why I like science fiction, but I'm curious what gravitated you towards the science fiction genre?

Seth: Science fiction for me, good science fiction, the hard kind that I like is about noticing things, puzzles, ramifications. So I'm basically a science fiction writer, but my science fiction is what's going to happen tomorrow. So you say, Robert Heinlein said, "What would happen if we replaced roads with moving sidewalks?" Arthur C. Clarke said, "What would happen if an astronomer could figure out how spirituality really worked?" So you start with a simple little scenario, and then you write a short story about the implications. So one of my most influential posts many years ago was I was the first person as far as I know, who said that the way we would end up with self driving cars is they would come via Uber first, and that you would be able to buy a car that was self-driving Uber enabled so that when you went to work, your car would moonlight for you working for Uber.

That was before Uber had a self-driving car program. The way that blog came to be is I'm thinking about self-driving cars, because they're clearly going to happen and I'm thinking about the fact that almost no human and no city is going to say we're going to switch to self-driving cars all at once. There has to be a gradual process, but it's really hard for there to be gradual process because who wants to be the first person to be in a self-driving car and buy one when it's that big an investment, but Uber lets you drive for an hour or 20 minutes or 10 minutes. So it will gradually enter the work flow and the day flow that way. So I riffed on that for six paragraphs, I didn't have to write a whole short story about it and we'll see if it happens, but that was fun.

Jacob: Wow, yeah. I think I actually remember seeing something like that a little while ago and of course, sure enough that is exactly what's happening. Going back to the original question I asked you around things that you did that worked well, and things that didn't work well. Are you doing anything different now, a couple of decades later that you're finding to be particularly effective? I actually remember you had Squidoo, a little while ago. When I was first branching off into creating my own website, I actually used your platform for affiliate marketing around the, over a decade ago now. So I know you've experimented with a lot of different things.

Seth: Indeed, I think the biggest differences in the last 10 to 15 years, I'm intentionally doing things that might not work. I didn't use to have the guts to do that and now I do. The act of intentionally not playing it safe, makes my work better.

Jacob: Do you have an example of something that pops to mind?

Seth: Yeah, when we launched the altMBA, it was a huge leap two, three years ahead of what most people in continual education were doing. I said, "Yeah, we'll build the system, will build the software, will assemble these people and I'll probably be able to get my fans to try it once and it's probably not going to work. Let's see what happens." With Squidoo, it grew to be the 40th biggest website in the United States and we only had eight employees. There was nothing about it that made it obvious that it would work. No one showed up and said, "Here's a bunch of funding." No one showed up and said, "Here's a bunch of support." It was before Facebook, it was before Twitter, it was before Pinterest. We were early and we knew we were early and I knew it might not work, but we tried.

Jacob: I definitely ... When did it go away?

Seth: We sold it to HubPages, so it's still there.

Jacob: Still around, okay. I haven't been to the-

Seth: It doesn't have that name anymore, but HubPages was our number one competitor. We realized that being affiliated together will give us more influence over Google than being separate.

Jacob: Very cool. So some people listening to this might be thinking, how long does it take to market yourself, to brand yourself? Which is I think an interesting, but a very hard question to answer. So if you decide on the promise that you're willing to keep, how long does it take for you to be known as that person?

Seth: Well, in the case of Psy, it took about three weeks for a few billion people to know that he was the Gangnam style guy. If Psy tries to get a job doing almost anything else, it's going to be hard because the promise he made is, I'm going to do that weird Korean horse dance thing. On the other hand, if you want to be known in a company with 400 employees as the reliable insightful brainstorm, who should be invited to a meeting now and then, it might take you seven years and there's nothing wrong with that. So it depends. It depends on how vivid your promise is, and it depends on how much authority you can put behind your promise and keep it.

Jacob: I know for me, I found I always told myself that I was going to practice three rules, consistency, visibility, and frequency. I was just consistent with the topics, I tried to make them as visible as possible, and I would be frequent with sharing those kinds of ideas. Still, 10 years later, that doesn't change. I know for some people, they often times start off in one area, maybe they want to be known in the marketing space. Then all of a sudden, they're jumping into conversations around all sorts of stuff. Basket weaving,

horseback riding. There's not a lot of consistency that ties the thread together. How important do you think that is for building that brand for yourself?

Seth: Yeah, those are the very same people that are hurt the most by criticism and by trolls because what they're actually is, I would like to be seen as my authentic self, as the person I am choosing to be, I would like to be seen as me. So the criticism is personal. It's not, I don't like your idea, it's I don't like you. Those are two totally different things. Being known as a source for an idea or a set of ideas, enables you to have thoughtful, intellectual conversations about the efficacy of your work. Whereas this new model of YouTube pop celebrity, Instagram, look how many Snapchat followers I have, I'm taking pictures of my kids birthday party, that's not professional in the sense that you can't not take it personally, because you've chosen to make it personal. That's not generous because the world doesn't want to know about you. They want to know about them.

Jacob: You mean people don't want to know about what I'm eating, and they don't want to see pictures of me and my family all over Instagram, Seth? That hurts my feelings.

Seth: I think they do if it helps them, but they don't if it's just about you. Sorry if I hurt your feelings.

Jacob: No, you actually had this really cool exercise in your book which I find to be quite helpful. It was this X and Y axis on page 55. I think in the book, you were talking about it in terms of how to position something, and I thought it would be really helpful. Can you walk us through that exercise and maybe how an individual might use it for themselves, not for a product or service?

Seth: Sure. So let's start with some famous individuals first and then we can try to talk about locally famous, because everyone is locally famous to their family or their colleagues. So if I thought about Walter Cronkite, or I thought about I don't know, some horrible, crazy AM radio shock jock. They're both newscasters in some sense of the word, and if I'm new in town and I want to know who to listen to, I have to pick. I'm not going to ask how many kids do they have, and tell me all the details about their political affiliation and blah, blah, blah. Just put them in a position for me, because I don't have time to sort through everything all the time. Well so one axis, let's say left and right can be focuses on the truth, make stuff up.

Another axis, let's say up and down could be is histrionic and throws tantrums versus is very calm. So Walter Cronkite fits in the is very calm, doesn't make things up corner, and somebody else fits in the crazy person making things up and having a tantrum corner. Different people want different things, so some of those people will have an audience with one people and some with other people. Now you can see there's two more slots available. So if you move to town as a newscaster, you can decide to fill the slot of everything I say is true, but I'm going to be the voluble over the top sportscaster like [inaudible 00:47:36], or you can pick the other corner and say, "You know what? I'm going to traffic in conspiracy theories and all this nonsense, but you can count on me to never raise my voice to be thoughtful and to make you feel smart." So there's four quadrants that someone could choose to fit in.

Well, if we're talking about it in a more personal level and I think about how do I want to be seen at work. My first job, I was 24. There were five other people who had the same job I did. We were all brand managers, we all had MBAs. Most of them were older and had more experience than me. So if you wanted to have one axis of experienced or inexperienced, I was already put in the inexperienced corner. So what are the other axis? Well the other axis might be conservative doesn't want to make a mistake, or energetic willing to experiment. So I picked that one. So when the president had a new project to give to somebody, should he give it to Jim who is good at his job but super conservative, didn't want to make a mistake and had plenty of experience, or should he give it to me because I'm the one who's ready to jump on a plane with four minutes notice to go brainstorm with Michael Crichton about something new we could do.

Well, there is no right answer. It just happened that the project I got, that changed things for me was one that needed an experimenter. So I decided in all things at work to fill that role. That's my position in that marketplace.

Jacob: So I guess people, the way that they can start is they can start to create this X and Y axis and fill in. How would you pick these four attributes that you would put on the X and Y axis?

Seth: That is the hard question, because there are so many to choose from. So you could choose, I'm the tallest one. You could choose, I'm the cutest one. You could choose, I'm the smartest one. You could choose, I'm the most loyal, I'm the person who's going to work the latest, I'm the one who's going to get into the earliest, I'm the one who's never going to gossip, I'm the one who's always going to gossip, I'm the one who's going to keep a secret, I'm the one who's going to tell a secret, I'm the one who has more technical knowledge, I'm the one who has more passion. You just have to look at what all the other choices are, and then pick at least two of the axis so you can find a quadrant where no one else is, and where you can keep your promise because that is the key part.

If you position yourself as the one who's the most passionate, and the one who will stick with it until it's done, then you can't break that promise by leaving a project half done, because now I'll never believe anything you say ever again.

Jacob: Why four? Is it possible to do all of the above? Pick like I don't know, eight attributes. I'm the smartest, funniest, tallest, all that sort of stuff.

Seth: Sure. Yeah, so in the original Star Trek episode, Spock used to play three dimensional chess. So it's not one word, but three boards and you can not only move left and right, you can move up and down. So if you're the kind of person that can play three dimensional chess, you can have as many axes as you want but in most marketplaces, it's difficult to successfully keep track of more than two. Up, down, left, right. What you want to do is find one. So I say Harley-Davidson versus BMW. BMW motorcycles are brilliantly engineered and reliable. That's one way, the other way and they are for Yuppies not for headbanging hipsters. On the other hand, Harley-Davidson motorcycles don't really care so much about German engineering. They're just powerful, so they've picked that axis.

Pick us because we're powerful and they stand for, you will be surrounded by people in leather jackets who will watch your back. So Harley-Davidson only needs two axes to build a multimillion dollar brand. It's hard to imagine that a human being in a company needs more than two to stand for something, but if you want three, go for three. I think four is really hard to pull off.

Jacob: You're talking about all my favorite topics. You mentioned three dimensional chess, I'm a huge a chess nerd. So chess, science fiction, we're hitting all the major things that I love here. Question about the branding aspect inside of an organization. I'm wondering if there's ever any tension between an employee and a manager, or maybe an employee's brand starts becoming, I don't want to say more powerful but more known than the manager's brand. How do you navigate building your brand inside of an organization when you have people that are more senior than you, who feel like their brand should be more known than yours?

Seth: Well, who's the customer? Is the customer your boss?

Jacob: Yeah. So let's say I work at a company like I don't know, IBM and I'm doing a good job and they're building my personal brand. I'm engaging in discussions and participating in things, and my manager-

Seth: Who decided you are doing a good job? Did your boss decide that, or did you decide that?

Jacob: Man, that's a good question. I suppose peers, I was getting good feedback from others that they value my contributions, that they're seeing me participate. People are responding to things that I'm doing.

Seth: First, are they your customer or is your boss your customer?

Jacob: I suppose the boss in that case would be the customer.

Seth: So if the boss is your customer, then you need to position yourself and build a brand that makes the boss happy. Now if the boss is going to be ultimately not your customer, figure out who your customer actually is and market to them. So being popular with your peers might be a good way to get invited out on Friday night, but it might not be a good way to build your career. If you view your boss as temporary, then your boss's boss is actually your customer. How do you live and tell a story that makes your boss's boss excited to see you in the morning. So that choice of who is the customer, who am I trying to change? Who am I trying to interact with? Who am I trying to please? It all begins there. Who is your customer?

Jacob: Maybe that's one of the reasons why I was never good at having a full time job working for somebody else. I don't know what it is, the whole limiting yourself and doing something, well and I know you're probably going to say, well now you have many customers and there are different customers, but that's one of the things that drove me

nuts inside of an organization is I felt like I was constantly having to do something to make my boss look good, at the risk of saying things that I actually wanted to say. Again-

Seth: Well that means you just picked a bad boss.

Jacob: Yeah? Well, I wish I had the chance to pick my boss. That was the boss I was given at the time.

Seth: If someone has talent and someone has passion, they ought to earn the right to pick their boss. The way you do that is if you get the wrong boss, you leave.

Jacob: Yeah, that's exactly what I did. That was almost around the time when I sent you that email that we talked about in the last episode, where I don't know if you recall that story from the last podcast. I sent you an email a decade ago talking about the situation that I was dealing with my marketing manager, and your response to that email was very simple. You said, "It sounds like you need to go do your own thing and soon." That was the full email that you sent me a decade ago, and as soon as I saw that I was like, "You know what? Maybe Seth is right," and here we are 10 years later. So I still have that email floating in my inbox.

Seth: I'm so glad. I will tell you the secret though, which is I didn't come up with that. You came up with that. You made it really clear in your email to me, that you were looking for someone to say it's okay for you to leave.

Jacob: Yeah, that probably was true. I just needed somebody to give me that permission and say, "You know what? Your job does suck. Your boss is a jerk, you shouldn't be there." Sometimes we feel like that in our minds, but we need that outside validation so I found that to be helpful. I know we only have a couple of minutes left, I wanted to touch on one other thing here which is super important. You talk about empathy in the book, and I'm working on a new book on the future of leadership and I've interviewed now 100 CEOs around the world from companies like MasterCard, Unilever, T-Mobile, et cetera. Empathy keeps coming up as a skill that a lot of these CEOs believe is going to be crucial for leadership in the future. Why is it also important for us to understand empathy when building our brands, and marketing ourselves?

Seth: Well, I don't think you should be marketing yourself. I think you should be seeking to solve the problems of the people you seek to serve. The only way you can solve the problems with the people you seek to serve, is to know what their problems are. That selfish marketing is on its way out, because people have choices. If you show up and see people who want to be seen and understand people who want to be understood, and acknowledged that they know things you don't know, and they want things you don't want, and they believe things you don't believe and you can see, then you will be seen. That is [00:57:30] the work of empathy. You don't need to be ... Sorry, there's a big lightning storm here.

Jacob: I was going to say, it sounds like-

Seth: That was very vivid. I think Thor has made his presence known about my comment here. What I'm getting at is, if we can have the humility to go where people are, then we have the ability to be generous and help them change in a way they want to be changed.

Jacob: I guess that's what the skill of empathy is.

Seth: That's exactly right. Most marketers are just selfish, short term ego maniacal narcissists who say, "I've worked very hard to get here. Please pick me, please hire me. Please do what I want." Without pausing to realize that instead, they could just choose to be of service.

Jacob: I suppose the same is also applicable to more seasoned than tenured employees, who feel like they deserve that as well because they've done a lot of great things in the past.

Seth: They do deserve it, but we're not talking about what you deserve. We're talking about what you can possibly do.

Jacob: Yeah, which is obviously a clear distinction. Well to wrap up, I have a couple of questions that people online wanted me to ask you. The first one is from Julia Spencer and she says, "What's the number one thing people aren't seeing?"

Seth: That everyone is afraid.

Jacob: That we just have this facade.

Seth: Yeah and they're at least as afraid as you are, and you know you're afraid of a lot of things, you're just denying it.

Jacob: It's a great one. Next question is from Jennifer who says, "I would love to hear his thoughts on which way to go for the future marketing leader. Self employed or corporate team?"

Seth: Well if you want to learn marketing, you do it by marketing. So if you can work at a place where they do marketing and you can do a lot of it, you should keep doing that. If you don't, you should just market. Not get an internship, not read a book, but actually market because it's not expensive to market now. So find a charity you care about, and market for them. Do a Kickstarter and market for it. Figure out how you want to make a change happen and go do it because if you get good at marketing, a line will form out the door of people who want you to help them.

Jacob: Next question from Alexandra who says, "How do branding and company culture interact?"

Seth: Culture defeat strategy every time. Culture is people like us do things like this. Culture is how we make decisions and you can't successfully tell a story to the outside world for long, that's the opposite of the culture you actually have.

Jacob: Man, that is a loud thunderstorm.

Seth: Yeah. Sorry about that.

Jacob: No, no worries. It's great, it adds to the mood. Just to wrap up, if you have maybe one or two more minutes, I just had the fun rapid fire questions for you if that works for you.

Seth: Let's try.

Jacob: Okay. First one is what has been your greatest failure?

Seth: The failure of missed opportunity, roads not taken, opportunities I had to be generous to take risks to level things up. It's not the failure of I did something and it didn't work, it's the failure of what didn't I care enough to do.

Jacob: You've had failures just like everybody else, because I know oftentimes people think of Seth Godin wrote so many books, speaking all over the place, doing all these great things, but people forget that you too also had your own fair share of failures, and struggles, and challenges, that you had to overcome.

Seth: More than you, more than almost anyone listening because that's what I've been focusing on. If I fail more than you, then I win. The secret to failing a lot is not failing big enough that you're out of the game, just failing enough that you learn something and get to play again.

Jacob: What are you most proud of?

Seth: When I see someone I taught teach someone else, that means the world to me.

Jacob: That's a great one. What is or has been a favorite marketing experience you've had with a brand, or with a company? Is there anything that you can recall that particularly stands out for you?

Seth: I think it happens almost every day. There are things that organizations do where they let humanity come before short term profit. So when I get a smile from somebody, when someone goes one inch or one mile across the line to care, that's magnificent because what I'm reminded of is, we didn't invent culture so that we could inform capitalism. We invented capitalism so our culture could get better.

Jacob: Last two questions for you. Do you have a recent terrible marketing experience that comes to mind, and what do you think could have been done to make it great?

Seth: Well also, almost every day I run into a corporation with rules that sucks the humanity out of the people that have to enforce them, that puts people on hold pretending they have no choice, that quotes policies back at you as if that was a good reason. While they just watch a loyal customer walk out the door saying, "Well, it's just my job, I can't do anything about it." That breaks my heart.

Jacob: Yeah, it's funny that you can in the same day have an amazing experience, and the same day oftentimes even with the same brand, have a terrible experience. The airlines' a classic. If you ever fly, you can have great gate agent, and you can have terrible flight attendant. Same brand, two different experiences. So that's always weird. Last question for you. Who has been your greatest mentor, and what did they do that made them such a great mentor?

Seth: That's my readers. When I watch them be brave and level up, and raise their hand, and contribute, and care, and inquire, that fuels my next thing every time.

Jacob: So you get those emails from people?

Seth: Or just watch, just watch out the window to see things in the world.

Jacob: Well Seth, those were all the questions I had for you. Where can people go to learn more about your book, your site, anything you want to mention for people to connect with you, that want to learn more about the stuff you're doing?

Seth: Well the blog is updateddaily@seths.blog and if you go to sethblog/tim, you will find a video and sample excerpts and all the links you need to find out about the book, This is Marketing.

Jacob: Very cool and it's coming out, you said November 13th.

Seth: I believe that's right, that's it.

Jacob: Perfect. Well Seth, thank you very much for your time and for joining me today.

Seth: It's a pleasure. Keep making a Ruckus, man.

Jacob: Thank you. Appreciate it and thanks everyone for tuning in. My guest again has been Seth Godin. Check out his book, This is Marketing: You Can't Be Seen Until You Learn To See, coming out November 13th. I will see all of you next week.