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I think the cliché saying Great minds think alike is completely incorrect. I think great minds don't think alike is conformity ever a good thing? Isn't everybody in some way suppressing themselves, you're not being accepted for who you are, you're being accepted for who you pretend to be. And that leads to all sorts of problems. And I think that's part of the big challenge. It's not that easy to distinguish between the professional and the personal, we tend to wrap up our self around our identity, and you often define your identity around what you're doing is that the same thing is where you get value from for sure, yeah, if you're viewing your self worth based on whether someone says yes or no to you, then life is gonna be really hard. The quality of your life is defined by what you pay attention to. If you pay attention to junk, your life turns into junk. That's a choice. Why do you think so many people struggle with this idea of creating their own path for the vast majority of our lives? We don't have control over our destiny, right? We're told what to do constantly by teachers and parents and managers. What do you think about this theme of following your passion? You will never feel on top of everything. It's interesting. I don't think follow your passion is good advice.

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Everyone, welcome to another episode of great leadership. My guest today, Ozon veral, a rocket scientist turned author and professor, you may have read his previous book, it was called Think like a rocket scientist, which I believe was Adam grants. number one pick of his top 20 leadership books, one of ink magazine's six business books you need to read. I think last time I checked on Amazon, I had like 17 or 1800 reviews, which maybe you could give me the secret to how to get that many reviews on Amazon.

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And his brand new book, I believe it's coming out April 11. Or is that April 11th. And it is called awaken your genius, escape conformity, Ignite creativity and become extraordinary. So quite the title and subtitle there. It goes on. Thank you so much for joining me. Thanks so much for having me on the show, Jacob. Well, let's jump right in with why you felt the need to even write this book to begin with what what propelled you to put this out there.



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The main reason was this culture of conformity that we live in, where we're constantly looking externally for answers. We're businesses do this to copy and pasting what other businesses are doing chasing trends and fads.



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And in many ways, conformity is genetically wired into us, like we had to conform 1000s of years ago, conformity was essential to our survival. If you didn't conform, if you stood out, you may have been ostracized, rejected or worse left for dead. And so and then the education system reinforces that tendency to conform, right? You're taught that answers have been determined by someone far smarter than you are. And your only role is to just memorize those answers and then spit them back out on an exam somewhere. We then take that genetic conditioning reinforced by educational conditioning into our lives and so so much conformity, so much following the herd. And so I wanted to write a book that showed people how to stop living life on autopilot, and unlock their own originality and unleash their unique talents. And I picked the word genius for a very specific reason. Genius is often thought to mean the most talented or the most intelligent. But that's not how I'm using genius in the title. I took that from a quote from Felonious Monk, he says, a genius is the one most like himself. And a genius in the Latin origin of the word actually means the spirits, attendance at birth, and each and every person. So each of us is like Aladdin, and our Genie or our genius is bottled up inside of us waiting to be awakened. And I wrote the book to show people how to do that. Is conformity ever a good thing? Because sometimes conformity and assimilation I guess, can be used interchangeably. Like I'm thinking, for example, my dad, and my family, you know, they're immigrants from the Republic of Georgia, former USSR. And then when they first came to the United States, you know, my dad didn't speak any English. He had to learn everything himself. And conformity was kind of a big part of what he tried to do to assimilate like he wanted to be, like other people in his job, he wanted to be like other Americans. So conformity from that respect, ended up being I guess, a positive. So is conformity always bad, or are there certain situations and circumstances where it can actually be beneficial?



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It depends, I guess, on how we're defining conformity. Conformity means suppression of the self.



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I don't see a good reason for that unless it's like essential to survival. But in the conditions that most of us are privileged to have, I think suppression of the self suppression of the unique qualities that you have the unique wisdom that you have. I don't see any benefit to it. And I have I have a similar lifestyle.



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Are you too I came here when I was here being the United States when I was 17 years old. I

grew up in Istanbul.



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And then I learned English as a second language and sort of similar to your father, I went through this process of a settlement, some assimilation as well. And my goal was to fit in. So I lost my accent very early, I had a really thick accent when I first got here. And I remember my sophomore year in college, my roommate was like, Dude, there's something happening to your accent, it's like going away. And I think subconsciously, I was just trying to fit in. And I thought to myself, well, if I could talk like them, I could be them. But I ended up suppressing some of the qualities that made me unique. And I love the way that Brene Brown talks about this, she she distinguishes between fitting in on the one hand and belonging on the other. So fitting in is what I tried to do, which is to suppress my unique qualities in order to fit in. But fitting in, actually makes it harder to belong, because you're not being accepted for who you are, you're being accepted for who you pretend to be. And that leads to all sorts of problems, I learned something absolutely insane. Today, 96% of the people who watch videos on this channel are not subscribed, are you one of those people, please make sure to subscribe to the YouTube channel, it'll take you one second, it helps me a lot. And you'll get access to more videos just like this one. So yeah, I guess if we're going with that definition, suppression of the self.



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in a corporate environment, though, isn't everybody in some way suppressing themselves, because you can't, for example, in a professional environment, if you



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have certain beliefs, or certain ways that you live in your personal life, or certain things that you do in your personal life, you can just bring all of that into your organization. So in some ways, aren't we always conforming or suppressing ourselves in some way, depending on the situation that we're involved in? It is context dependent, in many ways, but the way that conformity shows up in the corporate world, I think the problem you're describing might exist. But I think the more severe problem is how it usually shows up, is suppression of the sense. So I believe something about you know, whether we should acquire this company, or whether we should launch this particular marketing strategy, or we should launch this product. I have my own beliefs about that, or I have my own beliefs about how those strategies might be changed. And I don't share them. Because I'm afraid of what might happen. Yeah, I'm afraid of what might happen to my job, I'm afraid of whether I might get that promotion. And then you remain silence. That's how conformity shows up in the workplace, and at least to an echo chamber, at least to the status quo, sticking companies just looking at the rearview mirror and doing what they did yesterday, as opposed to tapping into the creative genius and the creative potential of their employees? Well, I think it also shows up quite a bit in today's organizations, because it's, it's very polarizing now, to talk about certain political beliefs, or certain values, or vaccine mandates, right, there's so many issues inside of organizations now, where I think people are suppressing themselves to some degree, because they don't want to speak up, they don't want to share a contradictory opinion or a contradictory view, because they're scared that they might get in trouble. And it seems like this is happening. I mean, I don't have any data to

support this. But the feeling that I get from interviewing a lot of CEOs on the show is that it's happening more and more inside of organizations, and it's becoming challenging to create an environment in a space where people don't have to conform where they don't have to suppress, like, how do you create a space where everybody can show up? And if you believe, I don't know, example, right? You're you're Republican, I'm a Democrat, where we can still work together or you believe in one thing, I believe in another thing, and we can still have that debate. Whereas I think the challenge that we're seeing in a lot of organizations today is that if you speak up, and you go against the the culture or the narrative that currently exists, you, you could be reprimanded in some way. So getting back to the original question, it's kind of this idea of,

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of course, I would love it if we created organizations in environments where you never had to conform, where you could always speak the truth. Or you could always be honest about anything and everything.

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But I don't know, it doesn't seem like that kind of environment, especially in the business world really exists. I don't know if you would agree with that. I totally disagree. I do think though, that sort of environment exists. And not only that, because I've spoken to I've spoken to businesses that embody a culture of psychological safety in many ways, but then not only that, the absence of that environment is a recipe for disaster. Yes, the absence of an environment where psychological safety does not exist. And I'm happy to give you some examples.

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So let me begin. I'll give you I'll give you two examples. One, let's go back to 2003, which is the date of the Colombia special disaster. So Tragically, the special Colombia exploded during reentry into the atmosphere and, and all seven astronauts onboard the shuttle perished.

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What happened was during liftoff, a piece of foam separated from the shuttle instruct the shuttles thermal insulation, which is responsible for protecting the shuttle from the heat of reentry into the atmosphere. So the shuttle successfully takes off, it's in orbit around Earth.

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And engineers notice the phone strike because they're reviewing footage of the launch. And it looks really bad.

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One of the engineers writes an email.

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He says this looks really bad. And

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we should essentially call up the Pentagon, reroutes the Spicer satellites to see what we can do to repair the damage in orbit. And he says this, this could lead to potential catastrophe. I'm talking about the human loss of human life. He saves the email as a draft. And he never clicked send.

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And when investigators discovered the unsent email, they asked him like, why did you why did you not send this email. And he essentially said, I was afraid the environment was not psychologically safe. So NASA didn't just have a foam shutting problem. NASA also had a conformity problem. NASA also had a group thing problem, NASA was had a psychological safety problem. So what use is, you know hiring these brilliant rocket scientists if they can't share what they actually think.

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And the existence of that environment. By the way, those cultural flaws were identical to the cultural flaws that existed 70 years years before with challenger, the technical flaws, and the two disasters Challenger and Columbia were completely different. But the underlying cultural flaws were very, very similar. And it led to two catastrophes, the worst, you know, catastrophes and rocket science history. That's NASA. And then, you know, a corporate example would be Netflix. And Reed Hastings describes this as the worst mistake he's made in his career. When back in 2011, Netflix decided to launch this service called Quixtar. So they split the DVD and streaming into two different businesses before it used to be one service, you paid one price, the model was a lot more complicated with two different services, the subscription price was a lot higher, Netflix ended up losing millions of subscribers, their stock price dropped by more than 75%. And despite all the talk within Netflix of our psychological safety in the importance of the sense, the culture did not live up to those expectations. And Reed Hastings are very humbly looking back on that moment, admits that he says, you know, we, on the surface committed to a culture of psychological safety of sharing the truth and sharing what you believe in, but we totally failed to live up to those ideals. And so after that disaster, he has this quote that I love, he says, to disagree silently is this loyal.

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And the company ended up implementing a number of different mechanisms to make sure that the Senate and the supreme have the shared before important decisions are made. So and I

the Senate and the Supreme have the shared before important decisions are made. So and I love those examples. And I can think of a few others actually, as well to kind of build on that. But I also think there's a difference between psychological safety for business issues and psychological safety for issues that are more was the right way of putting it not not business related, right. So the examples that you gave are very much talk about a mistake or an issue that might come up or something like that. But let's say we're talking about psychological safety with something cultural, let's say we're talking about psychological safety, with politics with a vaccine mandates, with you know, some some of these really tough topics that a lot of business leaders have had to grapple with those types of issues. I'm not aware and, and I haven't heard stories really have a company that has such psychological safety where any of these things can be brought up. And I And that's, that's for me is I think part of the challenge, right is what, what happens, and how do you create a safe environment, not just where you can talk about business related topics, but you can talk about things that are, you know, outside of work, for example, and I mentioned this to previous podcast guests recently, like Brian Armstrong, I think, the CEO of Coinbase. And he said, I'm banning all political discussion inside of the organization, right? We're not gonna talk about anything political, and none of that divisive stuff is going to be allowed here. And, and I think we're starting to see more organizations, we're really trying to grapple with the fact that there's a difference between like business centric conversations that you can have versus conversations that are just impacting us as people and as human beings.



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And I think that's where a lot of issues and struggles are inside of organizations. And that's, at least I don't know what the right solution is for that. I don't know if you have any thoughts on that. Yeah, I mean, it's not something I cover in the book. I don't cover talking about vaccine mandates or political issues in the book. But I do think I'll say two things. Number one, it's not that easy to distinguish between the professional and the personal. Exactly, yeah. So. So what happens if someone is struggling with their mental health, right, which happens in a lot of workplaces. And so if you institute this division, saying, Well, you can't bring any of the personal stuff to work, then you're cutting off what makes a human being human being, you know, people are going to come in with their, with their issues and their backgrounds and what they're struggling with. And so I don't think the issue is as clear cut as that. I mean, I focus on the business side of things in the book and talk about that. But I, it's a difficult question. And it's not easy to distinguish between Yeah, exactly. The political because it's, it's hard to, and I think that's part of the big challenge, right is there I feel like there used to be a much clearer distinction in separation between business and personal. And now, a lot of it is just being kind of thrown together in one big pot. And it's, it's, it's really challenging to try to kind of balance that and figure and figure that out. So and I know Amy Edmondson as well, I interviewed her too, on psychological safety. And I'm a big believer in proponent that we need more of that inside of organizations, especially on the business realm, right. I mean, what was his name? Dr. Thomas zurbriggen, do you know him? Now, so I had him on the podcast as well, he was the CEO of NASA science, I can't remember if he oversaw that disaster that you spoke of, I think he came in a little bit after that. But he also talked about the importance of creating an environment where, especially at NASA, if there is an issue, he talked about it, not just mistakes, but almost mistakes. And that why it's important to talk about not just mistakes that might come up, but even before it gets to a mistake, and almost mistake and that everybody in the company should be able to speak up and talk about those things. So I love that from a business perspective, from a business angle, it's it's absolutely crucial to be able to create that

kind of environment. And there's so many countless stories out there of disasters and tragedies where loss of life happened because somebody didn't want to speak up. So okay, so let's leave that topic and transition a little bit to one of the themes that we're talking about, which is

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the importance of understanding your identity was one of the themes that you talked about in the book. And it reminded me of a quote from Fight Club. And I think you had a similar sort of quote in there and from Tyler and actually copied and pasted the quote, and he says, some people have not seen Fight Club, great movie. So Tyler Durden, the character by Brad Pitt says you're not your job. You're not how much money you have in the bank, you're not the car you drive, you're not the contents of your wallet. You're not your effing khakis.

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And and you kind of have a similar message in your book, as far as understanding your identity. Can you talk a little bit about that?

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A lot of people in this was me included, we tend to wrap up our self around our identity. So like you say, I'm a doctor, or I'm a lawyer, and you often define your identity around what you're doing. Or it might be what you believe in, right? I'm a Democrat, or I'm a Republican.

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And when your beliefs become intertwined with your identity, it becomes really hard to change your mind. There's this quote, I love from Upton Sinclair, he says, it's really hard to get a person to understand something when his salary depends on him not understanding. And I think the same idea applies to identity, like, it's really hard to get someone to understand something, if it clashes with their identity, if you've defined yourself as a thing. And now what you're the incoming information you're getting is in conflict with that identity.

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Most people will stick to the identity and ignore the conflicting information. And so that's why I think identity.

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If your beliefs are tightly wrapped around, it can lead you astray in many ways is that the same thing is where you get value from as far as like, like, Is it bad to get value from your identity as opposed to who you are? As a person because I know that some one of the things I personally struggle with sometimes is, you know, as a speaker, as an author, sometimes I get value from

that identity and from being able to bring in speaking gigs from being able to write a lot of books and get reviews. But the truth is that that's not necessarily my right. That's the work side. But and I know I keep telling myself this. I'm a dad, I'm a husband. I'm a business partner. I'm a bit like, those are the things that I should be getting the most value from, but sometimes it's very, very hard to like, make that shift. I don't know if that's something you've ever struggled with, but it's been a



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challenge for me for sure. For sure, yeah, I think most recently,



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the biggest struggle with identity for me was, I was a law professor for 10 years. And shortly after I got tenure, and this was back in 2016, or 2017, I decided that that life was no longer for me



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that I didn't want to. And I thought, at one point, when I started, especially when I started out, I thought I'd be a professor for the rest of my life. And I love to teach, like I love being in front of the classroom and teaching. But there came a point I actually remember distinctly the day when I walked into the classroom, and I would normally be energized and engaged. And I'm behind the podium, I put my notes down, and my heart sinks like my shoulders collapse, and that feeling of like, not again, like, I can't believe I'm about to do this, again, I can't believe I'm about to teach the same case for God knows how many times. And so that was a signal from me, from my body from within saying, you might want to look elsewhere.



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But identity got in the way, right. So I had to professor in front of my name, at that point for seven years, like people call me Professor for all right, like that is a part of who I am. That's part of my name, I, part of my identity. And I had worked really hard to get to where I was in academia, and I was the youngest tenured professor at my university. And so being able to let that go, that that identity go was for sure. The hardest part, yeah. Because not only would I lose the professor title, but by doing what I ended up doing, I will be starting all over again, like I'm starting from a blank slate, I don't have any credibility in this other area that I'm about to go into. And it's really, really hard.



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And there's a couple of things that I found helpful in terms of framing this number one, which you already alluded to like diversifying your identity. So you're not just a singular thing, right? So if I'm just a professor, and if I'm not a husband, or if I'm not a writer, or if I'm not a

podcaster, if I'm not a speaker, if you have only one identity, it becomes really hard to let that go. Because then you've got nothing else to fall on. Like you don't have a leg to stand on. That's number one. Number two, for me was also realization that letting go of something,



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could be an act of love, that I can look back and say, you know, this was amazing while it lasted. But I want to leave this identity, I want to quit this job while I'm still ahead while I'm still good. And also realizing that letting go would not be a waste of the seven years or the eight years I had spent in academia, I could take what I learned I can take the speaking skills that I picked up the the writing skills that I picked up the storytelling skills I picked up in the classroom to engage the students who took the required classes, I taught new didn't want to be in the classroom, and reimagine myself using those core components to do something else. And so that was also an important shift for me was to say, okay, like, this isn't a waste, I can take these core components and, and build something else. And then the third part of it honestly was I was being pulled so strongly into this other direction of wanting to write books for general non academic audiences that like, I would have betrayed myself. If I hadn't given that a shot. Yeah, it reminds me actually getting back to this identity thing. He was the CEO of Panera Bread and Panera brands near and you're hungry. And he gave me a change in my life. And this was fairly recently, this was a couple couple months ago, I think. And we were having a conversation and I was asking him, you know, he's responsible for 130,000 employees. And I said, What do you do when something bad happens at your company, when you know, how do you deal with tragedy and, and top things and he's lost? Daughters in his life just had terrible things happen to him? And I said, How do you deal with that? And he gave me this visual and he said that he views his life on like a spoke, kind of like the wheels of a spoke. And each spoke is a different identities that he has. And so being a father, being a learner, being a husband being you know, all these different things that he listed out. And he said, what I do on a regular basis is I asked myself, How have I done on those different spokes? And so if I have struggled in one of those areas, for example, I've struggled on the work spoke Hill try to figure out well, can I do better as a husband? Can I do better as a father can I do better as a learner can I do better and all these other areas that kind of complete that spoke, and I started doing this every day as well like before I go to bed, because sometimes as you know, you might have a great day and a bad day. Sometimes you might get a speaking gig sometimes you might lose a speaking gig. And for me, personally, it was very, I would be



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very much dwell on the one aspect of that identity, I would very much dwell on dammit, I lost that speaking gig today didn't get it, they gave it to somebody else. And I would just, my whole day would suck. And so now what I started doing it night before I go to bed is I would say, Okay, well, maybe On the work side, I didn't do as well as I wanted. But I was a great dad, today, I learned something new today, I was a good husband, I checked in with my family, my mom and dad, I was a good son, I called my brother, I was a good brother. And as I go through all those different types of spokes, it kind of makes me feel better. And it makes me kind of just view myself more a whole instead of just a part of that one thing. And that's been very, very helpful for me. And I think it goes very much aligned with kind of what you were saying. Yeah. And can I share something else? Yeah. Regarding what you said. So one of the other things that struck me is, so say, you know, you lost a speaking gig. And so you have a bad workday as a result, I

think. And I've made that I had a similar mindset before, too. And one of the things that I talked about in the book, and that I am still a work in progress, but that I've been able to shift over the past few years is not defining my own accomplishments by decisions outside of my control. So you have no control over whether you get a speaking gig. There's so many variables outside of your control, you can show up as yourself, you can say, Look, this is what I'm going to speak about. Let me hear your objectives and challenges. And here's what I can contribute. There are so many variables that go into the decision to bring a speaker that you have zero control over. And that doesn't mean that you didn't show up the right way. That doesn't mean that you didn't do a great job. There's a section in the book where I talk about defining ourselves by external metrics. And like I say three examples. Glenn Close. One of my favorite actresses of all time, she was nominated eight times for an Oscar and she never won. Jason Alexander famous for playing Costanza in Seinfeld, one of my favorite TV shows. He was nominated for an Emmy eight times. And he never won, which is crazy. Isaac Asimov. Yeah, Isaac Asimov. And I, this blew my mind when I read it in his book. Yeah, I was shocked when I read that in your in your book as well. But I'll let you share the stat because I also couldn't believe it. Yeah, so he wrote



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261 books that were not best sellers. And it was only his 200 and 62nd book that hit the New York Times bestseller list. Yeah. And does that mean that is first 261 books suck? Or that Glenn Close as a Telugu Telugu actress or that like, Jason Alexander is a terrible actor? Of course not. And so those are all, of course, those metrics are valuable. But if you're defining whether or not you had a good day or a bad day, by reference to metrics outside of your control, then your good days and bad days are always going to be fickle. You're just you're just not going to have any control over them. Because those are decided by other people.



28:06

Do you want to learn how to create an amazing corporate culture while avoiding the pitfalls that make for a toxic one? If so, I created a brand new eight part training video series just for you. In total, it's around 30 minutes in length. And you can get it right now by going to [help my culture.com](http://helpmyculture.com) Go there right now, before this training series disappears forever. Again, that is [help my culture.com](http://helpmyculture.com) and get access to this free eight part training series on how to create an amazing corporate culture.



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I know you're working on your book number two coming at iBook. Number five coming out later this year, I can't imagine 260



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Something books. And I'm a big fan of Isaac Asimov as well, I read the foundation series, the iRobot series. I'm a huge, huge fan of his books.

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And you're right. I think a lot of people struggle with that too, right? It's even, you know, not talking about us as speakers and authors. But people, for example, who apply for jobs that don't get jobs. How many times do people ask for a promotion? They don't get the promotion? And it's, I guess, how do you separate that out? Is it just a matter of just viewing these different identities of yourself? Or how do you like, what's the opposite of the identity? Is there an opposite of that? Or is it just so I think the identity is pieces separate here. What we're talking about here is like when you apply for a job and you get rejected, or when you apply for a promotion, and you get rejected.

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All you can control is how you show up. And as long as you're showing up in a way that makes you proud. That's self aligned. That's true to who you are. That's the only thing that you can control. But if you're if you're viewing your self worth, by the choices that other people make, if you're viewing your self worth based on whether someone says yes or no to

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To you, then life is going to be really hard. Yeah. And I've been in that place before where I was doing exactly what I'm now what I'm now sharing should not be done. And it made life very difficult. The only thing you can control is how you show up. And so like with the writing of awaken your genius, it's a very different book than my last book. And there was a part of me that wanted to cater to the same audience in the exact same way when I was writing this book. So the tendency to self imitate was there, because my last book, Think like a rocket scientist did really well, it was translated to almost 25 foreign languages. And so the the, the tendency was, well, I gotta keep that success. And I need to appeal to the same audience in the exact same way. And for the same for the first time in my life, I got writer's block, words just stopped flowing, because I was trying to copy myself. And I was trying to imitate what I had done before. And the moment I let that go, and the moment I said, You know what, I'm just going to write what's coming up for me right now, I'm going to leave my past behind. And I'm going to stay true to who I am as a writer in this moment in time. And that's the only thing I can control. And it's a really uncertain position to be in. Because you're, you know, as you've known, you've launched this book, and you don't know how readers are going to react to it. Yeah. And I can't control how people react, the only thing I can control is whether I think I'm putting out the best work possible. How do you make that shift, though? You know, for a lot of people out there, whether they're authors, or speakers or employees inside of organizations, where right now a lot of our value and worth comes from external, right? It comes from our performance reviews, it comes from the reviews that we get on Amazon, it comes from how many speaking gigs that we get, it comes from so many of these external sources, how do you move away from that and not rely on that as being your kind of rubric for value and worth of who you are as a person? Sure, I think the the number one thing to realize is that that's a choice. So you're choosing to tie yourself worth around how many speaking gigs you get, are you choosing to tie your worth as an employee on whether or not you get this, this promotion? And I think so number one is realizing that it's a choice, and there is a different choice that I just talked about. And number two, and I think this, to me was a turning point, realizing that reliance on external approval, as a measure of your self worth is completely toxic. Yeah, that fuel does not burn clean, it doesn't burn clean, because it can be withdrawn at any time. You're constantly at the mercy of other

people's decisions and other people's choices. And not only that, but you're also getting pulled in all of these directions, because you're trying to cater to other people constantly, and you're suppressing yourself in the process. And so if you're relying, it's like relying on fossil fuels for energy, that stuff doesn't burn clean,

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internal energy that is renewable. If you if you're defining your self worth in accordance with this metric of did I show up in a way that makes me proud. On that call I had with a potential speaking client, did I show up and in a way that's aligned with me when I spoke on stage, that is the only thing within your control. And as long as you're approving of that, that energy, you have an infinite source of that energy within you, you can always come back to it and whenever I lose myself, and by the way, this happens a lot to me, especially with the upcoming book launch, it's so easy to get pulled into these external sources. When that happens to me, I always come back, try to come back to me and ask myself, like, Did I show up in this podcast interview in a way that makes me proud, not in a way that makes Jacob happy.

 34:01

And so as long as that's the framing, and again, the reason why I know that is because of how much I've hurt myself in the past. How, and I was disappointed I've been by relying on external sources for approval, and I lost myself in the process. Yeah. Well, let's shift gears a little bit, I want to talk about any equation that you had in the book, which was 0.8×0.2 . And I don't want to kind of spoil it. But can you walk through why that was such an important equation? Because even when I was reading it in the book, and you were talking about what that was, I was like, wait a minute, is that right? I you know, like, you don't think about that. So what what's the significance of that equation and kind of what's like the riddle behind it? Sure. So one of the things one of the weird esoteric things I do is I journal about my dreams. I wake up in the morning and I journal about what I dreamt about the night before, and some really interesting

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The insights came from that and the equation you just referred to as one of them. So I had a dream about this equation. And to be clear, I don't normally dream of math, even though I was an astrophysics major in college. It's usually when I do it's a nightmare about like bombing some physics final. But this time around, it was this equation that popped up, and it just says $0.8 \times 0.2 = 0.16$. And the middle school math checks out, like 0.8×0.2 is actually equal to 0.16 . But in the dream, I was this mathematical beginner, and I was looking at this equation completely befuddled, like, it didn't make any sense to me. And I kept thinking, how can the product of two numbers be less than each number. So zero 0.16 is less than both 0.2 and 0.8 . So I kept thinking about this, and,

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and the dream stuck with me for a while, and then

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it hit me, the Insight was about attention. So when we are operating, as we often do, by the way, at 0.8, or 0.2, instead of a full 1.0, the output becomes a fraction of what we actually put in. And I found myself doing that. At the time, especially it was like a message for me to stop doing this, which is fragmenting my attention. And by the way, we tend to think of time or money as the most scarce resource that we have. But I think the most scarce resource we have is our attention. Because attention doesn't scale, you can pay attention to only one thing at a time, if you're trying to do multiple things, then you're operating at a 0.2 instead of a full one and your output suffers. And the quality of your life is defined by what you pay attention to. If you pay attention to junk, if your attention is fragmented, your life turns into junk and your creativity and your output suffers. And so I now have a post that with with that equation on my desk and the different room that I normally work in and as a constant reminder to give my full attention to whatever it is I'm doing whatever it is I'm working on versus operating at a 0.2 Yeah, I like that. It's funny is, as I was reading it, too, I was also kind of going through it. And I guess there are a couple like 0.5 times 0.5. Right, there's I actually wanted to chat GPT. And I had to type this in and I said which to which two numbers are multiplied together, the output is smaller than both of those individual. And it gave me kind of a couple of them. I was trying to look at, but I thought that insight was was really, really interesting. Why do you think so many people struggle with this idea of creating their own path and forging their own

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I don't know being more in control over their their destiny and the direction that they go in.

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For the vast majority of our lives, we don't have control over our destiny, right? We're told what to do constantly by teachers and parents and managers. And so we usually don't have that realization, or at least when we do we lose it over time. Because we just end up giving up control to outside sources.

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And one of the, you know, realizations I had in my life had just this memory came up, which I talked about in the book, too. I was a college students. And you know, one of the things that you're told to do is to pick a major, like you don't have any control over that. And you have to pick a major from the available course catalog. And I remember looking at the catalog and thinking like none of these work for me, none of these majors appealed to me. And I wanted to design my own course of study. And I think part of me was like, Well, you know, tough luck, right? You got to pick what's available on the menu. And then part of me was like, huh, like, I wonder if there is a different path forward. A closed door isn't always a locked door. Sometimes you just have to push. And I went to the registrar's office and I told them none of these work for me, is there a way for me to design my own course of study? And it turns out that the answer is yes, there was this little known program at Cornell where I went to school where you could

design your own yet to apply for it and get recommendation letters and whatnot and but I applied and got in and got to design my four year course of study and that really that stuck with me that moment of like, oh my God, I am not stuck with the menu here. I can actually go off menu and pick something else. And I was lucky in that moment to listen to that voice. But I think you know, most of us don't do that. And I again, I There have been moments in my life where I ignored that voice too. But whenever I lose myself in or find myself giving up control or saying I



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I need to go with what's on the menu. I think back to that moment and say, You know what? I can I can probably go off menu here. Yeah, I can ask for what's not on the menu. If it doesn't exist, I can just create it.



40:13

Yeah, it reminds me of going in and out and getting their secret menu, right animal fries, double, double animal style. You know, my wife, always, my wife and I, we always try to eat healthy. So oftentimes, when we go to restaurants, and we look at their menu, we're kind of like making our own dish there. You know, can we get that grilled chicken, but like, without that sauce on there, and who get vegetables instead of is. So we're always we're always trying to make something that isn't, isn't on the menu. And you're right, I think we're not, we're not taught to do that, really, we're just kind of taught, like, you know, these are your options, climb that corporate ladder, that's really the only chance the only option that you have. And I think that brings us to another theme that you talk about in the book, which is this idea of follow your passion. And I remember growing up, I was always told, and I always heard this phrase, follow your passion. And if you follow your passion, great things will happen. And bla bla bla bla bla, every time an athlete wins an award, they say to follow your passion. Every time somebody gets a Grammy or an Oscar, it's a call your passion like you can do it. And, and I gave a talk for Ted Academy a couple of five years ago, and one of the tenants of that talk was following your passion is bad advice. And I said that it's better to bring your passion with you to whatever it is that you do instead of following it. Because for example, I don't know about you. But for me, I was never passionate about leadership, I was never passionate about like, writing a book, I was never passionate about speaking like I didn't seek out to do these things. I thought I was going to climb the corporate ladder and go get an MBA and this and that, and blah, blah, blah. And I that's where my mind was. So, you know, what I learned to do is to bring the passion that I have two things that I became relatively good at, and then I became passionate about them. So I don't know if that resonates with you. But why do you think or what do you think about this theme of following your passion? Yeah, I agree. I don't think follow your passion is good advice, in part because of what you just described, but also because like, how do you figure out what you're passionate? Yeah, I had no idea especially, you know, yeah, yeah. Like, how could you and especially, you know, I hear that phrase a lot in commencement speeches, I sat through so many of them as a professor. And that was always almost always a part of what the commencement speaker was talking about. And like, you're just starting out, you don't know what your passion is. And it imposes this huge burden on people. When you hear that advice, follow your passion, you're thinking, Oh, my God, I like I need to know what my passion is, I need to know why why no star is. And I don't have that yet. You know, and that creates panic, which I saw all the time around students of like, I haven't figured that out. And I kept telling

them, I haven't figured it out, either. Like, I have no idea what I'm passionate about. I know what I'm curious about. And this is one of the things I talk about, in awaken your genius is like, it's easier to lean into what you're curious about and follow those breadcrumbs of curiosity, versus trying to figure out what your passion is, passion comes later, like you get curious about something, you start doing it, you enjoy it, and then passion comes later. But if you put passion and try before that, and try to figure out what that is, it's like putting the cart before the horse. Yeah. And it's, I forgot who I heard saying this. But he said that, you know, there are a lot of passionate people who go on to things like America's Got Talent or merit, what's the what's the dance show?



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Oh, my God, America's Got Talent. And then there's the dance, the dance version of that. And there's a lot of passionate people about dancing, who like are not going to make a career as dancing. A lot of passionate people in music are not going to make a career as musicians or basketball players. So sometimes, you just have to find out something that you're good at and try to kind of bring your passion with you. And so yeah, I mean, I think we're very much aligned on that as far as why that can be kind of scary and dangerous advice.



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