

Episode 1

THE SECRET TO BECOMING A BUSINESS UNICORN WITH MARK FISHER



[Updated as of 04.01.18]

Michael: Hi Mark Fisher!

Mark: Hello!

Michael: Welcome to the Business for Unicorns' podcast.

Mark: This is truly bizarre. *laughs*

Michael: I know. It's so weird. Just sitting in your living room and talking. I think this is the first time we've actually ever been on podcast together. Is that right?

Mark: I think, Podcast. I believe we've done a couple of webinars together but that's true.

Michael: So, we've done some recorded material together, but this is our first podcast.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: I think so, milestone, milestone for us.

Mark: I know.

Michael: So, thanks for being my first guest.

Mark: Thanks, thanks for having me.

Michael: They want to put this one out as a little teaser just to get people titillated.

Mark: Great, I'll try to be extra titillating.

Michael: So, not only are you one of my favorite humans in the world obviously. We've known each other for a long time. But you're also kind of one of my favorite business minds. We never really get to let people in on our conversation about business. So, I'm kind of excited about that.

Mark: Well gosh! That's so flattering. Thank you so much, obviously likewise. Let's just tell each other how great we are.

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Michael: The thing is that I feel like I've had a front row seat to you, even just becoming a business mind and becoming an entrepreneur. So, I'm probably going to ask some questions and hopefully, some questions other people have asked before because I feel like I've had that front row seat.

Mark: Sure.

Michael: For you becoming a man, becoming the business mind and entrepreneur you are today. So yes, I'm excited for it.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: Thanks for letting me do it. So, let's just start at the very beginning. I'm kind of just curious to hear your personal reflection on that moment you decided you want to start what we now call Mark Fisher Fitness. Just personally, what was going through your mind at that time?

Mark: I think if I remember back to when Mark Fisher Fitness, which at the time was Mark Fisher Fitness Training and Consultation, I believe, I think a lot of it really came down to personally I knew that I didn't want to leave town anymore. I really was ready to make a go for life in the city. I think even in my acting career, I always had moments of entrepreneurial seizures and always liked the business part of the business.

In fact, even in my 20s, I don't think I ever shared this before, I was co-founder of *Sweetie Flyers Company* which was a business that went absolutely nowhere. That was founded with three of my roommates from college where we were going to essentially try to put together a business that would distribute flyers in Times Square for restaurants.

Michael: I don't think that I even heard of this before.

Mark: Because nothing happened with it.

Michael: Absolutely the hidden chapters. *laughs*

Mark: It's too bad because it really actually could have been a thing in retrospect. I just wasn't ready to commit to it. I don't think any of us were at that time. But I was always attracted by anything that let me be the king of my own small, hilarious, low universe.

I think after I realized I didn't want to leave town anymore and I started reading books, part of what I think happened was when I started reading two books a week, the business book which I was reading extensively because it was going to make me more successful with the business of acting, started to inspire in me a creativity around what business was. I think the opportunity to really run with my own thing was very satisfying, particularly because coming from the world of an actor where you are unfortunately so often at the behest of gatekeepers, the fact that I could just make a thing and do it was so satisfying.

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Michael: Yeah, yeah. That makes a lot of sense. What do you think that impulse to want to do your thing really comes from in you? I get it kind of in contrast to acting where you don't have control of a lot of what's going on.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: But I know a lot of people that we've worked with and talked to over the years who want to start their own things have trouble finding that in themselves, the belief that they can do it themselves. So, where do you think that comes from in you, that kind of confidence that you were kind of ready to start your own thing and be holding the reins?

Mark: Great question. I think for me, and I imagine it's different for everyone, I had spent so long on the training piece under the radar that I strongly felt that I was awesome at what I was doing. That was not a confidence that came out of a positive affirmation, fluffy. It was because I had spent years doing it.

One of my favorite books is "Ego Is the Enemy" by Ryan Holiday. He tells a story of General Sherman in the civil war. It talked about how he developed confidence over time because he slowly kept seeing him win at slightly bigger and bigger victories. I think in many ways, that's what happens.

So, by the time I was really ready to do MFF, its precursor as a thing, I had been doing it for so many years that I was able to do things like go into my agent's office and let them know, "Here's the thing. I'm staying in town now. I do training and you've known this. But what you might not know is if you send your clients to anyone other than me, you're making a terrible mistake. Because there is literally no one in the city doing this better than I am with an understanding for what your clients need and understanding of show business. Follow your heart, totally no pressure. But you're going to want to send to me. And if you don't, you're doing them a disservice."

Michael: So, would you phrase that in the form of advice like this? That if anyone's thinking about starting their business and they're not sure if they're ready yet, go get better at what you do. *laughs*

Mark: Yes. Be good!

Michael: Is that fair? Is that fair?

Mark: Yeah. Another great, and I'll be dropping all the book recommendations, "So Good They Can't Ignore You," the Cal Newport book about passion and not necessarily being where it starts. Passion is something you earn over time but just getting ridiculously good at the thing. Admittedly, even that might not be the best formula because I don't necessarily know why some people don't seem to ever get better at stuff. Quite frankly, we both know there are people in this world that do all the stuff. They go to the conferences and they seem to put the time in but there doesn't seem to actually be an improvement of skillset. So, that is a piece, I confess I'm still mystified by and trying to figure out because I know it will make me more effective at helping other people.

Certainly, it occurs to me. I could probably take you through some of my life where I've tried to do that and it didn't work because certainly I'm not good at many things. So yes, I think actually being ridiculously good at the thing and then getting proof of it. Then that becomes a marketing piece anyway,

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too because case studies, if you can't prove whatever it is you're trying to sell, you can do predictively and repeatedly then you probably have some room to go. I think the interesting situation is when you have someone that seems to have the skills but is missing a confidence piece. I suspect in that situation, the strategy is different. It probably relates more towards some sort of mindset retraining.

Michael: Sure. That sounds like at least a good place to start. Just go build your confidence. So, moving forward just a little bit in time, what was really your approach when it came to the first major decisions you had to make? I know in some ways what we had to make but this is about you today. What decisions you had to make about growing MFF, things like hiring first team members, getting commercial lease? I mean those are big steps for people who were just starting their business. What was your approach to personally handling that, those kind of decisions in your life?

Mark: Well, as you all know, I'm always what I call an oocher. Ooching is a term from a great book by Chip and Dan Heath, the Heath brothers, called *Decisive* where they talked about how to make decisions. In spite of the very amazing stories of entrepreneurs going out and jumping off a cliff and burning their boats, even though in retrospect, that's in fact what we did because we emptied my savings and your furniture into the clubhouse, it didn't feel like such a giant cliff.

I can remember very distinctly walking home to Astoria before you'd even moved to the city. So, it must have been September of 2011. And we were both reading *Delivering Happiness* and talking about all the things Tony Hsieh did where he went to the truck. And then he put the rest of his money in and us both being like, "We'll never do that. That's crazy." So, in retrospect, and part of it was frankly even the lease was cheaper. So, the amount of money we were dealing with at that time didn't seem inappropriate in relation to the amount of success we'd had up to that point and the battle chest we'd built up in 2011.

Michael: Yeah. I look back at it as well and think about people say, "Well, how did you swallow all that risk? How did you handle the fact that New York is so competitive and lease is –." I was like, "We didn't think about any of that. It felt like one bite-sized piece at a time." So, it's interesting to hear kind of your memory of it as well.

Mark: Yes. It seems in many ways for better or for worse and this is disappointing because I don't know that it's a good anything that someone could take as a suggestion. But I feel like we knew just the right amount. We knew enough to be effective with the things we needed to be effective at. But we didn't understand a lot of the things which we've come to learn the last few years that I think if I knew it that time, I might not have had the nerve.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, that's great. So, I mentioned this earlier but I feel like I've really had kind of a front row seat to watching you grow and evolve as a business leader over the past seven to eight years. I watch you go from someone who was an accomplished actor with this side hobby of training, who knew very little about business (and putting business in air quotes you can't see), to someone who not only has a few thriving businesses but also who helps other people grow their businesses. So, how did that transformation happen?

Mark: I don't know. I don't know is the honest answer. I can only say that I think the dumb answer is when I decided I would start, almost on a whim, reading some stuff about business because I knew that

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it would benefit for me to learn a little bit more about business for acting and also for my training career. I was exposed to people in the fitness industry that mentioned that yes, it's a good thing to learn about business.

I think I just got lucky because I'm very, very curious. So, it's very rare that I read a book that doesn't immediately make me interested. In my life, I feel, really since childhood, there had been the successions of obsessions, everything from ice hockey to musical theater, to avant-garde theater, to fitness, to nutrition, to business, to real estate, to politics. Whatever it is I'm interested in, I'm so curious about. Whether that's dumb luck if I just read the right books in the right order, I think I was fortunate to read, make a lot of good decisions in those first few books. Books like E-myth, and Rework, and even Good to Great that really inspired me for what business could be and made business seem not only fun but a further exploration of what I was always doing.

Because I feel like with acting, which I quite liked, it was this experiential exploration of what it means to be a human. Philosophy and psychology was always this intellectual exploration of what it means to be a human. Business done well, I think, you get to explore human psychology, both the way you interact with your team, the way you have to interact with yourself, the way you understand markets, the way you understand clients and consumers. So, in many ways, it weirdly felt like a natural next step for me even though at that time, even I was like, "Do I really like reading about this? This is weird."

Michael: I would say from my perspective, and tell me if this feels true for you, I've seen you have kind of two super powers in this area. One is the one you mentioned which is just your willingness to just be obsessed with something, right?

Mark: Yes.

Michael: The obsession is not just like willy-nilly, all over the place like fanboying out over something. It's like a real deep dive. It has discipline that comes with it.

Mark: Yes.

Michael: So, I think that's one piece that feels like a real super power. Then the piece that's, after this we talked about the second one a lot, which is not only will you kind of read the book or go to the conference but then you'll try it on, like you'll try the ideas on. You'll try them in practice and see what they feel like, and see if you can get results using them.

I know a lot of people get stuck at one or the other. They get stuck in not going deep enough, or not allowing themselves to be fully immersed in a topic, or reading one or two books but not all ten that are available. Or they read all the things, or they cram all the knowledge in but they don't do anything about it. They don't try it out in real life to get that real life feedback. So, that's what it looks – your practice looks like on the outside. Does that feel - does that resonate?

Mark: That feels accurate. I think the one thing that might be a useful distinction when I'm reading that I'm almost embarrassed about because it's almost narcissistic. The whole time I'm reading, I'm only ever thinking how does this apply to me and our businesses. That's all I'm ever thinking about.

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In many ways, it's the first level of listening where it's all about me listening. So, whether I'm reading a business book that's highly technical or even something like "Team of Rivals," I'm literally the entire time thinking, "What do I need to learn from this? How is this showing up in my life, in my relationships, in our businesses? What is the action step? What are the different behaviors that I could execute here that might garner better results?" And the willingness to then write the thing down and then either go and do the thing or at the very least, have a conversation with someone else.

But I feel like I'm constantly a detective, constantly searching for better ways to do things. So even on, for instance on the car ride home, on audio book, loads the book called Dollars and Sense which is by Dan Ariely. It's another book of a lot of things I've already heard before about the cognitive bias and the way they affect finance. But I can't not listen to it in the lens of how does this affect the way we position things on our website. How does this affect the way we position pricing and upsell? How does this affect the way I am currently thinking stupidly about my personal finance? I'm not sure everyone does that.

Michael: Yeah. The other thing that's coming to mind as you say that is I know this is to be true for you. But even as you say it, this is what you're describing is that nothing you know seems to be sacred. It seems they'll always be willing to question what you thought you knew yesterday or five years ago. Talk about that.

Mark: Yes. I think actually my favorite thing is the feeling of my brain being stretched by something that I'm uncomfortable even exploring because it feels inherently so wrong, or out of character, or immoral, I guess in some situations. But I'm never shy about assuming that anything I know might be wrong. Even if it's not, I'm always going to think better by being challenged. It's part of what I think we aspire to at MFF. I think even in organization, you see the same thing with the best organizations. It's annoying but yeah, everyone is constantly checking everyone else. Then ideally, you come to think better about things.

I think because to your point, there are very few things that I really consider to be an unquestionable principle. I think that allows space for things to change, and evolve, and hopefully get better over time because again, if something is the first principle, it's the first principle. It's not going to be bothered by me exploring, okay, what if this potentially incendiary things is true. Furthermore, I'm not even sure there are first principles. It seems to be a context as everything. We know this in business. So often you see completely different ideas. A classic example: should you have your prices on your website or not? I don't know, maybe.

It seems to, one thing that I know you and I have shared, we can share it. I think it's been a frustration is although I understand why many people in the guru space need to speak in absolutes, that's not reflective of my understanding of the world. It probably in some moments hurts honestly my ability to sell because I'm willing to consider the nuance. But I don't think life functions in black and white. That's not to say that you can't help somebody if they're in a moment where they need that lattice work and they need that structure of finite answers. But in practice, I think life is very nuanced. My favorite, favorite thing to learn is when I change my mind, when I think there's something that I think either wrong or more often than not incomplete.

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Michael: Yeah. So one downside I know you've experienced from the sense of exploration and constant willingness to challenge your ideas and change your mind is the people on the other side of those changes. For example, our team at MFF or other people we've worked with. So, what's your experience with trying to balance constantly exploring, being able to learn new things, question your assumptions and change your mind with managing change in a business? Because what would you say to those people, some of whom are on our team and maybe going to be listening to this about, you know? We've gotten in this crisis before, that MFF changes a lot. Things are constantly changing and evolving. For a lot of people, that can be frustrating. It can be scary. It can be hard to keep up. So, how do you think about balancing those two things?

Mark: I tend to think about the best way to approach that is just to again engage in dialogue, engage in these constant feedback sessions and negotiations, sort of make sure the plane is finding the right amount of tension. Because no doubt in any organization, there are some people that prefer complete stability, some people prefer tons of change, and then every therein. This is a sticky issue which is almost academic because there's nothing I think that's necessarily an action step in this. But I think what's challenging in many business is you don't necessarily always have the right makeup for this certain moment in the organization's life because sometimes things do need to change quickly. If you happen to have a lot of people who likes stability, that's problematic.

Ultimately, our job always is thinking about what's in the best interest of the organization because that is what's going to be the best interest of all the people. Then I think we have conversations that certainly we've never been shy about having moments where we could concede, okay, this rollout was not as thought out as it could have been. Yeah, I think that's mostly how we've been, I think, mostly successful.

I think the metaphor I often use when I talk to people about this, this point to appreciate is when you're a leader, it's like you're in a giant pedophile van. You're in the front row. It's like a giant white van. There are no windows. Your team is in the far back seat. So, when you casually cavalierly decide, I'm going to go pull over and go get a coffee, if you haven't given them a heads-up or your being thoughtless with your driving, they're getting beat up in the backseat even though for you, it doesn't seem like a big deal because you're on the front seat.

No doubt there's a time and place to have a conversation if you think someone just has a very, very sensitive stomach. Maybe this isn't the right van. Maybe they need to move up and sit in the passenger seat. Because ultimately, you still have to deal within the organization's best interest but it is very important to appreciate that an inherent bias of the leader is not to understand the way the choices you make are going to impact other people. I know for me because of my fast personal style, I often have to course correct and force myself to go slower than feels intuitive and get by and other people will be a part of that process.

Michael: Yeah. I just want to underscore one thing you said there. There are so many good things in there. Just for our listeners that if you work with a team, you're always going to have some mix of people who really like change and some people who really don't like change. It's really unlikely that in any given time, your team is going to be fully made up of all people who love change. So, knowing that about the people you work with is probably at least one of the first steps to handling change well is knowing how people on your team respond to it, so you can be proactive and engage in that dialogue

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that you talked about. So, going back just a minute to kind of personal development, I'm going to ask you a very podcasty question.

Mark: Great!

Michael: Are you ready for this? So, if you had to articulate your approach to personal development and continuous learning as like a recipe, what is your recipe for kind of personal development?

Mark: I probably would direct people to the goals article I wrote for Business for Unicorns in that for me, it is this constant process of re-envisioning at this moment now in my life, knowing what's bringing me joy, what's lighting me up and filling my cup. What does the dream version of that look like in five years? Then what would one year look like if I'm moving towards that five years. Then how do I clarify? What are the skillsets that I would need to become truly world class at in order to create that life in one year and then going super ham on whatever that is, and then just going after the education like a dog with a bone in its mouth.

Michael: Yeah, great. I'll link to that blog article on goals in this podcast description. So, you can go check it out listeners. Mark outlines exactly that process in the blog so you can do it yourself. So switching gears a little bit, I know another area of real growth that I've seen over the last seven years is your relationship to feedback.

Mark: Yeah, yeah. *laughs*

Michael: When MFF first started, I know I came from a place, from two companies that were wide open on feedback. We are constantly getting feedback from our customers. I had many years of experience dealing with that. I remember, for you it was really tough in the beginning. I used to try and keep some stuff from you because I knew it would hurt your feelings. So, can you just talk a little bit about when MFF was just getting off the ground? How would you describe your relationship to feedback particularly from clients or Ninjas.

Mark: Yes, I think I was terrified of it. There is another great book that I recommend people read called "Thanks for the Feedback" where they discussed it in fact. There seemed to be very distinct personality styles. Some people are able to be affected by feedback more easily than other people. When you are like that, which I am, a feedback represents an incredible threat because if it's a negative thing, it's going to break you. If it's a positive thing, it could leave you soaring to the sky. The longer I'd been in the game, the more I do my best to just let it all be.

I think one thing that I do think I've done pretty well because we have been fortunate. This is a place where people speak in no short version of hyperbole around Mark Fisher Fitness and how great we do things. But I do think I've done a pretty good job of not believing my own press because I think that's the other piece of it is both. I think if you don't want to be destroyed by the negative feedback, you also have to remember the positive feedback. It's great. I'm not validating it. Of course, it's wonderful to hear if someone has an amazing experience. But the older I get, and again for me, that's of course correcting it because I can be overly the person with responsibility. Extreme Ownership is not a good book for me to read because I get in this mindset where I'm like everything that ever happens is my fault. That's not useful.

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So, I know that for me, I've also again learned to course correct. I know that whatever it feels like isn't accurate. I mean it's always going to feel bigger than it actually is. I also have enough experience with it too because that's the other thing. I think that action step for people that struggle with feedback which is so important is if we just do it a while, you get used to it. Now, people can say at times things that are incredibly personal and incredibly pointed and really seemed designed truly to break me. I don't like to hear them. But I get it. That's their perspective. Then you try to look for okay, well, is there something here that's true. If there is then I really wish you would have said it different. I'll do it. Then if it's not true then it's not my problem anyway.

Michael: Yeah. You're such a perfect example of someone who really did like a 180 on this topic.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: For so many people that we talk to on regular basis, someone giving them feedback is like an instant, undeniable, unchangeable negative response. So that's just immediately, heart rate goes up, sweating, pulse racing, feelings for days. Now, we can both sit here and say with a lot of time and experience, you can put some space between that feedback and your response and really see that feedback as just data, something to look at and pay attention to. It doesn't need to cause you infinite amounts of pain.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: Or for that matter, send you unnecessarily soaring into the heights for a few days. Both can be -.

Mark: Are not necessarily useful.

Michael: Both can be challenging. So, I think that's the thing I just want to say with our listeners. So, if you struggle to get feedback, it's such a huge part of building positive relationships with your clients. If you want to serve people, if you're in a service-oriented business, you need to be in a dialogue that includes feedback. It's something that Mark does so well.

Mark: Yeah, the full disclosure is I'm still deeply emotionally porous person. I'm still very open and available in a way that if I had a magic wand, part of me almost – I know it's also my super strength but it does continue to cause me what I intellectually understand is truly needless suffering. Because to this day, if someone sends us an email with, hey, I have some feedback for you, my stomach always drops a little bit but less so and no doubt. So for instance, a classic example like even when Rachele, who's brilliant, had feedback for us about the thing. I did have just like a moment, I was like, "G-uh." That could be a better scenario with someone that I adore, someone I trust.

Michael: Yeah. Some contacts, a mutual friend of ours who's been a Ninja and is actually my coach came to one of our workshops and gave us feedback on the workshop, how Mark and I were doing as speakers and facilitators. We asked her to do it. We knew when she was coming. Her feedback was brilliant and so well-given.

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Mark: So good.

Michael: But even then – continue, sorry, I wanted to give the context.

Mark: Yeah. Even then, I have a moment where butthole puckered just a little bit. Again, that's best-case scenario because again, we trust and respect Rachelle so much and feel so cared for that it's quite easy to hear that from somebody you both think is going to give good ideas and in fact, objectively. Also, I was so stunned by how brilliant the feedback was. I was like, "This is so good!" I was so grateful for it. Certainly, that's one of her core professional expertise, so no surprise there. Obviously, the more challenging situations are when you have someone that maybe doesn't have entirely aligned missions with you and that maybe you don't feel very safe with.

Certainly, as we know the ongoing issue, which I admit is still a little bit, it's not my favorite in the world, the completely unsolicited feedback. The only way I've been able to get around that which I give you most of the credit for is just trying to get my head around the mindset of I'm always asking for feedback, always. I always want to know what everyone thinks because the more data I have, the closer I can get to finding out what is actually true. Then when I come as close as I possibly can, limited though I am to knowing what is true, then I can think carefully about okay, well what do I need to do about what is true. Most people, as I imagine would agree, I think go too quickly to the second phase and don't spend enough time trying to find out what is actually happening.

Michael: Yeah. I think one of the things that we've talked about a bunch that is always very useful to me is that people don't give feedback about shit they don't care about.

Mark: Yes.

Michael: They're only giving you feedback because they want that thing to be better. Certainly at MFF, no Ninja has ever given feedback because they don't care what happens at MFF. Because if they didn't care, they would just leave, like they wouldn't be there. The same thing is true when people are giving feedback even online. It's like, you know, people who are on Yelp giving feedback, it's taking time out of their day to write those reviews even if they're hateful, spewing venom. *laughs*

Mark: Right.

Michael: It's because they want that service or that place to be better. I think that's always a useful lens to return to. It's just that I'm getting this feedback because this person wants this thing to improve.

Mark: Yes.

Michael: That's a gift of over time even though it won't feel like it in the moment.

Mark: Yeah. I think one thing that serves me there is because I virtually never give feedback. I'm the opposite. Some people feel very entitled just to share with everybody all time what they're thinking. I will never offer my opinion unless people beg of me to. Even then, it's not my natural setting so it's tough for me to do. So, I am always just – I have to say, like almost moved by even negative feedback because you took the time to let me know what you think. Thank you!

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Michael: Yeah. How do you think about feedback differently if it comes from customers or clients or in our case Ninjas versus internally, like feedback from the team? Do those two things feel different to you in any way?

Mark: I guess so. Honestly, part of what has made the feedback from Ninjas relatively easy now is to some extent frankly, it's so depersonalized now because I'm just kind of out of the day-to-day. So even when if we get critical feedback about a program I designed, it just doesn't feel like me that much. It's just a feedback about the program or feedback about a team member. I'm immediately then kind of going, is there a papa bear mode about how can I help this person? If it is true, see this in a way that's life safe and useful.

Feedback from the team is obviously a little bit different because it tends to be more personal. It's directly like you said this thing I didn't like, or you did a bad job of rolling out this thing, or whatever the feedback was. So, I do think I'm probably a little bit more vulnerable when it comes to the team but I'm also still very interested in hearing what they say. At the end of the day, one thing I also think is pretty clear to everybody is I really do just want to do a good job.

laughs

So, I prefer them to say it kindly. I do think that's perhaps another difference and one thing that is to the credit of MFF is I think the standards which we hold ourselves to for the way we communicate with each other, to be respectful and thoughtful, the fact that we have this very robust shared vocabulary from these years of studying, these curriculums around communication, I think means that in fact, the team is pretty elegant. More often than not, sharing feedback even if it's a potentially hurtful thing, it's generally offered in a kind way.

Michael: What makes someone good at giving feedback?

Mark: I think taking ownership of the distinction between the actual behaviors and the facts and then the story and emotions and meanings you have around it. I think if someone starts any conversation like that, you're already ahead 90% of the time. Because so often, feedback is about you made me feel this way because you're this kind of person, which is not an effective place to start. So, I think that distinction is 90% of it.

I think, as this obviously is something we talk a lot about, another piece that's maybe not quite as tactical, I think is being able to really see that person as perfect and whole and complete as the way they are. And not making them an obstacle in the way of what you need. And really treating them as a human you care about because I think when you deliver even very critical feedback but you obviously care about the person and you love them, I think people get that.

Another book recommendation too I would offer, I think Crucial Conversations is a great deep dive for that first tactic. I think Leadership and Self Deception or The Anatomy of Peace, its sequel are great for the second distinction. That if you say all the right things but you do actually hate the person on some level, like they're going to know, they're going to know.

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Michael: They can feel, they can feel your heart. *laughs*

Mark: I always say there are three levels of management. When you first become a manager, at least this was true for me, you're still mad and you don't even say anything. There is no management because you don't even know how to say it without exploding. Then management 2.0, you say the thing with gritted teeth and you say the right words, but you still are so mad that they did this thing that they obviously shouldn't have done. Then management 3.0 is like hey, that thing you did, don't do this. Those are done. We talked about this. Stop doing it. Do you want to give me some coffee or just like not a big deal and you can wear it lightly. I can say that that for most people seems is not intuitive.

One of my favorite books on management is "The Hard Thing About Hard Things" by a venture capitalist named Ben Horowitz. He makes the point that it's the most fundamentally not intuitive thing to give feedback can be a manager. It doesn't make sense. There is no place in your life, except for perhaps a certain bizarre personality style where you'd stop your friend, "No, that joke was pretty funny but let me tell you what. I want to tell you a few ways you can make that even a better joke." That's not normal. Certainly, for someone like me, that's so not in my wheelhouse. I'm so respectful of other people's distance and space that it took me many years to get used to that.

Michael: I don't know if we ever talked about this connection before. But I feel like one environment that we both grew up in where that kind of feedback is actually more common is in the theater, right?

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: In theater, you are often kind of taking some action, doing some behavior, and then immediately getting feedback about how that went and how that, you know. That feedback happens in front of everyone.

Mark: Yes.

Michael: Sometimes it happens in the sit-down sessions where everyone's getting notes and notes and notes of feedback. And so, I feel like if everyone could just grow up in community theater, managing people will be so much different.

Mark: It's so true. I look back on my career as an actor. I can think back to probably one of the more important role models that I've ever seen for a leader that made everyone safe, a gentleman by the name of Mark Robin, who was just a dream to be around at all times. You just always felt so safe. It was so obvious he was always in your corner that it was never felt personal, never hurt. I had experienced in my professional career where the director was so obviously frustrated and very clearly thought I was an idiot and would say very hurtful things, sometimes in the room. Things along the lines of like looking at another actor and referencing me, like, "Mark's not going to do this thing. He just can't figure this out. So, here's what I'm going to need you to do." Things that in retrospect are just like fourhead slappy.

Michael: It's so motivating.

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Mark: Just so stupid. So, it's just terrible, terrible leadership. But you know the nature of that world is. As we know, there are a number of skillsets going in director. You might have other non-people relationship thing. But I care about people and relationships. So, that was a great example of what I never want to be as a leader.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, switching gears again, I know the last seven years, MFF have been magical and very successful. But I know from experience with you that not everyday has been full of sunshine and rainbows and kind of like all business leaders. I know there has been days full of drama and challenges. So, one of the challenges you face in running a business is just constant kind of chronic stress.

Mark: Yes.

Michael: This chronic stress that is specific to leadership, specific to having to make a million and one decisions and to feel like the world is on your shoulders. And people who I know like family and I care about like family, their jobs depend somewhat on the decisions I make, that kind of chronic stress. So, how have you learned to deal with that over the years?

Mark: Honestly, I think I'm still figuring out to some extent. But I think again it's the same thing with feedback. I think there's a reason you see a lot of people on entrepreneur space studying stoicism. I think frankly, studying philosophy and psychology has been a big piece of it because I think that gives one perspective around what's going on. I think refilling your cup, and we both are big fans of Dr. Richard Boyatzis and his work around how to use renewal activities to counteract that.

So, I think being disciplined about my own self-care psychologically and physically has been such a crucial piece for me. And also just accepting some days, it's going to be hard. I have to remind myself when I'm in a tough moment that nothing of value is going to come easily and that's okay. There are going to be moments where it's also okay to be sad about stuff. I certainly, by no means, am finished product. There are certainly some specific things I think I'm still working on currently.

But I think a lot of it is I've just been in the game long enough. I also now thin in 50 years. So, that's everything, too. That is different perhaps now at this point is even when things are cray-cray, I assume, well, it's just for now. We're going to get it figured out, whatever it is. And then we'll get even better problems.

Michael: Yeah. It's just that your perspective, it just kind of keeps growing and growing and growing.

Mark: I think so.

Michael: You view longer timelines.

Mark: Yeah. I think that means, for instance, we obviously had the challenges with the second build-out. But they're never, honestly, it was really a moment where I thought truly we were experiencing existential actual threat as maybe we should have. But as bad as things were, I never really, I didn't like it. It was very - if you remember that time, it was very hard for me because, particularly in my position, I felt so helpless to help you and to help the team do anything other than just

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like I wish they'd go faster. So, that wasn't a fun thing. But even then, it felt, and we talked about this at the time, we were almost like, "Ugh, finally, finally, things did go," because we've had like a pretty good run. So, it was almost nice to be like, "Oh, finally, something is hard, great." And now it's so satisfying because as we predicted, now here on the other side of it, it feels better than ever because we did a real hard thing.

Michael: Yeah, totally. So, thinking more kind of day-to-day, what are the things that still make you stressed or push your buttons on a kind of day-to-day basis?

Mark: Yeah. I continue to have to remind myself to not be so sensitive about what the team thinks. I'm such a recovering people-pleaser that, and this, of course, how you do things, how you do everything is not just related to the team. But I care about them so deeply. I'm so committed to them that if they seem upset with me about something or I feel like they're not having a great time at their job, I have to remind myself to not make that about me. Obviously, the hardest moments are when in fact I did do something that I, in retrospect agree, wasn't the best thing to do. Those are the moments I still will actually cry myself to sleep because I have very high standards for myself. I sometimes struggle to be as compassionate with myself as I probably could be.

So, I think those are the things I sometimes feel some stress around. But even that, I have to say, the longer I've been doing it, the more I'm just used to it. It's like, yeah, people are going to be upset about things sometimes and I want everyone to be happy. But I think truly for me, I had a not useful journey. I want to word is very careful because I don't want to talk smack about these books.

But I think what happened was in the aughts and into the 2010s, there was a lot of leadership literature that was a response to a very hard-hearted, patriarchal, evil, like prophet first, like management approach. So much of that literature was about bringing in this more thoughtful sensitivity to work, and building relationships with your team, and being a servant leader.

All that stuff is really, really great. But I am naturally wired so much that way that I've actually had to edge back now a little bit because I can be serving you to the point where you like go off a cliff. I can't say that we've, I can't say that frankly there's anything I've done that, in retrospect, was really an issue. But I know that at times, I've suffered more than what's frankly necessary and certainly more than the team even wanted because the team doesn't want somebody that's going to break into tears if they're upset about you, but somebody they deserve. They should be pissed at me sometimes. I'm stupid. I'm not always like great at stuff. So, that's been an ongoing journey. But I do think it's better than it's ever been.

Michael: Yeah. Well, let's just kind of continue, kind of pulling this thread because I know that really one of your values all along has been to be really authentic and transparent with the people you work with both at MFF, with our clients at Business for Unicorns. That kind of transparency and authenticity is something we talk about a ton. And so, how do you think about balancing, saying everything that you're thinking and feeling versus saying the right thing? How do you decide when to share all your ideas and emotions no matter how raw they are with a given audience versus sharing the versions of those ideas and emotions that might be right for the particular audience?

Mark: Right.

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Michael: I know we talk a lot about how we craft the message so that it's the right message for the team without hiding anything, right? How do you think about that?

Mark: One of my favorite quotes about leadership is that the first job of the leadership is to define reality and the last job is to say thank you. I love that because I think a lot of the job a leader is constantly doing your best to thank people for giving of their life force to help serve some shared mission. So, that feels easy even though I don't think that's often done, it seems.

Michael: We know you all missed it, a mark to the very grandiose gesture but it's a shared mission. Everyone's passionate about that.

Mark: Yes, it was very grandiose.

Michael: Yeah.

Mark: But it's true. I feel this allegiance in that we share this precious little thing, this dream. And then we had other people that were like, "I see that, too. I'm going to help you. I'm going to help you, joining in that mission." It's weighty. The first part of that quote, which is that the leader's job is to find reality, I think, speaks the fact that at any given moment, there are multiple competing realities that are true. And you see this. This is a part of the constant conflict in team dynamics because based on what lens you're looking through things, there are a lot of realities that are equally true, and some are more useful than others. I think part of the job of the leader is to continue to look for and help everyone see the most useful version of the reality which is the one that leads to, in the leader's estimation, the best possible future outcomes for the organization, for the individuals.

It's been a journey. I do tend still, as you all know, be pretty transparent most of the time. There are not a lot of moments where I feel like I'm holding pins close to the vest. But obviously, there are moments where these things were understandable, that the team would understand this, too. Before considering making some sort of change in the organization, it would be wildly inappropriate to share that. I think interestingly, what has helped me be, I think, reasonably effective that frankly is out of respect for my desire to take care of them supersedes any need on my part to share things that are not going to be helpful and are going to be hurtful. So, I think that has helped me because otherwise I think without that respect for the team and understanding that if I'm not thoughtful about what I share, I could do some real violence here. I probably would be more predisposed to just always wear everything lying on my sleeve. I still think I do that most of the time. But I am capable when necessary of buttoning it up.

Michael: Yeah. Stepping outside of MFF for a moment, one of the other most impressive accomplishments of your past few years has been that kind of quietly, kind of in your free time, you've managed to kind of build a mini career, kind of speaking at conferences around the world. So, outside of MFF, you've been doing this probably, what, like two years now?

Mark: Yeah, it's like two and a half years maybe. It's very newish.

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Michael: So, I know many of our listeners are business leaders and entrepreneurs, listening that really desperately and want to get better at promoting their personal brand and building their network. You've been really great at doing this really successfully in a pretty short period of time. So, how do you do it?

Mark: I think the one obvious unfair advantage I had is just as someone that spent many years training as an actor. There are a lot of complimentary skillsets to professional speaking, everything from understanding pace to tempo to visuals to what we call *mise-en-scène*, which is a very pretentious term which means where I'm standing or how my body is making a shape in front of the background that's behind me. And a lot of that stuff, because I did it for years and years and years is yeah, I would say like at the mastery level. I don't have to think constantly about a lot of those things that I think separate me from people that just start speaking who are going invariably to be like baby lambs. So, I think that definitely is something that worked for me.

The thing that I find, surprise, it's not a judgment, I find surprising is talking with a lot of people, even friends of mine that speak on a regular basis, is how little rehearsal they do. They tend to kind of put together some slides. They have an outline. And then they just kind of get up and talk. I'm not suggesting you should have your things memorized word for word. I don't think, you don't want to hold the bird so tightly that you suffocate the bird. But there's a level of preparation and time I put into speaking that I'm not sure everyone always does. I think getting in the reps is so, so important.

Some people are serious about this, doing this like Toastmasters, finding opportunities to just speak in front of people. Because the other thing that I've noticed that's interesting is there are both the technical elements of speaking, which one can get better at, and the technical elements of creating content, which one can get better at. But there is also something to be said for the fact that because of the type of career that I had my entire life, I often was the lead, the romantic lead.

There was a rare show where I didn't have the extended period of time where it was just me and a lot of people looking at me. In many ways, that is the closest to home I feel in my life. There's something about that flow state that feels so home to me. It's the only way I can describe it. I feel very lucky for that because I know for most people, the stat is that people fear public speaking more than death. And for me, I feel somehow safer there and less awkward than when I'm frankly having a normal conversation which is more intimidating to me.

Michael: Yeah. Well, I find it so fascinating that of all the answers you could have given, we're talking about building a speaking career with conferences that involves all kinds of networking and relationship-building and all kinds of skills, you went back to something very similar to what you said before which is get good at speaking.

Mark: The craft.

Michael: Like just get obsessed with being a great speaker who has great content, and is really confident, and knows you're great at doing it is a great place to start because often I don't see people starting in that place when they want to kind of build their brand or network. They forget that if you're going to do that through conferences in a speaking career, you have to be a good speaker.

Mark: Yeah, in theory.

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Michael: It helps.

Mark: Yeah, depending on the field you're in and what you've done professionally. It's not always strictly necessary. But we know if you've ever been in the audience, it's always appreciated when somebody is adept at that craft.

I think the relationship-networking piece of it is also important. I think a lot of that is again just like empathy and just being cool. Just be cool to be around and write thank-you notes and be appreciative if someone gave you an opportunity no matter how big or small. Yeah, just be nice to everybody. Don't be like a dick. Don't act like you're full of yourself.

It's easy for people when they start to get those nods, I think, to fall into that trap. Again, for better or for worse, again I don't really believe my own press, so I'm just always grateful to anybody. It always feels like this surprising miracle that anyone wants me to do a thing. It's not a knack at myself because I think I'm good at it. But I do know that I'm always appreciative of that and I'm aware for the - I just also never want to be a pain in the ass.

It's so important to me when someone's running an event, I know they've got so much going on, I don't want to add to their stress. They're giving me a gift. I'm thinking, "How can I make this great for them? How do I make this as low stress to them as possible? How can I bring them some fun and some joy, and know that no matter what happens - the space is on fire, you lost my slides - don't worry. I'm so happy to be here and I'm going to make you feel safe. I'm really going to deliver something for the audience."

Because I think the other tactical piece I would give around effective public speaking, which I see not always done but it's not wrong, I'll say this, I don't know there's anybody that loves their audience as much as I love my audience. I just like, I feel so honored when someone's going to sit there and listen to me, that I know that I exude that.

Oftentimes, when you're in the audience, and this is understandable, it's because of nerves, you're not always sure that person likes you. We've all been the audience where it feels like the speaker is like kind of yelling at us or this is their moment to finally show you Facebook trolls. I don't know that that's wrong and that could be where you go branding-wise. But I think it's always a cliché, but you do get more bees with honey.

It's the same thing with my audience. I want them to feel cared for and safe and know that I believe in them and I like them. They don't owe me anything. I'm not going to yell at you if you're on your phone. Well, then I need to be better if you're not engaged with what I'm doing. That's a great opportunity for me and you're giving me some feedback. So, I'll just try to be more engaging.

Michael: Yeah. I love to go back for a second and ask you to talk a little bit more about not being a dick because I know that when you've travelled around and built a lot of relationships at different conferences and for different organizations, you really do a lot to invest personally in those relationships. You really think of those people that you're working with and for as real friends over time.

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Mark: Yeah, they are.

Michael: Yeah. So, for someone who's just starting out, how do you be someone who is memorable and friendly and kind and not a dick? What does that look like? What do you actually do? You mentioned writing cards, but what else?

Mark: Yeah. I think certainly being willing to put in the face time and hanging out is a big part of it, and not disappearing after the event to go in your room. And listen, I know that's stuff. At this point, I do so much speaking. That has been incredibly emotionally difficult thing for to come to understand, that when I'm in events now, I do need to check off a lot of that self-care, unfortunately often while my friends are talking. But I need to balance my own need for self-care with the fact that part of my job as the presenter and the speaker at that event is to be available to the people that are there that have spent money, sometimes in part to even see me, which by the way what an honor. I think that willingness to just spend the time is required to build those relationships.

That's the first step. That's everything from going out to dinner to, when necessary, getting everyone to get into Ubers and leaving them all to a club where you can all drink champagne together. I'm lucky because I really, genuinely like people. I'm interested in people. If we're at an event together, we obviously have a shared interest. I think a lot of it also is the Mark Fisher Fitness stuff of just kindness, of just knowing people's names, really, truly listening to people, and showing that you care about them in behaviors.

One of the ways we do that, I think, is certainly time, and respect, and listening, and not being entitled to anything. I think that's a thing you can see creep in to any human. But certainly, when someone has a certain amount of success, his entitlement, they're entitled to things. I do not feel entitled to any of this. That is true.

Michael: Yeah. I just want to underscore that relationships in this way are not built in the conference room, right?

Mark: No.

Michael: They're built at lunch, and afterwards talking, and just going out to dinner, or having a drink at a bar and people are really kind of talking one-on-one.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: Yeah. It's a big deal. It takes a lot of energy.

Mark: I think one more particular potentially actionable thing, which again I feel lucky because it's so inherent in me and it's easy for me to be effusive to the point where I can, often I'm aware I make people very, very uncomfortable. If they're an introvert, it's hard for them to stand when I'm just like, "This is why I like you so much." But telling people specific positive feedback with things about them I value, the things about them that I admire, I look up to, the things that I've learned from what they're doing, and I think being generous with that sincere praise is a powerful tool.

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Because I'll tell you, even the people that I know in this industry, there's no shortage of super bro-bros that I've watched who feel very, very uncomfortable. I just gush and tell them how much I love them but even then, I still think like on some level like -. I try to meet them where they're at. I do. It's certainly not my intention to make people somewhat feel awkward. But if you're going to make someone feel slightly awkward, there's probably worse ways to do it than by sharing specifically about why you think they're so amazing, and how much value you find them, and how lucky you feel that you're alive at the same time in the same part of the world.

Michael: Yeah, for sure. I have a few big-picture questions. So, we're going to zoom out for a second. I would love, because whenever we're at team meetings or you're talking to MFF team about your vision for what MFF can be, you always have so many beautiful things to say. So, I would love to hear from you what do you think is a quintessential success story from MFF, a success story that really illustrates what your vision is for what Mark Fisher Fitness can really be. Can you think of one story that really illuminates the best of what you think Mark Fisher Fitness stands for?

Mark: Oh, gosh! I mean, so many from this past round of snatch. I'm almost at a loss at where to begin. So, for people listening to this who I imagine are not so familiar, but we have a six-week makeover program called Snatched in Six Weeks. For whatever reason, this, and every round is great, but some are crazy sparkle dust. And this past round, this crew was so open-hearted and kind and supportive of each other and bought into the process. It was so gratifying for the team. Again, we had many amazing rounds. But there was just something very unprecedented about this round. And who knows why. I think we did some structural things that I think created this space for it. But I also am not so being glorious to say there was anything we did so much to this group of people.

So, the one that immediately comes to mind that I think is appropriate to share is Ninja wrote this really beautiful email to one of our team members, Craig, talking about how much she loved MFF. The email was so poetic and so wonderful. His background, I know, has been very intense including some things with some drugs and having a spouse pass away. To see somebody rebuild themselves and use MFF as a dojo to get their strength back and get closer to who they want to be is everything I want to be doing with my life.

I would give more specifics, I just want to be mindful of privacy. So, I think that's probably hopefully specific enough. But it's that kind of thing because we'd like the fitness stuff obviously but it's really just a platform for us to sort of help people, like take the keys back to their life and get back in the driver's seat.

Michael: Yeah. So, even bigger picture still, how do you think about your core purpose these days, specifically as an entrepreneur and business leader? Now that your work is not just solely focused on Mark Fisher Fitness, how has your core purpose changed? And so, how do you think of yourself really in that bigger sense of being a business leader and business mind, thought leader maybe, how do you think about that?

Mark: I mean, more broadly when I think of the highest zoom out, I literally say to myself on probably daily basis that always my goal is I want to make the maximum positive, net positive impact before I kick it. That's the goal, knowing that I, by being an imperfect human, am going to make negative

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impact. There are going to be moments where I'm not a perfect leader. I'm not a perfect son. I'm not a perfect husband. I just want to make the most positive possible impact in my time here on this planet.

I think both with MFF and for Business for Unicorns and speaking, the opportunity I see hopefully is to prove what for me is the central hypothesis of Mark Fisher Fitness. That if you run your business based around a set of progressive, inclusive humanistic values that ultimately the free market will work. It will reward that business and reward certainly us and the team as shareholders. But more importantly, that the impact of Mark Fisher Fitness is it will begin to change other businesses both inside and outside the fitness industry. That can look to us if we do, if we've achieved our quest. That can look to us as an example to inspire them to be more human and more loving and more kind. That hopefully that would change the way that other entrepreneurs and other businesses show up for their clients and for their stakeholders and for their teams. And that would allow us to take the work we're doing at clubhouses, and make it so much bigger, and truly have admittedly miniscule but still significant impact on society at large.

Michael: Yeah. I mean, beautifully said. In many ways, it's part of why this podcast now exists is to talk to other people who are similarly using their careers and their businesses as a platform to have a positive impact on the world, right? So, you're the avatar of people I want to talk to and have more conversations with, people who are using their businesses to really do good, to really do good.

So, we're going to switch gears. I got two questions online. I picked two questions from online. So, I put the call out on the intrawebs, on the social medias, and asked people what I should ask you. I picked two of them, two of them. They're not related at all. So, ready for a random adventure?

Mark: Yay!

Michael: So, number one is, and actually, I know who asked this. This is a fitness company called Training Fitness Studio in Ontario, Canada, so an international question. The question was: aside from referrals, what is the most successful marketing strategy for attracting your ideal clients? I know you love talking about marketing and we didn't touch base at all.

Mark: Yeah, I sure do.

Michael: So, I give you a little bit to talk about it. So, aside from referrals, what's the most successful marketing strategy for attracting your ideal clients?

Mark: Yeah, Well, that obviously is a very - I'll answer that as broadly as it is stated. I am a believer in content marketing. Essentially, you're looking to first let people know you exist. Then over time, come to like you and find you likeable. Then come to ultimately trust you, and then ultimately hopefully pay for your services. I do believe that is harder than ever in today's day and age for two reasons. Number one, I think it's harder and harder and harder to get people's attention. And number two, the free line of what people can get for free keeps moving further and further and further back.

So, the broadest principle there I can think of is beautifully scribed in a great book called "The Go-Giver" by Bob Burg, highly-recommended, of just trying to just be so generous and love people and give them so much information and content and stuff that at a certain point, they begin to feel -. My

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goals, I want people, Business for Unicorns, and Mark Fisher Fitness email subscribers to start to feel actively uncomfortable because they cannot believe how much great stuff they're getting from us. For me, that is I think probably the most important principle of marketing outside referrals. I think that's great that we sort of discounted that because in good business, I do think referrals should be the largest source of stuff.

But one thing that we start with our own journey, at the beginning we really do any marketing at all is that I think as the business owners, you do have an obligation to have some control over the spigot. If you're just relying on people to come, even if you do a lot of the John Jantsch Duct Tape Marketing stuff where you make referrals, the condition of doing business, that's all well and good. But you can't be only relying on your clients to do it because they're going to do it on their own schedule. So, I think how that principle shows up, of course, are going to be drastically different. The most obvious example in today's day and age is a Facebook funnel strategy where you give content. And then you offer lead magnet in exchange for an email. And then you continue to give email overtime. And then you make an offer of some product of some kind.

Michael: Yeah. So, it really just starts with giving a lot of shit away.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: Give a lot of free shit away. Knowledge is not so valuable anymore. People can get it anywhere.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: People can get it anywhere. Yeah. Awesome. Question number two, how do you guys - oh, this is for both of us. And this one comes from - we actually know this person. It comes from Sandeep. He's a co-founder of Strength System in India.

Mark: Oh! Hi, Sandeep.

Michael: Hi, Sandeep. He says, "How do you guys, as business partners and friends, deal with each other's bad days? How do you stay so awesome?" How do we deal with each other's bad days? I'll let you go first. *laughs*

Mark: Yeah. I don't know. I actually want to hear your thoughts because you know me. I'm pathologically happy. So, I don't really fall like, "Oh, Keeler's having a bad day today." I think the closest I can think of as we know is like if I, you know, like the rest of the team, I had times that my own happiness is perhaps a little too tied in your happiness and for good. So, if I'm seeing you not having fun then I feel badly myself. "I'm having fun. I want to help in some way. So, I guess just like talk about it. But I honestly can't really think of a day like, "Oh, Keeler's being -." Like even when you have a day like you're being like really kind of short with everyone, I was like, also, I don't know. I don't even like to think about it. I was like, "Yeah, whatever. Keeler's having stressed day."

Michael: I'm pretty evenly ornery. I feel like I'm kind of consistently a certain percentage ornery at any given day. I don't know if I have like really bad ones. I'm pretty even.

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Mark: Yeah. You know what I was thinking about the other day, this would be a funny story to share. When the – oh, God! I can't remember. I was preparing something for some event. We were looking over the presentation. You helped me prepare for something. It was just, as usual, it's too much content right? And you're like, "Yeah, just you're better than this." What you meant was meaning, "You're too smart to put your stuff into like an hour-long content."

Michael: Yes.

Mark: I really thought you were saying like, "You're capable of doing better work than this." I was like, "Oh! Okay." But I was like down. I was like, "All right, take the feedback." I was like a little crestfallen. I was like, "Do you think I can do better work? Okay, I'll try hard. I'll get better at stuff."

Michael: I think it was a few minutes later where I realized like, "Oh, no, no. You're sad. No. What I meant was you have too much information to share for this one-hour presentation."

Mark: Yeah. And for what it's worth, I think to my credit, I would have taken it if you really were like, "You're too good to be doing work this shitty, this terrible. You have no standards." I'd be like, "Okay. Well, that's true. It's probably all right. I'll go and work on this and make it better if I'm better than this." Yeah. But that's the closest I got.

Michael: The one thing that came to mind when I read this question was one strategy that we often do employ. I think you do this better than I do. So, this is how I deal with your bad days is you sometimes will say, "Hey, can you put your business partner hat to the side and just be my friend?"

Mark: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Michael: And you said it from time to time. You're just like, I just need someone to listen.

Mark: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael: I would say someone to hear me and empathize about the event, let me have a cathartic moment and don't try and problem solve yet. Because so often, we get together and so many of our conversations are about like, "Cool, what's today's problem to solve?" They immediately go into that mode and sometimes you just want a friend. Sometimes you just want someone to just like shut up and listen, don't solve my problems, just help me be sad.

Mark: Yeah. Sometimes also I want you to help me solve the problem like coach me.

Michael: Totally, yeah, completely.

Mark: Because I think one thing that I think we've done a pretty good job with that I think is inherent trap and I know we're definitely not, part of the challenge and it's like I think the best part you can have, when you have a partnership that functions as well as ours, it can be very easy for our group thing because neither of us are intellectual slouches. So if we come to see things in a certain way, it can be challenging for anybody else to dent that, the two of us who have either come to it independently or as

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often happen sometimes, if one of us proposes a thought, or a thing, or an idea, or a concern that they want to throw out there and we should be working on and addressing, it can be very, I imagine, difficult for anyone else to get in that. And I think we're both open to feedback and open to it but that is an interesting, I think, ongoing challenge, when the partnership works as well as this does.

Michael: Yeah. I agree. I would say if we had another strong suit that helped us deal with this is that we're really good at disagreeing. I mean I think people will be shocked at the amount that we disagree about. We see a lot the same obviously. We have a lot of the same values. But how to do things, I think we often have very different opinions about. And we're both really comfortable with that. I think it comes from this many, many years of just trust that I know you have my best interest in mind and hopefully vice versa. So, I think that with that foundation, we can kind of weather a lot of ups and downs and we have.

Mark: Yeah. It is one of the classical business truisms when two executives agree about everything, one is unnecessary.

Michael: Yeah. We've come to that point. We just kind of crossed the hour mark. Wow! Good job, boss. Now, it's time for your final five. These are the final five questions I'm going to ask everyone throughout this podcast, kind of like in the style of inside the Actors Studio. And here's number one. Number one, what is your morning routine?

Mark: My morning routine in more days than not, I get up. I meditate for 20 minutes. Then I go and make my Athletic Greens and I grab my coffee. Then I sit down at my computer and I do the first key task. On a given morning, I have anywhere from 60 minutes to 120 minutes of high leverage, high impact activities that require brain power. That's usually either writing content, work on a presentation, or writing email copy, or creating a course or program of some kind. Then I have a little bit of time for me to catch up on emails very quickly then I go and work out and then work until the mid-morning. But obviously, I'm very regimented so I have a whole day routine. But that's the morning part.

Michael: Awesome! Number two, what activities give you a sense of renewal and I know you know what I mean by the word renewal.

Mark: Yes

Michael: But for our listeners, I don't mean a sense of rest. I mean, renewal is the sense that you're kind of filled back up, that you are reinvigorated and ready to go. So what makes you feel filled up and like your cup is full and you're ready to tackle the world?

Mark: Yes. I find that when I'm doing visioning activities and I'm thinking about the future, weirdly, business magazines, I always find incredibly inspiring because then I feel like we're part of this much larger and exciting tapestry. And it feels very exciting to be part of the modern-day business world. And travel is the same thing. In fact, if you put me on a plane to somewhere interesting or tropical and I have an opportunity to read a Forbes and do some visioning stuff, that's about as high as I'm able to get without external substances.

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Michael: Got it. Number three and this might be our most difficult one, so buckle up. What one book or learning experience has taught you the most?

Mark: Oh no! Impossible!

Michael: So, one book or learning experience has taught you the most.

Mark: This is impossible but I will – I'll share a very powerful one I always go back to is *The Moral Animal* which is a book about evolutionary psychology. It has completely changed the way I look at everything. And it's really challenged me and made me deeply, deeply uncomfortable. I find it so compelling, to look at all human interrelations, and all of our cognitive biases, and all of our psychological quirks through the lens of natural selection are very important, very important and very uncomfortable and very confronting.

Michael: It's not the one I thought you were going to pick.

Mark: What did you think I was going to pick?

Michael: I have gotten that wrong. *laughs*

Mark: What did you think?

Michael: I thought you were going to say *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Michael: Just because I know it's one of your – on top of the list.

Mark: Top of the list. And actually, *Leading with Emotional Intelligence* like Coursera.

Michael: Yeah. That was also there. Number four, if you had one superpower, what would it be?

Mark: Oh, I would – well, I guess superfast learning. I would be able to learn even faster, just be able to adopt skill sets as I need them.

Michael: Learning machine.

Mark: Yeah.

Michael: Number five, what is the last thing you think about before you fall asleep?

Mark: Rarely anything. I am lucky that I am a great sleeper so it is rare that I don't fall immediately to sleep upon closing my eyes. But usually it's probably thinking like, "Oh! God, I love this bed." I'm annoyingly pathologically happy about things all the time, my poor wife. And it's rare that I don't have a couple of times a week where I just like cry because I'm just so excited by our apartment, our dog and be like, "Can you believe what our life is?" I think the perfect little microcosm of that is when I'm lying in

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bed because I just love my bed and the way noise is going. It's the right temperature and it's so dark. And I got my wife next to me. Yeah, so I'm happy to be in this bed.

Michael: I love it. You did it. You're the first one to complete our final five.

Mark: Oh wow!

Michael: Good work. So, thanks dude. This was a blast. I mean, I think we got over our initial discomfort of sitting in your living room and talking to microphones.

Mark: Yeah, yeah. *laughs*

Michael: We did it.

Mark: Somehow, we've persevered.

Michael: Somehow, we overcame. So in closing, how do people keep in touch with Mark Fisher? How do people know what's going on in your life and follow you if they want to?

Mark: Yes, the best way these days is probably businessforunicorns.com which you know if you're listening to this podcast. My speaking schedule lives on markfisherhumanbeing.com. If people want to find me on Facebook, I am known to have periods where I post a lot and periods where I completely fall off the social media where I can totally. But I do write erratically about everything from books to personal involvement to time management to things that I'm learning I think are useful to share with the world.

Michael: Awesome. Well dude, this was a blast. Thanks so much for taking the time to do this.

Mark: Thanks, dude.