

Episode 6

HARNESSING YOUR GREATNESS WITH DAN EMERY



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Michael: Dan, welcome to the Business for Unicorns' podcast.

Dan: Thank you. It is awesome to be here. I am super excited to spend some time with you, Michael.

Michael: Yeah. I'm so stoked because really I feel like we've only met face to face a few times. But everytime I've been face to face with you, I felt like I've learned something. So today, I imagine it's not going to be any different. So, thanks so much for being here. I really appreciate it.

Dan: Yeah, absolutely.

Michael: Yeah. So, I want to just jump in and ask you about something that I mentioned. Listeners will have heard you just give your bio. I'm sharing this because I'm just absolutely obsessed with something you said in your bio. You mentioned that your official mission in life is "Coaching personal greatness one lesson at a time. Coaching personal greatness one lesson at a time." I'm just obsessed with that. I just kind of love that so much. So, how did that become your mission?

Dan: Well, I will tell you how that became my mission. When I was a kid, my mission when I was a kid, when I was a teenager, I had one mission and one mission only. That was to stay out of the house as much as possible. We were kind of knocking around. Sometimes we were homeless. There were some problems in my house. And I wanted to do anything possible not to go home. I guess that could have gone a few different directions. It did go in a couple of bad directions.

But then, I realized that you could compete, that there were competitions, that there were clubs, there were sports, there were teams, and I want it so desperately, man. I was that kid on that basketball team. Every single kid had name-brand sneakers. I was the only one, the only one out of 25 kids going after the team that didn't have a name-brand sneaker. Man, I wanted more. I wanted more so bad, Michael. That's where it came from. I was just hungry. I was like, "How can I be more? How can I be more? How can I be more?"

Well, football became my thing even though it's guitar now. I was so into football and I had a hero, a hero. His name was Eric Yarber. He was the smallest wide receiver in NCAA football. He played for the University of Idaho, right up the hill. Man, I was a small player at my team. I put every picture of that guy. He was constantly in the paper. Every picture, every picture went up on the wall of my room. I wanted to be Eric Yarber. He was the greatest. When I went to the University of Idaho and I got a chance to walk on to that football team, I was a little worried. I was a little worried because I knew that heroes have feet of clay, don't they?

Michael: It's true.

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Dan: And I had read in the paper enough. I knew people let you down. I knew that people may look great but they're not really great. Also, I knew that he was this big star and I was this skinny little walk-on. I remember I got cut that first year, by the way. But I was in the waiting room. I was doing upside down sit-ups, you know, where you hang your leg over the bar, yes.

Michael: *laughs* Oh, yeah. That's some fancy shit.

Dan: You guys know all about that. I was doing those sit-ups. Man, I was just like, "I want this. I want this. I want this." And I went back and upside down. I saw Eric Yarber looking at me. He said, "Hey!"

Michael: *laughs*

Dan: I felt like God was talking to me. He said, "Hey! I've been watching you. And I like the way you work out. I want you to be my work-out partner." He was an all-American. I was a guy who had just been cut from the football team and he noticed me. He looked at me and he said, "I see greatness within you." And then, I got to know this guy and he was a real hero. He was really great. Man, that was incredible because what that taught me is that taught that you can be great, that you can be great all the way through, and that when you touch somebody else with that greatness, when you believe in somebody else's greatness, it's the most powerful and amazing thing you can do for somebody. That really set my whole life in motion that I wanted to be as great as I could be but I wanted to be like Eric. I wanted to share that greatness and help other people get that feeling of greatness. So, not guitar-related but it's greatness-related. That's where it began.

Michael: Yeah. I mean what an amazing story. It's so great and I love that the arc of your story started with you really coaching yourself. It was really about finding your own greatness first. Somebody, who I talked to on this podcast have a similar story where the work started with working on themselves before they were able to help others, and just really getting great at something, and then being willing to share that and driven to share that with other people in their lives. So, I mean, what a fantastic story.

I know we talk so much about mission statements, personal and business mission statements, both at Mark Fisher Fitness and for Business for Unicorns, having like a real written, defined purpose statement in your life or in your business. So, when we think of it a little bit like having our North Star and I can even see as you talk about it, this is your North Star. I coach and help people connect with their personal greatness. In your business case, one guitar lesson at a time.

Dan: Yeah.

Michael: And so can you just think, how has having this mission statement in your business been valuable to your business? How has it been useful to have this North Star in running your business?

Dan: It's been incredible in so many different ways. First of all, let me talk about the people that we have on our team. You've met many of these people.

Michael: I have.

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Dan: They are incredible. They are amazing. It's because they see greatness within themselves and they want to embrace that greatness, and they want to become that greatness, and they want that for other people. So, they're on the same page as I am. We're all on the same page.

Let me tell you, when someone walks into our guitar school, they can tell that there is something really special going on. They can feel it. And it doesn't matter whether we're talking about how does the bathroom get cleaned, how do the guitar strings get changed, how do we respond on the telephone, how do we do anything. We do it... great. That's how we do it because we have this thing that we talk about all the time in our business: how you do anything is how you do everything.

Did you ever hear that Martin Luther King speech about the street sweeper? Man, the street sweeper. I remember in high school, I had this job working for the town where sometimes they put me out on the street with a broom and I was so embarrassed. People, kids would be driving by and I'd be like, "I'm sweeping the street." But you know what? Martin Luther King said, "If you're going to sweep the street, do it like Michelangelo."

And we talk about that. If you're going to pick up the phone and you're going to answer it, they're someone with dreams. They're calling you up. They want to play guitar. They're nervous. They're not sure if they can. Maybe they took lessons when they were a kid and they feel like they failed. How do you pick up the phone? You don't just pick up the phone. You make eye contact with the phone. You take a deep breath. You look at the phone because that reminds you that you're looking at a person. You wait two rings, not three rings. That's too long. Not one ring. That's too abrupt. Two rings. You pick up the phone. You have a smile on your face and you say, "New York City Guitar School. This is Dan." That's how you do it. You do it great. That suffuses our entire business. We are trying to be great.

Michael: Yeah. I love that. And it's so clear. We'll talk about this more in a little bit. But I've been to some of your schools and it's immediately clear when you walk in that they're all in sync and they're all excited to be there. And so, for our listeners listening who are like, "You know, that sounds awesome. I would love for all my people to think that their work every day is about being great, and showing them great, and having an awesome attitude." But how do you get started? Certainly, you can hire for someone who has a sense of personal dedication to excellence and greatness, but for the people who are listening who already have a team, already have co-workers that are working for or with them, how do you start to have a conversation about excellence, about doing quality work and really giving the shit? Where do you tell them to start?

Dan: Yeah, great, great question. So, first of all, I know you talked about the team you have but we have to take just a moment to say, "Going forward, no matter what the team is that you have, you've got to build the team you want." But the other thing is we don't bring people in to be them, right? We bring people in to New York City Guitar School so they can be part of us. The first thing you have to do with your existing team to communicate these values is you got to communicate. This happen all the time in businesses. As you know I've coached a bunch of businesses in Accelerator now, all the time in businesses, there's actually no communication going on.

So, the first thing you have to do if you want to get on the same page with your people is you have to be with your people. For us, we do that with meeting rhythms. We've got a weekly leadership team meeting. And literally every time we have that meeting, we're getting on the same page. What are we

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trying to do? What's our mission? Yeah, we're going to break it down into our little problems, but first of all, what's the big picture? What are we trying to accomplish?

And then, we have meetings with everybody in our company. We do one-on-one meetings. Our managers are going to do one-on-one meetings with every single person that works for us. We're going to do one every 45 days. So, there are companies all across America where the person doing the work is not going to get a one-on-one meeting except once a year, the end of year review. That's too late. You can't coach at the end of the year. You can't coach after the game. You've got to coach before the concert. You've got to coach between. You've got to look at people as they play. So, the first thing you have to do is you've got to actually be communicating.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. That's huge. It's such a big deal. And you're so right that so many folks just wait and they do coaching once or twice a year, but really to be in person and be constantly getting on the same page. What I hear you saying in those meetings is every week, we're getting with our leaders and managers and saying, "Are we on the same page here?" That is also connected to the same mission, the same purpose. Is that clear on how we show up every day from how we answer the phone, to how we greet people, to how we do our lessons? I know, I think you're right. That's so important.

And you mentioned in that one of my favorite words when it comes to business which is values. So, you say a little bit about maybe what your values are and what role having values in your business kind of plays for you?

Dan: Absolutely. First of all, I'd like to invite you, Michael.

Michael: Please.

Dan: Come through any one of our locations and ask anybody you meet, "Hey, what's your mission? And hey, what are your values?" Because very often, there'll be some mission or values that a business has that the people doing the work don't know. So yeah, values are incredibly important.

We are a values-driven business. When you have clear values, first of all, they help you find your people. You want the people with your values. And then, that gives you a place to come back to. How should we solve this problem? Well, I don't know. What are our values? It gives you a way to coach people that is way, way deeper than the processes to do this. Well, that's what the process is but what does the value say?

So, we have some values in our business and we thought a lot about this. We thought about the words. We've talked about them every year. We talk about them again. We say, "Are these still our values?" All team meeting, we say, "Hey, are these still our values? Are we all on-board?" Now, the question is well, what are my values, right?

Michael: Sure.

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Dan: What should my values be as a business? Well, I don't know. What are your values? That's the question. The problem with a lot of the so-called values in business is they're made up. They're not the actual values.

So, for me, one of my values is I think people are really important. And so, being people-centered is a value of mine. It's a value of the business. Another value is honesty. We want to underpromise and overdeliver, underpromise and overdeliver, underpromise but overdeliver. We want to be honest with people. That's really important to me as a person. It's important to the business, too.

Relentless improvement, that's one of our values and it shows up all the time. People will say things like, "You know, there should be a capo on this guitar." On every guitar in this room, there should be a capo because we want to improve. We want to save that 30 seconds that we used to be hunting around for a capo for the guitar for the student. How can we improve? I know. Let's get nice capos and put a capo on every single guitar headstock.

Michael: Can I ask, Dan, what's a capo? *laughs*

Dan: A capo? A capo, it's Italian for head.

Michael: Oh!

Dan: So what it is, it's a little kind of lever device that you stick on the guitar to change the pitch.

Michael: Got it.

Dan: Let's say you know how to play a G chord. That's a nice, easy beginner's chord. But there are songs that you're supposed to play a B flat. Oh, no! I don't know what a B flat is. But if I move the capo, I can get that sound while fingering my little G chord.

Michael: I love that. I love that we're talking at 10,000-foot level about what are our values? What does our company believe in? What a great example that this little moment in a lesson, this little piece of equipment on a guitar is informed by one of our values, right? Relentless improvement is we're even going to pay attention at that level of detail, of like this is where we're going to make the lesson that much more efficient, that much more easy. Every room is going to have one of these because we care about getting better and we're paying attention to the details.

Dan: Yes, and you know what I think? If you can't apply the value, if you can't apply the value to the most concrete, mundane thing, first of all, it's a useless value. And secondly, what that value does is it imbues any small thing like how you open the door, like how you clean the bathroom, how you get up. It imbues it with significance because it is important. It is exemplifying your value. It's why you're on the planet. It's what you're here to do.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, because it's a meaning. You feel like you're showing them not just in the bathroom but for something greater. There are very few things more motivating to people than a sense that they're contributing to something greater than themselves.

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Dan: That's right. That's right. That's what we are doing. I hear that from our team members so often. They'll say, "Hey, I really coached personal greatness today." I hear that a lot. We're doing good work. We're doing good work.

Michael: So, if someone's listening and they're like, "Okay. I'm bought in. I get it. I should be clear on my values. I should have some values at my business but I don't." Where do they start? What's your advice? What's the first step to figuring out what are my values for my business?

Dan: Here's what you don't do.

Michael: *laughs*

Dan: Don't start by thinking what values would make money or would motivate employees. Don't do that. Start by looking in your heart and thinking what's important. What's important to me? The thing about values is you already have them.

Our fourth value, for a long time we only had three values. But then I got some advice. The thing that drives you crazy as a business founder, that's got to be in your values. And the thing that drove me crazy, more crazy than anything is if we get a delivery of guitars or amplifiers or paper towels and it's sitting in the lounge not getting put away. That drives me nuts. And I realized hustle is really important to me. If people are not hustling, that drives me crazy. That value is already in there. I had to make sure that it was explicitly part of the business, too.

Michael: Yeah. I love that example. And I think it's – for all of our listeners, if you don't have -. That's a really great example. For all of our listeners, if you don't have values yet, a great exercise and we do this in one of our Business for Unicorns courses is make a list of all the things that tick you off in your business, all the things that push your buttons and annoy you. And on the flip side of that annoyance, on the flipside of that button being pushed is a value you hold? And your button's getting pushed because that value is being violated, right? If I value hustle and I see other people not hustling, I'm pissed, right? So, start with venting. Start with getting out all the things that you see not going well. On the flipside of that, what is the thing that you're expecting? What is the value you're holding up and putting on a pedestal that's so important to you that's not happening in that moment? I think it's a great place to start. I love that example. I love that example.

So, going back to walking into one of your schools, I mentioned people seemed just genuinely stoked to be there. And that energy that they have for being happy to be at their job is really infectious. You said a little bit about this. But if you could just talk a little more about how do you create that? How do you create that sense of energy and that dynamic in a place where you walk in and you can feel the positive energy? How do you start doing that?

Dan: First of all, you can't fake it. It's got to be based on something real. Then, you want to get those people in there that match that. You want to remind people constantly that they're doing good work, that they're doing important work. This is really important. You've got to communicate with people. Here's what happens if you don't communicate with people especially as the business grows. We have five

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locations now. We have team members that I may not see for a whole year between our annual all-team meetings. They're in another location. They're with their own -.

So, what happens if you're out of touch with people for a long time? Well, things go wrong and you start to doubt other people's motivations, start to think people are jerks. They're malicious. The teacher thinks, "What's wrong with this desk person? Why did they give me this crazy schedule?" The desk person thinks, "What's wrong with this teacher? Why did they give me such short notice on this cancellation?" And they both think, "What's wrong with the manager? They didn't order this equipment that was needed."

When you communicate with people, you've got to keep your eye on the values. You got to keep your eye on the job that you're doing. And you need to communicate so that you surface problems super-fast. You need to hear what's going on with people. And whatever is going on with them that's in the way of them doing the job, you need to take that away. And people, when the people on your team view you mostly as a person who's helping them get their job done, oh my gosh, that's amazing for morale. If they see you as a person who's looking over their shoulder and nitpicking details and critiquing them, and getting in their way, that's not good for morale. But if you're supporting them, if you're carrying water for them to help them do their job and they know that the job is good work, morale is going to be good.

Michael: Yeah. That's awesome. I really heard kind of two distinct things in there. One was at the same time, you're both inspiring them to reach for greatness, inspiring them to reach for your mission, inspiring them to embody your values. And at the same time, you're also helping them make sure they have everything they need to succeed. How they make sure that they're really set up for success by being a real partner with them, by being hands-on in there and making sure that if they do have barriers in their day, they do have moments where they're not set up to succeed, that you're seen as really being someone who's helping get that shit out of the way at the same time.

Dan: That's right. That's right.

Michael: And I know that you mentioned doing that a lot in kind of group meetings and one-on-one meetings. Can you just talk a little bit more what happens in those meetings? So in your group manager meetings or in your one-on-ones, what do you actually do in those meetings to make sure that you are both inspiring and reaching for the stars and being strategic about the day-to-day? How do you do that?

Dan: The first thing is that there needs to be regularity to communication. Building this kind of communication takes time. It's not going to happen in one meeting. It's going to happen in a lot of meetings. That's the first thing. The second thing is before you even have a meeting, before you even sit down with somebody, remember time is valuable. Do not waste time in meetings. Have a plan for the meeting.

So, I'm in two kinds of meetings usually. The first meeting is our weekly leadership team meeting. We base this off of EOS, which is an awesome, awesome system. It has really, really changed the effectiveness. We had our mission, we had our values. But it really helped us get traction, which is the name of Gino Wickman's book, in implementing what we wanted to do.

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So once a week, we meet at the same time, same place. We're in the same room. We have a different leader every single meeting so everybody gets the chance to have that leadership experience. We run through our metrics, our dashboard. That's like what's happening in our business. So these are the numbers. But then, we drill down to what we call the score card, what EOS calls as score card. These are the actions that take place on a regular basis that produce results. And you've got to have both. You've got to have your vision but you have got to have concrete step by step fundamentals.

Just like in music, if you learn music, you can listen to the song but you've got to work on those step by step fundamentals to be great and it's the same in a business. You've got to have your step by step fundamental things that you execute on. And everybody just reports what they did that week. It's our premise that activity produces results. The right activity produces the right results. So, we're focusing most of our time actually on those activities. And then we have issues. We use the EOS method and we say, "What are the issues? What's going on? What's getting in the way?" Then we knock out those issues. We solve them. So problems, we want to hear problems and we want to solve those problems. That's how our group meeting works.

Michael: Amazing. Amazing We're going to dive into so many of the things you mentioned, score cards, metrics in just a minute. How was that or is that different than one-on-one meetings? So when you know you have some one-on-ones with people too and I know those are super important. And so, how are they any different?

Dan: In the team, you're making sure that important information is shared across all the different, in this particular meeting, all the different managers of the different programs. And you have that bird's eye view of the business. And then you also are looking at the different components that go into running a whole business.

When you meet one-on-one, there are a couple of things that are going on. The first is people are so important. Don't be afraid to really care about the people in your business. You can do that. I used to think you couldn't do that because they're your employees. You have to keep a distance. There is always going to be some kind of a distance between you. That's okay. You're the coach. They're the player. You're the owner. They're working in the company. But you're working together on the same massive important project and they're important.

So, the first thing that you need to do in that one-on-one, the first thing I try to do in that one-on-one is connect with that other human being. What's going on in their life? What's going on in their personal life? What's important to them? What's happening in their business? What are they excited about? What's getting in their way? So, that's the first thing that I do in that one-on-one meeting is I spend some time just connecting.

And then, I ask that we start to dig down into the business a little bit more. What's going right for you in the business? In your program, what are some challenges that you have? And then, we do. We look at those numbers. We look at - it might be, what's your revenue via tenants in this location? What's the trend year over year? Is this program growing? Is this program growing? What are some challenges that you have? Is there a teacher who's leaving that you need to replace? Is there a problem with a neighbor who's concerned about noise?

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And then by the end of that meeting, we want to be on the same page with two important things. One is what are their priorities? What are they going to do in the next week or two? What are the two or three things that they're going to do to make a difference in their business? So we can bounce those ideas back and forth. Secondly is what am I going to do that's going to help them? How can I support them? And it's awesome. We're on the same team. We're sweeping that street. We're playing that guitar. We are doing great work together.

Michael: Yeah. That's amazing. I'm so in love with the fact that you started with making it personal, right? Because so often I hear and I think I've talked about this before on this podcast that so many business leaders think that it's not personal. It's business, right? And I just love the fact that you said, "No, no, no." Actually, start with who is this human sitting across from me. Who is this person? What matters to them? Not just in these four walls of this building when they're on the clock, but what matters to them in their lives, what's going on their lives and giving a shit about that.

And not only is that okay, that's actually required. That's actually so important that they feel like you actually care about them, not just as an employee but as a person. So, I think it's a huge takeaway for our listeners. If that's not how you start your meetings and you dive into your meetings with score cards and metrics and all the serious stuff and you're not taking a moment to get to know each other personally and connect, I think that's a great thing to try out at the very least.

Dan: If I may, I'm going to jump over to our world of guitar lessons.

Michael: Please.

Dan: We love guitar. We love teaching guitar. I love teaching guitar. Time is so limited, right? There are so many skills to teach. You've got such a limited amount of time. You have 45 minutes with this kid or 45 minutes with this adult. Their temptation is to cram in that technique, to teach that technique, to get them to drill a few more times, to get them to have that correct finger angle. How's that wrist doing? The rhythm's off in this measure.

But what I realized is if you spend five or ten minutes talking about music, maybe you even listen to a song together, and you make that connection, and you get on the same page, and you get that motivation, you build that identity, that may translate into that kid practicing an extra three hours or four hours. It's so worth the time to help that guitar student become who they can become.

Michael: A 100%, 100%. So, Dan, tell me this because I know one of the hardest things for the leader when you're trying to create an environment and a culture that is fun and positive is to also have the environment where there is clear accountability and clear consequences when things are not going well. And we have a one-on-one where all the numbers are looking bad and you actually are not performing. And so, I guess my question is twofold. How do you balance both of those things? I have a clear sense of how you create environment that is fun, and engaging, and inspiring. But then, how do you balance making sure there are real consequences to people's actions when things are not going well?

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Dan: This is something that I've struggled with over the years. And for me, one of the reasons why we got so clear on our values and one of the reasons we got so clear about what good execution looks like is so that we could all be on the same page. So that if anything is off track, it's not a surprise to anybody that it's off track.

Many years ago now, probably a dozen years ago when I was first starting the guitar school, I had a rock star desk person. Oh, my gosh! This person was amazing. She knew every program we ran. She was so good at talking to people on the phone. She was so motivated to close sales. She was so good at everything except for showing up on time consistently.

Michael: *laughs*

It's always the killer. It's always the killer.

Dan: So, first I realized that, I realized wait a minute. I'm jumping in. I'm doing her job for her because I don't have the courage to tell this amazing person who's so valuable to the business that something she's doing is not executing correctly. This was a huge moment in our business because it was a moment where I got clear about how important execution is. A friend of mine said, "Wait a minute. Is she working for you or are you working for her?"

Now, I love, Michael, I love to answer the phone. I love to work as a desk person. I love to welcome people to the lounge. The problem is I had other things that I was responsible for. And I realized that at any random moment, I was taking the place of this awesome person who was not coming. So, what am I going to do? This could be tough. It might require honesty. It might require being upfront.

So, that's what I did. I said, "Listen. You're such an important person. You're such a great person. But you've got to be on time. And look. You're not on time. And it's important to be on time." And then I said, "What should we do about this?" Well, the answer's clear, right? We should come to work on time. So, we were both on the same page with that. And then I said, "What should we do if you don't come to work on time?" The answer was pretty clear to that, too. Now, you're in business and you know what happened next. It took about two weeks.

Michael: I'm guessing she was late again.

Dan: She was late again, yeah.

Michael: *laughs*

Dan: And it was super clear. So I said, "Okay. You're late again. What happens now?" She said, "I guess I don't work here anymore." We want people to be successful. We want to bring them in to be successful. We want to give them every chance to be successful. We want to give them coaching to be successful. It should never go that long before you have an honest conversation.

Our most recent hire was late on, I think, her third day. You know what we did? We had a big conversation. I said, "Listen. It's important to be on time." Actually, her manager should have had the conversation but I was so excited to have the conversation. I said, "Can I be part of this conversation?"

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And I said, “Listen. One of our values is honesty. To be honest, you have to be on time. You weren’t on time. It’s important. We want you here. We want you here but we can’t have you here if you’re not on time. Can you be on time?” And she said, “Yes, I can be on time.” And you know what? She’s been on time.

Michael: *laughs*

That’s amazing. There are so many great things about this story. One is just how common it is for being late to be the reason people wind up losing their jobs. I mean, for a long time I worked in the hospitality industry. It was, historically, a lot of turn-over. I would say a solid majority of that turn-over was because people could just not show up on time. And the way you handled it, there are so many things about the way you handled it that I absolutely love.

The first is just kind of just leaning into it and just being upfront and honest about it in a kind way, right? It didn’t sound like you were judging the person. It’s being like, “Hey, one of our values here is to be honest. And if we’re being honest, you’re just not here when you said you were going to be here, when the schedule asked you to be here. Can we just agree on that?” Like what a great way to start.

And then, I really love what you did next. It was just you included them in the process. Like, “What should we do about this? Clearly, we’re on the same page that you should be on time. So, if that’s true and you’re not, what do we do next?” Because including them in the process gets them to really kind of buy in to the commitment that you’re asking them to make to the business. And so, I think that’s just so great.

It’s a great takeaway for our listeners is in those moments when you are the most pissed and your button is pushed especially for things that you feel like are silly like, “Just be on freaking time,” it’s a great moment to get curious. It’s a great moment to be like, “Okay. Let’s collaborate on this. What do we do now?”

I think it’s a great way especially in an environment where you want to build relationships based on mutual trust and understanding to kind of assume good intent like, “This person is not trying to fuck me over. They’re not trying to make this place crumble. They’re not trying to be disrespectful with their co-workers. What they’re doing is they’re just showing up late for all kinds of reasons. Let me just find out why. What’s going on for you? How can we make it better?” That’s great. I rarely hear such a great answer.

Dan: And something that goes along with this which I’ve learned, so one of the first books I’ve read was the EMyth. What a great book! Boy, I made so many checklists. But I learned that for me, I couldn’t control my business to greatness. I couldn’t force everybody to do the right thing. I mean, if I could, it would be way too much work. It wouldn’t be fun. But if people are running themselves, then you have a chance to do some great things. And so, if they’re in-charge of themselves because you’re on the same page, that’s when good things happen.

Michael: Magic. So, I want to go back to some things I promised we would come back to. I know we’re both big friends of the book, Traction. We both run our businesses in similar ways on this front. And you started talking about score cards. So, I was just wondering, can you just talk a little bit about what score

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cards are, a little bit? For our listeners who are not familiar, how do you use it? Just kind of score cards 101 primer.

Dan: Absolutely. So, we adopted the EOS system of score cards. A score card is tracking an action that is going to produce a good result. It might be a metric like the time you spend on something. So, I know you were in the room a few months ago when I shared this stunning marketing metric that I figured out. If we spend time on marketing, we get marketing results. If we get distracted and we don't spend time on marketing, after a while, we don't get marketing results. It's stunning.

Michael: It's like magic. *laughs*

Dan: You don't even have to say, "Marketing on what?" If you just use that metric of are you spending time on marketing, that metric alone is enough to make good things happen in our business anyway. That would be an example of a score card number, how much time did you spend on marketing.

But it could be a number like I have a metric and every one of our managers has a metric for the number of one-on-ones. We're not going to be super, like, "Oh, it's your turn to have a one-on-one," because sometimes something might come up. Sometimes, someone might need a one-on-one faster for a good reason or a bad reason. But we know that if all our managers are meeting team members regularly, we're going to meet everybody in the company every 45 days. So, everybody's got a metric. When we go through our score card, how many one-on-ones did you do this week? I did three. Great! We're on track.

And the magic of small numbers over time is just amazing, isn't it? Three meetings, that's 150 meetings a year. I mean that's stunning. You're getting a lot of quality time with people. I have adopted this into my own life. I've got metrics that I keep track of myself, like how many times did I jump out of bed and go straight to the train instead of hanging around at home? That's a simple thing to do. And you know what? It makes a big difference in how my day goes.

Michael: Yeah. In so many ways, it's just about kind of when you use it for yourself. It's just like am I being honest with myself? Is my memory of how I act on a regular basis actually in line with how I say I want to act on a regular basis? The same is true at work. If we all agree this is the direction we're heading, are we actually putting our time, and our energy, and our behavior in line with where we say we want to go together, right?

Dan: That's right.

Michael: And it's just a fantastic way to just keep it transparent and make sure we're all on the same page, moving in the same direction. So, with all that you gave, a few great examples, but a lot of times when I talk to people on this topic, they get a little overwhelmed that there are so many things I could track. I can track website visits, and the social media things, and time spent on every single task, and ClickFunnels. The list goes on and on. So, what is your approach to deciding what you track and what you don't track?

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Dan: That's a great question and this is something I've thought a lot about over time. First of all, in my world, there's the dashboard and then there's the score card. The score card is activities that we track. And there, again, you could track a hundred different things. A lot of our business activities, we have on checklists. So, we don't really track them. We just do them. Today is the day. I'm just going to go down this list and do my tasks.

Michael: You're just kind of tracking that they're done.

Dan: Right. But certain things that might not happen on as regular schedule, those can be great score card numbers. But then, what about the dashboard? What are the fundamental numbers that you're looking to for the health of your business? What are those? That's what you're asking, right? Yeah, there are so many.

So for me, the question is what is the number that most coincides with everything else you want to do? And we really struggled to come up with what this number was. But we ended up – we track new students. We track revenue. We track a bunch of different things, cash-on-hand, et cetera. But we realized that for our business, the one metric that seemed to align with every single other thing was something we call high-commit students.

These are students who love what we're doing so much that they come back again and again and again and again. They're not taking five lessons. They're not taking 10 lessons. They're taking 30 or more lessons a year with us. They love New York City Guitar School and we love them. We realized, "Wait a minute. Those are our people. We want to take care of them." New students are important but having something that makes people want to come back for more, that's really important. So, we call that our high-commit student number and that's our number one number that we track.

That number goes out to every team member once a week in our all-team email. Everybody knows what number that is. That number is going up and it only goes up if the teachers are coaching personal greatness. It only goes up if we are really people-centered and people can feel that. It only goes up if we're executing. It only goes up if people are getting results. That number aligns with all other numbers.

The funny thing is our revenue had been flat for a couple of years. I was like, "Aah, I don't know what to do." And then, I literally said, "Guys, forget it. We don't care about revenue anymore. We only care about taking care of students and giving them a great experience. We're only going to pay attention to the high-commit number." So, we paid attention to the high-commit number. That number jumped. And you'll be stunned to hear the rest of the story.

Michael: Shocking, I'm sure. *laughs*

Dan: It's shocking, yeah. Revenue shot up, too. Revenue followed taking care of students. So for us, the number that the entire team can get around is that high-commit student number.

Michael: Yeah. So, let me make sure I get this right to make the distinction for our listeners. You have a score card. And a score card is mostly behaviors you want to see consistently on a regular basis. And you're tracking those behaviors both individually and kind of as a team?

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Dan: Yes, that's right.

Michael: And then separately, you have a kind of a universal or I mean, a kind of global dashboard, that are the things that represent the general health of the business. And that there's one that everyone is sharing in that dashboard is this high-commit number.

Dan: That's right.

Michael: I love the fact that you can really boil down the success of a business so usefully, so practically to this one number. If we just focus on this, a lot of other things fall in place, probably not everything else.

Dan: Not everything but a lot.

Michael: But most things. It's so magical. For our listeners, yeah, that's your takeaway. If you had to pick one thing to really track that is a great indicator, and ideally, a leading indicator of where your business is going, what would that be? That's a great question to ask yourself. I love that so much.

So, let me ask you on the kind of negative side. What happens when you're not hitting that number? What happens if you're either on your score card or on your dashboard that some numbers are plateaued or consistently declining? What do you have in place to notice that and how do you make decisions on what to do about it?

Dan: We believe, I believe that we don't have direct control over some of the end results. For example, I remember after 911. Wow! That was a brutal time to be in business in New York City.

Michael: I can't even imagine.

Dan: That number was related to what we're doing. But we didn't have ultimate control over the outcomes. So, I think there's a great peace for me. There's a great peace in knowing that your job is to do your best. It's not to get any particular number. Your job is just to do your best.

So, when we're not hitting a number, when we're not getting what we want, we look at the things that we can control. What are we doing? We need to change our behavior based on the outcome. If new student flow is going down, we've got to change our marketing approach. You can't keep doing the same thing and expect it to work. But you can't freak out too much about the number because ultimately, you don't have any control over that number. Ultimately, you only have control over the actions that you take. And that's what you concentrate on. That's what we do. When the team is being challenged, when we know that we can show up and do a good job, that's incredibly powerful.

Michael: Yeah. What a great approach. I mean, so I think the thing I'm hearing in that is that when it comes to any one number you're tracking, there are things that influence that number that are in your control and things that influence that number that are completely out of your control.

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Dan: Yes.

Michael: And so when it's not going your way, the very first question you ask yourself is what are the influencers that I can actually control? What are the levers and dials that we collectively can pull and touch and yank to make things start moving again in our direction? And it's a great kind of can-do approach, right? It's a great can-do attitude. So, I love that so much.

I'm going to switch gears. I'm going to switch gears a little bit and switch topics because we could talk about traction and score cards and stuff forever. But I want to ask you about this just because I mean, our listeners can hear. You're a guy who's got a lot of energy, a lot of passion for this topic, a lot of passion for business in general especially your business. And you even help other people and coach other people with their business.

When I asked you before this interview what your super power was, I loved your answer. You said your super power was relentlessness, relentlessness. And so, I'm just curious. What makes that your super power? Where does that come from?

Dan: Wow! Relentlessness. I've seen time and time again in my life that if you just hang in there, good things happen. This has happened to me so many times in my life where I had this experience, one of the pivotal moments for me. Now, it's funny because I spent years and years playing guitar, playing in bands, playing in shows. I have a music school. But I go back to those dirt roads in Idaho. I go back to thinking about where I came from, where I was made in a way.

I told you before that I went out for football at the University of Idaho. I got cut the first year, did make the team the next year, and it was a great experience. And everytime I'd walk through the locker room, all the cross-country and track guys would say, "Dan, what are you doing? You don't belong on a football team. You belong with us."

In my junior year of college, I thought, "Wait a minute. I'm not going to get a letter in football." I ended it. That was tough because I had been trying as hard as I could. I was working as hard as I could. I mean, I'm satisfied. Man, I was busting it. But I was small, slow, weak, and uncoordinated. I realized that there were limits in Division I football of what I was going to do.

So, I thought, "You know what? I'll go after cross-country." Not very many people go from football into cross-country. I went out for that team. There were probably 20 people going out for that team and they're all state champions, 800 meters, or transfer from community college cross-country team. They were legit. I mean they were good runners. The truth is the coach looked at me and I don't think the coach expected me to hang out for very long.

Michael: *laughs*

Dan: There were too many people on the team. So, what the coach did is he packed us all, just stuffed us in a van, drove us out. It's harvest season in Idaho. There's grain, dust, and dirt all through the air. He put us on a dirt road. He'd say, "Okay. Start running, guys." He'd pull, peel out a big cloud of gravel and dust and dirt and he'd go, "Just for a mile." Just enough that the dust hadn't quite died down, lean out the window, yell our splits, go for another mile. And I thought, "You know what? I'm just going to

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keep running.” I had no chance to make the team. But I said, “You know what? I’m not going to stop running. I’m just going to keep running.” And I kept running.

And then the next day, someone got injured. The day after that, someone quit. At the end, the preseason ended and I was the fifth runner. I was the fifth point guy on a Division I cross-country team. I thought, “You know what? I didn’t do anything except keep running.” That’s all I did. And that works. It works. It works. I tell you I’ve been beaten, Michael, I’ve been beaten. I’ve been kicked in the face. I’ve laid down so beat up. But I’ve always known that when the morning came, I would get up and go back to work.

So, that’s it. I believe in relentlessness. It’s the way I want to live and it also is the smartest way to live because you get good results.

Michael: Yeah. What a great story. That’s so great. I hear this as a theme through a lot of leaders I talk to. They often will say, a little differently but it’s the same message, which is, “I may not be the smartest. I may not be the fastest. I may not be the one that comes from the best family or neighborhood. But I’m the one that shows the fuck up. I’m the one that shows up everyday. And I’m on time and I am persistent. Even when you knock me down, guess what? I’m showing back up tomorrow.” And just that drive alone, that persistence, that commitment to just keep going and keep freaking running, like that is so much about, it seems like, your recipe for success. And I hear it from so many others. So, I think that’s such a great story for our listeners to hear. That’s great.

So, you were actually sharing before we started recording another way that sounds like this kind of relentless pursuit of getting better appears in your life. This is a personal example, if you don’t mind sharing just with you wanting to read more books, and you maybe wanting your family to spend less time on their phones and things. Can you just share that story because I think it’s such a fun, kind of practical example of how this relentlessness kind of shows up in your life? Do you mind sharing it again?

Dan: Absolutely. First of all, I want to tell you I’ve got three kids. I love these kids so much. They’re 11, 15, and 17. I love these kids with all my heart. Now, throughout my life, I’ve read a lot of books. I grew up without a TV. Read books then. I’ve been reading books ever since.

A couple of years ago, I noticed that I hadn’t read that many books in 2016. I was like, “Hmn, I didn’t read as many books. Why not?” And I realized it was because I’ve been walking around with my phone. I’ve been flipping through my phone. I’ve been listening to podcasts at night or music at night.

And I thought, “You know what? I want to read more books. Books are important to me. I want the knowledge that I get from books. I want to connect with these other people through the books.” And since I really believe in setting myself up for success, I thought, “You know what? I’m not going to take my phone into my bedroom anymore. I’m going to put it on the kitchen counter.” That’s all I did. For the next four or five months, I read a lot of books. I always had a book next to my bed. I always had a book in my backpack. And I made that conscious decision.

And then I thought, “You know what? My kids are not reading as many books as they used to.” So, I said, “Kids, listen. I’ve been doing this thing where I don’t take my screen into my bed at night. And I

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want you guys to do the same thing. So, at night, you cannot sleep with a screen in your bedroom. It's got to be on the kitchen counter. Now, if it's not on the kitchen counter, it disappears for a day. But if it's on the kitchen counter, it's a miracle. It's still there in the morning."

And that has gone great. It's gone great. Even though these are teenagers, even though they love their phones, even though according to them all their friends get to sleep with their phone, they're pretty much okay with it. I know. I know why. Michael, it's because when they go to the kitchen counter, my phone is sitting there.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. They can see. They can see you showing up doing what you say you're going to do every single day. And that just kind of leads you forward to where you say you want to go. I just love that. It was such a great example. And to do it with teenagers, I mean, that's pretty bad-ass. Yeah, that's pretty bad-ass. *laughs*

I don't know if you can believe this or not but we're coming up on having talked for almost an hour. What? We can keep going for another three I'm sure. But my job is to start to wrap this up a little bit. And so, I want to end with our final five questions. I ask the same five questions to everyone at the end of our chat together.

Dan: I'm so excited.

Michael: Yeah. I'm so excited. They're really fun. So, are you ready for your final five?

Dan: I'm so stoked for my final five.

Michael: *laughs*

Question number one, what is your morning routine? What is your morning routine?

Dan: My morning routine. My alarm goes off and the first thing I do is I leap out of bed. I do not stagger out of bed. I actually roll back and then I flip myself forward and land on my feet.

Michael: *laughs*

I'm picturing it as a sort of ninja jump.

Dan: Yeah, yeah. That's what I feel like. Every single morning, I feel like that. The next thing I do is I make my bed every morning. I've done this for years. I make my bed. It just feels so good. The next thing I do is I look at my clothes which I laid out the night before. Now, I'm in rock and roll. I don't dress fancy. But it makes a difference because I'm sleepy in the morning.

And by the way, I'm wearing to sleep, I have my pajamas but underneath my pajamas, I've got a pair of workout shorts and a shirt on. So, I take my pajamas off. I stick them under my pillow. I make my bed. And then I pull on my clothes for the day over my workout clothes. Oh, no! If I want to shower, that

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means I'm going to have to probably go to the gym and work out. I mean, it's like it literally is walking downhill from there.

Michael: *laughs*

Dan: And then I walk downstairs. I turn on the coffee. While the coffee is getting made, usually I either do some trunk twist or I'd like to juggle in the morning.

Michael: I love it, morning juggling. I love it.

Dan: Yeah. That's what I do.

Michael: I think you win the prize. I think you're the first person that were juggling to the morning routine so far. So, congrats on that.

Dan: Yeah, I got them in a drawer in the kitchen.

Michael: *laughs*

I love that answer. Number two, what activities give you a sense of renewal? And by renewal, I mean what activities get you like fueled up, fill up your cup, make you feel energized for your life and your work? So, what gives you a sense of renewal?

Dan: The first thing that comes to mind is hugging my kids. I love these kids so much. I love putting my arms around them. It makes me feel amazing. And to walk out the door in the morning having had that connection with my kids, it just gives me so much power, and to know that I'm coming back to them.

But also, in certain ways you can turn yourself into the person you want to be. In certain ways, you're stuck with the person you are. And the person I am, I'm cyclical. I love to be in front of people. I love connecting with people. And then, I must go be by myself. So, I've learned this about myself. I've got to have quiet time by myself.

Michael: Great, great. Number three, what is, and this is a hard one, what is one book or learning experience that really taught you the most? If you had to pick one thing that has been the most influential on your life in some way, what would that be?

Dan: Well, let me start with a book.

Michael: Great.

Dan: I was beat down and broken down. It was raining. It was winter time. I was teaching lessons door to door. I wasn't sure where I was going in my life. My performing career wasn't where I wanted it to be. I was just so dejected. I walked into a Salvation Army where they had some paperbacks there. There was a book there. I think it was "10 Greatest Sales Stories."

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I started flipping through this and it blew my mind because it was stories about people who took action to change their own lives. That book led me to another book called “How I Raised Myself from Failure to Success in the Field of Selling.” And that book led me to The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. That unleashed the whole thing. I realized that people had taken my journey before and I wanted that. I wanted that feeling of taking action and then tracking my success.

Michael: Yeah, fantastic. I love that trail of books, kind of one led you to the other. Question number four, if you had one super power, what would it be?

Dan: You mean if I could have one?

Michael: If you could, if you had.

Dan: Yeah. I would speak every language on the planet.

Michael: Oh, that’s a good one.

Dan: Yeah.

Michael: That’s a really good one.

Dan: I could hear people. I could communicate. I mean, in my fantasy, it won’t just be able to speak different languages. It’d be able to be aware of subtleties of language like body posture and intonation so that I could really understand what people were saying.

Michael: It’s like a super communicator. Yeah.

Dan: Yeah.

Michael: I love that. Last one, number five, what is the last thing you tend to think about before you fall asleep at night?

Dan: I will tell you exactly what I do. I have a chain of things. The first thing is I think of three awesome things, three moments when I either felt like I crushed it or I felt like I just felt amazing. I want to remember those moments and capture. Typically, I fall asleep somewhere in those three. I do have other stages and things that I count if I am not asleep after three. But really, 90% of the time, I fall asleep. Yeah.

Michael: *laughs*

I love that. I love that you also just had no hesitation. You’re like, “I know exactly what I think.” These are the things.

Dan: That’s what I do.

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Michael: Awesome. You did it. That was the final five. You did it.

Dan: That was so fun! This was so fun! Thank you for having me.

Michael: So fun. So, in wrapping things up, if our listeners want to learn more about you, follow you, or learn more about guitar school, how can they find you? How can they find the guitar school?

Dan: So, go to nycguitarschool.com. We've got all things guitar, and rock and roll, and music there. We've got, I think, six books now on Amazon ranging from deliberate practice to just learning how to play guitar. And if you want to get into some of the other stuff I do which is helping education entrepreneurs, blow up their businesses and connect with more people and change more lives, or learning how to practice effectively, you go to nycguitarschool.com/dan, D-A-N. It's all there.

Michael: *laughs*

Easy enough. Easy enough. Dan, thank you so much for taking the time to do this. This was a real blast. I love hearing your stories. I love hearing more about how you run your business. I always learn so much and say it was not an exception.

Dan: Thank you very much. I just want to say that you and Mark are icons to me and examples to me. I admire so much what you do in Business for Unicorns and also Mark Fisher Fitness. I'm totally emulating your greatness all the time. It's just such a pleasure and honor to be here with you.

Michael: You're the man. It's a lovefest. It's a lovefest. Awesome. Well, thanks so much.