

Episode 8

Balancing Emotional and Rational Selling with Chris Burgess



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

Chris: Thank you for having me on, Michael. I'm really excited to be here.

Michael: Yeah, I know you have. You're a busy man. You have a family at home. So, just thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today, and from all the way across the pond nonetheless.

Chris: Yeah, absolutely. I'm here in the UK, in a really small town just outside of a city called Bath. Well, it's 9 PM here. So, what time is it with you. It says 9 PM here.

Michael: It's about 5 o'clock in the evening here.

Chris: Okay. Cool. Yes. So, the babies are all in bed. Dogs don't want to sleep. My wife is patiently watching me from across the room making sure I don't stumble too much and to make sure I slow my words down. I've got a habit of speaking real fast.

Michael: [laughs]. It's the same for me, too. I think it's a New Jersey thing there. Maybe it's a UK thing for you. I also just want to take a quick moment to do one more thank you. It's just thank you for being such a great advocate for me and for Mark and for Business for Unicorns. Your support has just been so valuable and appreciated since we started. So, just a quick moment to say thank you again for that. We really appreciate your support.

Chris: Oh, you're so welcome. And it really, really is a pleasure to collaborate with you guys and to look up to you from a Britain-world perspective. From a brand perspective, you really do set the standard for what kind of business I want to run. So, the feeling is more than mutual.

Michael: Thanks so much. And so, I'll start with this. We haven't really known each other that long. But since the very first moment I've met you, I've seen you to be an incredible connector. Some people might say like you're really good at networking. But I think for you, it's less networking. It's something a little deeper. You actually seem to really enjoy bringing people together. And so, just talk a little bit. Where does that impulse come from to be a connector like you are?

Chris: I think it comes from – obviously, we're both friends with coach Stevo from Habity. My feeling is I'm desperate in my career to spend as much time with people that enjoy and value the things that I enjoy. It's actually quite rare to find sincere integrity like people in an entrepreneurial space, especially in fitness where everybody's out to do the best for them. Some people keep results to themselves.

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So, when you find somebody and stumble across somebody that, “Hey, I care about our industry, too. I care about education, too. I care about helping and serving people the right way every single time.” Of course, financial reward is very important, but doing the right thing for the right people at the right time everytime matters most. If you listen enough and spend enough time, events, and listen to core people, eventually you’ll find out who is on the same path as you.

And then I just connect because I know that we’ll share good thoughts and good feelings. It started off with coach Stevo and then a lady called Cathy MacDonald over here. And through Stevo, I met Mark and yourself. And so, the network spreads. Of course, you don’t get like 100% strike rate in the people that you still connect with and you feel you belong with. But for the most part, that instinct is very raw, very rare. Well, I try and make sure that for me, I am spending time on a journey with people that appreciate what I’m trying to achieve because I’m sure as hell I appreciate what they’re trying to achieve at the same time.

Michael: Yeah. I love that. It’s so amazing. It’s always just been so apparent. It’s also really reflected in the work you do with Lift The Bar Education. That what you’re creating there is such a community of people that are networked together, supporting one another. So, I talked a little bit about Lift The Bar Education when I gave your intro. But you can just say a little bit about how did that get started and is that related to this impulse you have to be a kind of connector and community leader?

Chris: So, yeah. It did start very specifically like that. And the whole thing was born out of -. I used to go to a lot of seminars and events. When you go in the event cirque in the UK because our little island is quite small, when you eventually go to cool seminars by evidence-led people that are trying to help you get the best results from general population clients, not performance athletes, not like in any way, shape or form elite standard personal training clients, the workshops that you went on, you realize that maybe three, a maximum of four times per year, you’d sit in the same room with the same people listening to a different educator. As much as we like going to see the educator speak, we actually enjoyed our company together more.

So, it was born out of actually a real tired moment in my career. I did work in like 50, 60 sessions per week. But clients are trying to keep up with education because I’m not academically bright so I try and stay on top of what I can. And I thought, “Why is it I have to wait to see these guys three or four times a year? Surely, there should be some way of having an online platform where we could get together and maybe invite a few of the guests that we speak to in a classroom. Maybe they could do something over Skype.” I didn’t know that online presentations were available. I didn’t know webinar software existed.

And from that idea, it came into my head in October. By December, we’d launched the bar. I say I’d launched the business where it seems out of general consensus that having an online space where friends could hang out and learn and educate and crowd-source ideas and crowd-share ideas, and it worked. My feeling was that maybe it would just be our friends, maybe we just paid like £20 in per month each, we’d be able to afford the speaking fees because somebody needs to do a Skype presentation. I thought, “Well, maybe if we could get like 20 or 30 people, that would cover the fees. I don’t mind hosting it. And here we are a few years down the line just under 1,000 people there for that very same real reason which is it’s mind-blowing to think of that in those terms.

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But the whole thing started out, click to your question, the whole thing started out as we already created a sense of belonging. But it's really hard to not belong for most of the year. You don't have to have four weekends, so eight days per year where you truly belong together. How could we keep that every single day of the year? How could we create that connected world? And it worked. Why it worked, I think I know now. I don't really realize. I think I did before. But now I know why it worked.

Michael: Yeah. What a beautiful story. It's just such a great example of when you start a business from that place, when you start a business from a place of who are the people I want to spend more time with? What are some ways that I can add value to people's lives that I care about? What are some pain points I have in my life that maybe I can solve for myself and for other people? That when you can do it from that kind of genuine, sincere place where I want to help myself and help others, that's where great businesses are built from so many times.

I hear that in a lot of entrepreneur stories that I talk to that it just feels like at the moment, it's like you're just kind of putting one foot in front of the other to do something really obvious. Then you look back at it and realize how rare that is for people to take that initiative and grow it. And as you said, Lift The Bar has become something so much bigger than probably you ever imagined. So, can you just say a little bit about what is it today, who do you serve and how?

Chris: It's personal trainers that have, in my mind, is it obsession? Is obsession the right word? I don't know. I'm not, again, not academic and gifted. But let's call it obsession for the time being. Have an obsession for trying to make general population clients the best they can possibly be.

When it comes to our industry, I'm still fully of the mindset that we've got so far to go to show people that fitness is more than puking in a bucket, eating really bad food, and not enjoying the experience of improving their body and improving their life through what we can do. We are facilitators of potentially a much happier-lead life. And I like to work with people who believe that, too.

Now, the tools and mechanisms in terms of volume, intensity, and all of the mechanisms of making a great training program, all the mechanisms of making a great nutrition program, I don't mind having differences of opinion when it comes to these things. In fact, a lot of our education is led by people who do generally have differences of opinion. But one thing I can't have a difference of opinion on is - are we in this for ourselves and our own education, for our own training which is what a lot of CPD for personal trainers is. It's actually trying to make the personal trainer get bigger guns themselves, whereas we are all about how do we make the people, the vast majority of people who are available as personal training clients, how do we give them the best experience.

So, the way in which I look at my business now is I love the personal trainers. I truly do. And I want to make them as good as I possibly can. But I'm more interested in their clients. If I can make their clients informed brilliantly, if I can make their clients enjoy the experience of personal training more, then maybe, just maybe, news will spread that personal training is something that people should see less of a luxury and more of a this is something I can do to genuinely improve the quality of my life. And I believe that with every ounce of my being. That if we go out and we try and make sure the clients are as happy as possible, then the personal training gets looked after, anyway.

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Michael: Yeah. I love that so much. And for anyone that knows anything about Mark Fisher Fitness, you can see why we're so connected with Chris here. We both have the same passion around this topic of wanting fitness to be something that's more accessible to people, that feels relatable. It's not something just for the elite or just for people who are already fit. That could be a positive great experience. And then in fact, personal training can be a really rewarding career. And so, I love that.

Another thing that I know about you and I get this sense of it every time we talk is that you're someone who is just so incredibly driven. I mean, I feel like everytime we speak, I learn that you're working on kind of a new project or a new program. I know that you see this as something that's a real super power of yours, this ability to just be creative and constantly iterating and driving forward. So, where does that drive in you come from?

Chris: The drive in me in its most real form comes from my mom who is the hardest working person I've ever met. I do often have come to try and show that I have a work capacity to work really, really hard for myself, for my family. It's also an inner built ambition that the area I come from, not too many people, I believe, it's not the most affluent part of Bath. It's a city. I've got a huge family and none of them have ever graduated from university. None of them have ever started their own business and made a success out of it. So, I've got an ambition to be so much more improved, making myself wrong, offering my upbringing. I didn't expect much from myself certainly academically. I didn't expect much from myself in terms of my career.

It's funny when I see people from my old school or the place I used to live. I would bump into them and they ask how I'm doing now. I'm very apologetic over what I've done in terms of this because my drive is for me. It's for my family. Every single day, I get an opportunity to wake up and make my daughters very proud, my wife very proud. That's where it all comes from.

The fact that I get the privilege and the honor to spend my days trying to make either clients happy through the gym, or personal trainers happy and trying to show that, "Hey, I get to help people live happier, healthier lives." From a personal level, a deep-rooted like ambition level, from making my family proud, from making the industry better, it's very easy to be driven that way, really, really easy now.

For me, in terms of like my long-term ambition, I think I desperately, desperately want the whole world to see personal training as more than what it is now. I think we've got great examples: Yourself, Cressey Sports performance, Mike Boyle stuff. Over here, we've got W. Tan. We've got my place. We've got lots of independent gyms doing a really, really great thing.

I want when somebody says the words personal training together, those two words in combination, I want them to think of sincere people that could help me get better and can shorten the distance from where I am now to where I want to be and I can do it, I can do it with somebody fast enough. I can do it myself. I'm desperate to make that happen.

Along the way, I need to learn more because I can't do that with my current skillset. So, in terms of my current skill set, how do I build it from there? I can't build that with my tendencies. I'm very creative. I think very deeply about certain subjects, consumer psych and marketing, and things. So, I need administrative support. I need decision-making support. So, I've built a team of experts around me that

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allow me to now drive on to the person that I need to be to take our industry to where it needs to be and then bringing it all back to make my mom and my family as proud as they possibly can be of me.

Michael: Oh, yeah. What a great answer. What I hear in what you're saying is just this real drive and that is to do your work each day that is not driven by some of the obvious things that a lot of people think business is driven by, desire for fame or fortune, right? You just talked for a few minutes and I didn't hear any of those things. The things that drove you are a real sense to do good in the world, a real sense to trying to create life for your family, a real sense to have a community around you that's proud of the work you're doing, a real sense to leave an imprint on an industry and leave it better than you found it.

And so, for all my listeners out there who are just starting a business or maybe even in the game for a long time, if you don't have a strong connection like when you hear Chris articulating right now about why you're in this, it might be time to ask yourselves those questions. What am I really doing this for? In my experience, when I talk to folks, if they got into a business or an industry just to make money or just to be well-known, I feel like that fades really quickly. But the motivation you're talking about is motivation that lasts a lifetime. That kind of drive is something that will stick with you for many, many years. And so, I just love that that's the way you articulated it. It was really through that drive.

And so, one thing I'll say about this is that when you have this kind of drive that's driven both by your community, by your family, your desire to do good, I feel like I often hear people talk about that as kind of double-edge sword. That it can be both really, really fantastic that I have this drive that really serves me in many ways, and this constant drive to improve, improve, improve. In MFF, we might talk about it like getting 1% better every day. This constant drive towards self-improvement can also feel like a burden sometimes. So, talk about that a bit. How is this drive both really fantastic for you and your business? And how is this drive sometimes a little bit much to carry?

Chris: It can be a huge, huge, huge amount to carry. Amongst the real reasons why I worry about the place that we've got to in terms of the pure numbers and the scale and these things, in terms of the burden, for me, I'm desperate to make sure that my girls grow up knowing that their dad did good, knowing that their dad did those good for people, and has a career that adds to the world. I want to set an example. I want to be a role model to them.

In terms of, you mentioned a second ago about things like fame and notoriety, I couldn't think of anything worse.

Michael: *laughs*

Chris: I try if I can to keep my own personal profile at a level that allows my business to grow very stably, very structured way, one by one by one by one, the people come in. I don't aim to try and get a launch of thousands of people because I know that to do that, I need to become a personal brand, a personal celebrity in a mini space like fitness. And I'm not willing to do what that takes because that's not who I am. The amount of notoriety that comes with that, I just don't think that I could be distracted that far away from the day to day life of being a dad first and a husband first and all these things that go with it.

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So, my double-edged sword is that if I don't use my drive the right way and I don't focus the right way on the things that drive me, which are largely led by my family and my desire to do good in the world, if I don't focus on that like completely the whole time, I'll get distracted trying to be a celebrity. And all of a sudden, I'm not becoming who I should be for my family. I'm not becoming who I should be for my business.

And actually, there were times I've flirted with that because well, you would do it at times. I think in this space, entrepreneurs always kind of say, "Well, maybe if I get more notoriety, the business will grow faster." The people that signed up to what I do off the back of my personal brand and personal fame, and actually they're the fastest people to leave. Their customer lifetime value is really low because they expect, they want and expect me. This is the next part of this is that when you grow notoriety and when it's all about you, and then you come into a business and you realize that, "Hey, Chris only contributes on the floor of a program, let's say, every two or three hours per week at the moment." They're like, "Well, I'm here for Chris and Chris alone." That's not, to me that's not a business. I can't build our future. I can't build my family's future off of the back of that.

So, in terms of like the double-edged sword of treasure, it's like I know my family is always going to be proud of me because they know that I'm always going to do a good job. But I want to make them as proud as they possibly can be. So, I need to stay in my lane, grow the business at precisely how I know I can do it best, and avoid the pitfalls of trying to be someone I'm not. Because what was that was the frontend that allows the business to grow faster, at the backend, it allows us to shrink faster, too. And I lose a bit of who I am, who my identity truly is which is somebody that tries to make my whole thing about my team, my whole thing about my program, my whole thing about my community. That's who I prefer to be. So, I'm constantly torn about who is it that Chris Burgess needs to be in the world of personal training education in order for everyone to win. My own values to win, my family's, and the business'.

Michael: Yeah. I imagine also that you're human, and through all of this striving and all of this driving, you got to get tired sometimes. There's got to be days where you're like, "Damn! I just needed all to slow down or just straight up stop once in a while." So, how do you do that? What do you do when there are days when it kind of just all becomes too much?

Chris: Those days, in late 2016 all the way through to mid last year was cold everyday. *laughs*

Michael: *laughs*

Chris: Ultimately, in the last two years, we've been blessed with two beautiful baby daughters. So, it's been very emotionally amazing, incredible. But new kid just comes with poor sleep even though they're good sleepers overall. So, I'm physically tired. Then, we have like the aspects of the gym. It's very physically tiring there. Then, when we take into consideration, let's say, a rounded out, let's say, 1,000 overall customers there. And if only 1% of our customer-base per day is disgruntled, dissatisfied and has a customer service query, because at those points I didn't have a big team around me and then we have 10 complaints per day. So, sometimes, it felt like I couldn't win at anything.

The business was growing bit by bit. That was okay. But we're getting complaints in. I couldn't allocate the emotional energy to my family because I was tired. I was fatigued, physically fatigued. Therefore, I

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wasn't also – I was grouchy. I was putting a disgruntled amount of effort into my staff. I saw them as a burden when actually they were my help-out with things. So yeah, I'm extremely, extremely, extremely human.

And as a result of this, it's something that you mentioned to me last year in a very brief conversation we had on day 1 of the New York conference where you mentioned about how entrepreneurs need to do more to preserve their energy. Since then, that rings true a lot. It really does ring true a lot. And so, while I always try and do the best, and the analogy I always like to use is like I'm like a terrified swan in some respects.

Michael: *laughs*

Chris: On the surface level, you can't tell the expressions. But under the water, legs are flattened like crazy and go mad. That's who I try and be for the business. I'm very aware that in our space particularly, you see people come and go because they can't handle their own personal self very well. I was always very conscious that while all this stuff was going on and business life brings in, like I say the complaints, we had a big problem with the builder over here in our gym. While still that was going on, I was just very conscious the whole time of making sure as little as that showed to our customers as possible because my problems weren't their problem. What they needed is a person that provided the service they are paying for and then their needs come first. So, it was a really terrible time actually.

I think I'm much better at managing that energy now. I think I'm much better at being rational, much better processes about what is truly good and what is bad, customer service systems, behind the scenes to make sure that hey, if we are getting complaints, if that's the trends, there's something that we need to make sure we are addressing properly as a team, as a group, or even as an individual. And so, slowly but surely, I'm learning.

But I think that these things whilst they're teachable, you need to kind of live through them to realize whether you're on these things. So, you're right. There are dark days. There are still tiring days. There are still days where hey, it's 2% problems. So, we get 20 complaints or 20 issues we need to resolve or such like it. They can be a bit of a drag. But at the same time at the grand scheme of things, the way in which we reframe that and now you're amazed and helping people reframe things is that if I've got 1% of my customer-base that I just has to [0:23:30] at any one time, it stands to reason. Now, I've actually got 99% of it that they're doing just fine. They're really happy with things. So, that's a great way you're getting out of that funk.

Michael: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's so true that when you are first starting really any business, it's hard to imagine with all the chaos that goes on, and all the decisions you need to get made, and all the stress and anxiety, that you'll ever get used to that. But you really do get better at managing it overtime. As you said so beautifully, it's not something you can read a book about and get better at. It's something that there's a book that can help. But ultimately, you need to go through it. It's a process of learning self-management and self-care that you have to actually live through to get better at. So, I love that example.

So, switching gears a little bit, I want to talk just a little bit about your team. I've had the pleasure of meeting most of, if not all of, your team, at least at Lift The Bar Education. They are just such warm and

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thoughtful humans. I know you take very seriously your role in finding the right people and creating a great atmosphere for them to succeed. So, could you just talk a little bit about what is your approach to kind of finding the best people for your team?

Chris: In terms of the education side, it was really straightforward. Actually, initially, it was just me and I muddled along. And then, by speaking to people and having dialogue with people, Stuart, Claire, and Greg, it was very, very clear. They had skills that I didn't, that we needed to go to the grand vision of where I needed to be.

We had Greg who is like from a technician perspective in training, he's just flawless. He's just, just so, so, so good. He had a passion for that that I just don't have. I'm like I want to make people happy. But like his tools are different than my tools. So I was like, "Right. Okay, we need some of that." But most importantly we connected on the basis that we cared so much about the same outcome in terms of making our industry better, making clients love personal training.

And Stuart, Stuart, he was a member as well and he said, "Don't you love the people to have this so much?" I've met this really great lady called Cathy MacDonald. I've listened to this really great podcast by this guy called Coach Stevo. You might not have heard of him. So actually, they're the human behavior side of the Lift The Bar experiment that came from Stuart. I was like, "Okay. You've got a really keen eye for the humanistic side of coaching. We need some more of that. So, now you're going to come and work for me."

Then we had so the three of us and there are three guys who we're trying to make a really great deal. They've got really great attempt at things. But then our processes, our systems, our organizational structure, the way in which we had KPIs, the way in which we monitor our performance, equality across the customer-base, where we deliver in a fair and equal service across everything. Claire Winter was absolutely amazing as a member of giving feedback on what she deemed was fair and appropriate for our business to be doing. And so again, she kind of talked herself into a role.

But over the course of time, it was very, very clear that while we got different skills, while we have different tendencies as people, we all have this innate ability to want our industry to be an amazing place. But more importantly, what does that truly mean? Everyone can say that. Everyone can say, "We want the industry to be better." What we truly mean by that is how do we help clients be the absolute best? Well, we helped the training to be the absolute best first. And that's something that was really straightforward.

So yeah, it was a keen eye for talent-spotting. It was a keen eye for making sure we shared values. It was a keen eye for making sure that our expertise were extremely different and complementary to how a business should be run. So, from our technicians to our humanistic side of people, to our processes and organizational structure and making sure that while those skill sets we're independent of each other, there was crossover.

So, I can dabble with technical stuff. Greg can dabble with nutrition stuff. Claire can get involved in the humanistic side of things. So, it was a collaborative four-way. We are absolutely on it. But Michael, I've got to be really honest in this respect and say that whilst it worked from the education side of the business, I don't want to say [0:28:07] way of not truly assessing people. That'd come to bite me in the

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ass eventually. And I found a bad ache on the gym side of the business that caused nothing but problems. It was probably my biggest stress in the backend of last year. It was a really, really, really bad time.

So, whilst your listeners I'm sure are saying, "Okay. We can connect some values and complementary skills and all these things," I try to rinse and repeat that. I had a gut feel about someone. On paper everything looked great but I didn't know them anywhere near as long as I knew Greg, Claire, and Stuart before they joined on my team. And I went on a hunch and the hunch was so horrendously wrong I can't even begin to explain.

Michael: *laughs* Yeah. Well, that's the thing is we're all going to make those mistakes. There's no hiring process I've ever heard of that is 100% success rate. But I think that the process you outlined there, just that checklist of I heard specifically kind of three things is we have the same values, we have different skills, and I think we can all work together, right? I think even that as a starting place for a lot of people brings more to the table than some processes that I have heard of, right?

And so, I think for our listeners, if you are looking for some ways to really improve your hiring process, I think those three are a really great place to start. Are you really looking for and clear about what skills you need to bring to the team? Are you really clear about what your values are? And how do you test for that in an interview process which maybe I'll ask you in a second? And then, you know, the other thing is making sure we can all play in the sandbox together. That even though we have our different skillsets, those values mean that maybe we can collaborate and work together.

So, just going back to the values piece because I talk about values probably almost in every podcast, my listeners are going to get sick of hearing it. But in an interview setting and maybe this is part of your lesson learned with this person, how do you test for we're all in the same page about our purpose and our values. How do you test for that in an interview?

Chris: It's really difficult. I'm going to start with the education side because of the way in which I do things is that I didn't actually interview Greg, Claire, or Stuart for roles. It actually happened in a slightly different way in that because we've become so connected as individuals and as a separate part of Lift The Bar, as we started to do more Skype calls with members and things, I said, "You know, I don't have the skills to do this but I'm going to speak to Stuart Aitken. I'm going to see if Stuart can speak to you. Once Stuart finished his Skype call, I'll check in with Stuart to see how things have gone.

So they kind of went, is it an intern role kind of – that's the easiest way to describe it. And by constant evaluation and feedback over the course of, let's say two or three months, it was very clear that to bring these people in, they had the specific skills. It was actually true in practice. So I'm a firm believer in interview process in this respect that you can't do what I did which played the long, drawn-out interview process and then somebody can work their way into a job. You need to be able to see very, very clearly can they do what we need them to do.

And then on the gym side of the business, we didn't do an interview for, [0:31:19], the only interview we've done in that respect is the person that ended up being an absolute nightmare.

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Michael: *laughs* Well I mean, I think there's already a lesson in that, right there, which is just if you can create a process like an internship where you have a long dating period, you have a long getting to know each other period, you get to actually see each other in action for a long period of time, that in many ways is the best case scenario. It's in many ways the best case scenario. We can hire really, really slow and make small incremental commitments to each other, kind of like dating.

On the flip side, if you can't and you need to hire faster then I think we both would agree, saying the same thing, I mean agreeing, it will be really useful to do interviews. And in those interviews, test for the things you're looking for especially values, especially willingness to collaborate and communicate.

Chris: Completely and utterly agree. And you know what, this is in the gym space of [0:32:13] fitness specific to this stage. Well, in the gym space over here, it's very, very, very common place for personal trainers to end up their first employee is usually a client. Because again, over the course of time, that client believes in the brand, believes in what the personal trainer is trying to do, wants to be a part of the set up. It just so happens to be the right time in their life for a career change. And the mating commences.

So, it's really, really difficult for me as a person, it's going to be harder, it's going to be a big thing for me to learn about myself in the next two to three years and something I'm going to definitely lean on you and Mark about is I know my team is going to have to get bigger over the course of the next three years because we're growing at a rate that means it's definitely going to happen. But I feel like I've personally exhausted the people who are absolutely obvious to come in. The Claire, the Greg, the Stuart, my marketing assistant staff and the guys in the gym, it's like I don't know who I can trust to come in and be the person that I need them to be.

So, I'm going to need a process, I'm going to need an interview process in place. That's going to be like the biggest dip and steepest learning curve for me for sure. I'm a big fan of doing it slowly and people proving themselves over time. It's like a talent scout. So, if there was a really high performing sport or athlete playing in a semi-pro league somewhere, talent scouts would go and see that player time and time and time and time and time again to say, "You know, that is the person for me." Maybe it's from my slightly sporting background but the scouts in process works brilliantly well more often than not.

Michael: That makes perfect sense. Yeah, so let's skip ahead in talking about the team. So now, you got them. You got them through the hiring process. You have people on your team. What's some advice you have for how to create a great environment for the ones you have then? And specifically, how do you go about creating an environment where they can all thrive, where they're all really set up to win. What is your approach to making sure that your team really has all the resources and skills and support they need to win everyday?

Chris: From my perspective, I've work so closely, so much like a partnership with the leadership team Greg, Claire, Stuart specifically. When it comes to those guys, I simply ask them, "What do you want to do? How could you know what our goal is? You know what we want to do in the grand scheme of things. Your talent is the human side of things Stuart, what do you want do?" I really want to do a podcast. Okay, let's explain, let's justify how that serves the business, how it serves our members, how does it make general population clients perform better than they perform now? Does it tick those boxes? Well, it seems to. Let's play. Let's go do it. I don't want you to be confined by adult description

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that I write for you where I get to guess what you're going to be good at. I've got so much faith and belief in you doing the right thing for our business. You go do that.

Greg was, "I think the entry-level course to become a personal trainer in this country is borderline embarrassing. At the very least, it's not acceptable."

Michael: *laughs*

Chris: "So I think we needed a point of entry to create a better standard of personal training. I want lead that. I want to lead the charge. I want to do that." I was like, "Okay, cool. How does this serve our business? How does it contribute to make the general population clients better? How does it serve where we want to go as a group? Does it tick these boxes?" Yes, it seems to. Cool, go do that.

Then from Claire's perspective, it was actually much harder because what she wants is to improve the industry and improve this, her skillset was so very obvious that she could create internal structures, and processes, and platforms and making sure that our current members, not our future ones across the board had a fair and equal service. So hers was more of a, "Claire, we're not a business."

Michael: *laughs*

Chris: "We're a really well-intentioned idea with lots of people that pay us money. But structurally, we are not in a place whereby we should be." So, Claire came in and she is probably the closest we are. So like you got your Mark, Claire is my Mark or she is my Michael, whatever way you want to look at it. She is my closest work colleague by a considerable distance because we are the ones that are charged and tasked with making sure the ship sails effectively.

But alongside that, we are an education company first and foremost. What we did between Claire and I is we looked at the way in which we produce what we produce. Our initial USP was that we were the first company to bring in, well, we think we're the first company to bring in webinar-placed learning. But that means that we're appealing to people that don't mind being educated by the power of video. Stuart came in and did audios of the podcasts. And then Greg does workshops and the in-person thing.

But if you look at any high-performing academic institution across the world, most of their education is produced in print material. So, when it comes to that, we decided that we needed to have a print offering. So, I said to Claire, "Can we do this? Can we make this work? Can we make it happen?" She looked at the process. We had a designer in place. My background before the days of fitness was in magazine publishing. As a result of that, we ended up with the magazine.

All the while in terms of the skills, all the while in terms of making this [0:37:46], we can work together is do we all respect and understand where we're going as a group? And do we all respect and understand the individual role we have to play in going there? When it comes to assessing where we're at, we've just thought of using the traction meeting framework that you suggested to us back when you were over last year. As a result, I think that earlier in this rant that I've just given you, I mentioned that we previously were well-intentioned idea. We have lots of members that paid us money. Now, as a result of putting in these structures with Claire, I think we generally can legitimately call ourselves a well-oiled machine business.

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Michael: Yeah, I mean what a wonderful example and what a great answer to the question because so many leaders think that their job is to kind of be dictators; that not only do they have to decide where the business is going but they decide exactly how it's going to get there and exactly how everyone is going to help it get there. And what I'm hearing you say is not necessarily that most of your success has come from, let's all agree on where we're going. Let's all agree on what the goals are.

Then you're a little agnostic about okay, tell me how you want to get there. How do you want to fulfill this mission? How do you want to reach that goal? What are some ways that really make sense for you that you can be passionate about? Out of that, it sounds like a lot of great things came out of that, came some great webinar content. Out of that came, now we're going to do it by audio and podcast. Now, out of that came a magazine that's going to serve all your clients.

So, I think that's a great lesson for our listeners is that if you are the kind of leader that thinks that you have to be the one that decides the path everyone walks, you might want to consider a little bit of what Chris is serving here which is can we agree on the big picture, agree on the goals and let your team be part of the process in deciding for how they fulfill that mission and how they show up everyday. I love that so much.

Chris: Yeah. For me, it's really, really exciting. It's very empowering, of course, and it makes me feel great inside that I'm allowing people to express themselves in a way that they feel completely and utterly comfortable with. But the more important way of looking at this is that if I was dictating to them, it would mean that I thought I know better than them how they can contribute to the world. And I don't. I might have an inkling. I might have an idea. Of course, if they come up with crazy ideas that don't serve where we want to go, then maybe I have to veto at that point.

But because there's not frame of reference for the type of company exactly in our space, there's no frame of reference to the type of company we want to run, I just thought of this grand idea. At that point, I can ask my key players, "You know what, do you know where we're going? I need to maximize your talent. You tell me how I do that." And they come back to me with their various ideas. As long at that point is vetted and structurally organized by myself and Claire then we just press go on things. And what we've ended up with is not so much an education company. We're truly like a multimedia organization. That's very core for four people to have achieved.

Michael: Yeah, that's awesome. So, I want to switch gears a little bit because one big topic I want to get to and make sure we leave enough time and this is the topic I know that you've recently been studying more and more. And your background was in marketing but I know recently you've done a really kind of nerdy deep dive into consumer behavior, just going full nerd onto this topic which I love so much. You've been studying kind of underlying psychology and motivation of consumers, which sounds just so fascinating.

So I guess, briefly, let's start with what have you learned so far? What in your studies has popped up that's been surprising or that has stood up the most to you?

Chris: The biggest thing that stands out for me so far is, of course, we all know that we all buy most things. And there's an underlying emotion that's attached to that. We want to feel good or we want to

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not feel awful. There's varying degrees of how we do things. And of course, even the most rational people in the world, there are still going to be a slight emotional attachment to that purchase so they kind of legitimize it with logic after they've made the purchase.

But the biggest thing I've realized so far, especially applying it to gym life, general population client life is that the higher the emotion and this is a real general thing at the moment. I've got some good stats to back this up in our gym, the higher the emotion at the point of signup, the lower the customer lifetime value.

So if we really pick on pain points massively and we bring people in who are coming in very deeply emotionally attached to where they are and they're focused on the problem but not the logical steps of solving the problem, if we come in at that level, then generally people aren't set up to win. And we find it really, really hard to keep those clients for a very long time.

The same is true of people that sign up on huge levels of excitement. "I'm going to get thin! I'm going to get strong! I'm going to do this for once! And then what they don't do is they don't allow themselves the time and the space to think, "Do I literally have the time to do what I want to do? Do I have the finances to do what I want to do? Do I have, in some cases the childcare, or the time of day, or the session times available I want to do?" So the higher the emotion, actually the more difficult it is to keep people in the long run.

So when it comes for what we're doing now and the way in which we position what we do as a gym is that since I've been learning this stuff, I'm trying to make up processes on the way in which we attract clients, almost impossible for them at some point to not think rationally. I want at some point for them to know and nod along and say, "I completely understand what I'm reading, what's expected of me, what I can expect from this company. If I hit send on this application form or pay on this link, I'm completely aware of what I'm getting myself involved in." So that's really the big version of it.

And then alongside that, there are people that aren't necessarily quite so emotionally attached and quite so emotionally charged, be it in a paying perspective or a heightened emotion, so joy and surprise. They're not necessarily feeling those things. Then the people that are expressing lower sense of emotion or lower attachment to problem solving versus the problem, there's different ways of connecting with those as well. And I've had some real great fun in marketing campaigns trying to attract people in their various differing levels of like heightened sense of emotion. It's fascinating what people will click on if you write the right way. *laughs*

Michael: *laughs* Yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure. So let me just make sure I got this. So it sounds like you're saying is that in the research you've dove into so far, one of the things that's come out for you is that people who make a purchase at a point that where their emotions are high, where they're just running really hot, either really excited or really depressed; that's either because we as marketers have pushed their pain points real hard and they're really feeling that pain point. In fitness, it's specifically, "Oh geez! I really need to lose 10 pounds," or whatever the case may be. That when they make a decision at that moment, they're less likely to stick with it. They're less likely to have a long-term value as a client. One way that the research has suggested that you can combat that is to weave in some moments where you encourage them to bring it down to a rational level, right?

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Chris: Yeah.

Michael: So you can push the pain points and the emotion but at some point in the process, during the selling, you want to say, you want to make sure they've really thought it. Not just made an impulse purchase or done it purely out of feeling or out of fear. I imagine it's probably an emotion that drives a lot of sales in fitness. But they've actually done it out of, okay, I'm logically thinking through this commitment. I'm logically thinking through the results I'm asking for, what it's going to take of me. So, that's so fascinating.

My first question about this is what does the research say or as your experience, is this true outside of the fitness space? Is this true outside of -?

Chris: Yeah. Other than maybe nominal purchase like buying fuel for your car, ultimately people try and buy things to improve this. So, anything that people buy to improve their sense of self, they're going to try if they can to -. The research suggests that if somebody is trying to improve their sense of self, the more heightened the emotion, the more people are feeling anger, which is usually about other people, fear which is afraid of themselves, joy and surprise, the more heightened those things are, the lower they'll actually look into the behavioral cause of what's expected. That might be massage. It might be physiotherapy. It might be personal training.

In terms of other purchases outside of that, there is a big increase in things like Netflix. We take that one as a prime example. Our people truly buy Netflix in a rational or an emotional way. It's really hard to say. So many people buy things for different overly complicated or overly simple reasons. I think there's actually a big study being done on Netflix signups and customer lifetime value which I'm desperate to get my hands on when it comes out. But ultimately for me, everything I've seen so far would suggest from the consumer psych stuff, I'm opening up one of the studies now by [0:47:23]. Yes, let's look at the store level stuff.

The more people buy on emotion - I'm just trying to get this screen right. There we go. So the more people buy on emotion, the less you actually want to tell them detail. So that could be anything. So, if you're looking at pain points, if you're looking at ways in which people buy your service, if you know there's going to be a heightened sense of emotion that goes along with it, so it might be a feel-good factor for losing 10 pounds. It might be training to condition athlete achieving a gold medal or whatever it's going to be. The more you could avoid detail if you're truly focusing on pain points, the more you can avoid details, the higher chance you're going to have of getting them to sign up because people that are most high in pain want to feel understood. They want to know that you understand their pains, their problems. That you've helped people come out of that before. But what they don't want to know at that stage is the step-by-step process of how that person comes out or something. Can that be applied to other things? Probably.

Michael: Probably.

Chris: Would it happen with a car. Would somebody rationally buy a flash sports car to make themselves feel great? How many times have people put a massive deposit down on a sports car overnight only to then think, "What have I done? How am I going to pay for the rest of this?" What about holiday? The same thing happens.

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Somebody sees an ad there on Facebook, or ad there on the television for the Bahamas, somewhere great. All there is, is feel-good, suntan, this hotel is really cool. It's got all these amenities. But at no point, the people will say things like the price, or the hotel where it's actually located, or what airport she needs to get to, the connecting flight, so price range and things like this. So the more you can make somebody feel emotion, the less you should probably go into detail in terms of what you're trying to sell.

However, if you're trying to attract people that are not emotionally-led and you're trying to get people that are rational thinkers, detail wins out. Then of course comes in the point of well, is there this happy medium between people that aren't necessarily completely rational. They do want to know that you can emotionally connect and relate and understand and you've helped people out. So is there this middle ground at this stage whereby people can –. You can write their content or their copy in your marketing campaigns. And the way in which people buy things can have enough of the emotional hook with enough rational concept behind it so that people can know precisely what they're buying, what's expected of them, what's expected of us, of the seller. And then, it hopefully makes a better buying experience.

Because you guys must have noticed as well is that the early customers that really seemed to have a bad time and the people who feel their expectations haven't been met, even if you've been so explicit in the way in which your expectation have been put across. So it's a difficult one. But how this operates in other sectors, one day I'm going to get to all of the other sectors that I possibly can in the service space. Hotels would notice it too. Again, transport and accommodation would probably notice it. The others I'm not so sure.

Michael: Yeah. So I think what I'm really hearing here is for our listeners, if they want to make this actionable, takeaway is looking for a sense of balance in your sales process. A sense of balance in that you really want to push for, push on your kind of core avatar's emotions. You want to know their pain points. You want to address them. You want to talk about their pain points and their fears enough so that they know that I see you and I get you.

If your pain point is to lose a few pounds, or I just went to the doctor and he says you're diabetic, if that's the avatar you're going after, you want that to be somewhat of an emotional experience of pushing on that pain point. But you also want it to be balanced with some rationality, with some logic. So they're not just making emotional decision but there's also some logic in there. Am I hearing you right?

Chris: Yeah, completely. So if somebody, you're probably right in this respect, so we need to let people know we understand their pain points. Look, we know that you're not happy with where you are with your weight, that your confidence is low. However, the way in which we get out of this is that you are going to need to come to the gym three times per week. The times in which our gym opens are this time to this time. So you don't just have to come three times a week, you need to factor in the fact that opening and closing times are here. You are going to have to eat better. There's no way around that. We can't magic our way that you can achieve what you want to achieve this way.

So it's just making sure that yes, we show that we can relate to what they're doing or we can make them feel as understood because if we can do that, what we're showing is competence and control over

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the journey ahead. But if we stay in that place whereby we only focus on the emotion, the pain points, the structure, they'll still pay you money. But at this stage, if they're not completely aware of the expectations or what the path looks like, don't expect them to stay around because they're not ready themselves for what that truly takes.

Michael: Oh, that makes perfect sense. Yeah, it makes perfect sense. I think without us getting too much, I guess, without for me getting too much on my soapboxes about the fitness industry, I think that a lot of what we see, especially in the US, is so much of our marketing around fitness, and health, and wellness is all about pushing these emotional pain points. Then there's a complete lack of any rationale because the marketing ends with - and I'm going to fix it for you fast and cheap. There's no real acknowledgement of the actual expectations of how long it's going to take, or the work it's going to take, or any sort of rationale. In many cases, they are avoiding that rationale just to get the purchase.

You know, in some ways I'm painting the industry with a broad brush. This is certainly not everyone. But in many cases, I think this is, or in some cases, the worst of many industries. That they're going for the fast purchase and the emotional purchase. I think not only would it lead to more long-term clients to bring in some rationality but I think there's a lot of integrity there. I think there's a lot of integrity to say, "Yes, I understand your pain points and I want to be clear with you. I want to be upfront with you. That losing 20 pounds is actually going to take a lot of work for you too. We're going to be here to help. We have a lot of great tools. We have a great track record of helping people with this. But you need to also know you have to show up. You have to eat differently, maybe shop differently. You might need to enroll your family in this process. It's actually a lot of work." So, I think there's so much to be gained from just this one lesson in your research so far which is leading with that kind of logic.

Chris: You can't write about stuff in ad there. You can't write all that stuff in a Facebook ad. So they can show that you know what - because if said all that stuff, a lot of people would never apply to our marketing campaigns. That's really sad because at the deep-rooted level, everybody just wants their trainer or their health person just to be honest. Be upfront. Tell me what it's going to take. But it's just so difficult to put that across in advertising copy.

So my biggest thing for people is that everything that Michael has just said is so true. We need to treat people as adults. We need to be very honest with them. We need to show them there's a degree of personal responsibility. They can't just throw money on this and hope the problem goes away. This isn't the way you pay for a bunch of fat burning pills and then hope the fat melts away. There's behavioral cost to this. There are costs that are involved that go way beyond than just a financial transaction.

So when it comes to this stuff, showing people who you service is the most ideal for or what your program is most ideal for is such a good way of doing it. You can write out advertising copy or you can put landing page copy out there and say, "We do this, this and this." We can put all the emotional triggers. But this program is best suited to those who can - this, this, this, this, and this. And allow people to nod along and say, "Hey, this program is best suited to people that can allocate three hours per week to this. I think I can do three hours. Next point, our beginners to exercise and have at least 20 pounds to lose, hey, I'm a beginner to exercise. I've got at least 20 pounds to lose. That's great for me. At least it allows you to qualify people in a rational way without ignoring the emotive side of what they want to do as well.

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Michael: Great examples. That's a great example. So, we're actually, believe it or not, coming up on the better part of an hour. We're great talkers.

Chris: *laughs*

Michael: But if there are people who want to dive more into this topic, do you have some resources you can point out? If some of our listeners are thinking, "Wow! This is fascinating stuff. I really want to dive in and learn a little bit more," are there books, resources, blogs? Where can people go to learn more on consumer behavior in a way that is actually palatable?

Chris: Yeah, this is the big problem because there's so much research out there. I'm still trying to get my head around specifically. But one of the best books that I have encountered is one called Brand Psychology. That's a ridiculously good book and it helps simplify all of this down for my study which is very, very necessary at the moment because some of the papers are so long and drawn out. And you're trying to make tenuous links to the gym world and gym life.

There's something I will say when it comes to the consumer side a little bit. We can actually predict now based on our advertising copy how long customer lifetime value will be up. And through every ad that we've ever run, I've looked at who signed up to every ad that we've ever run and how long they stayed inside the business, and then looked at the reason why they left, and whether it matched up against the original ad copy they signed up to. It's fascinating to know that ad copy can predict customer lifetime value if you do it well enough. Brand Psychology goes into that a little bit. Then you have, if you want basically the world's easiest to read research review on pretty much everything you can see with psychology, the Cambridge Book of Consumer Psychology is probably the best one that I could recommend.

Michael: That's awesome.

Chris: It is so right. That's just like a bible of all consumer behavior related stuff.

Michael: Brilliant. Brilliant. Well, I think when I have you back on the next podcast, we'll dive into all your efforts and talk about your ad copy and what you learned from it because I think that's so fascinating. And our listeners would love to hear more about that.

Chris: Yeah, sure.

Michael: But to wrap it up, we're going to dive in, we're going to start to wrap it up and do our final five. As I mentioned to you earlier, at the end of each interview, I ask everyone the same final five questions kind of in the spirit of inside the Actors Studio. I'm not sure, did you have that in the UK? Was that just a US thing?

Chris: No.

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Michael: Some old dude, he used to interview actors and performers. At the end, he used to ask them these kind of five quintessential questions. Well, I think his was more than five but mine's five. So here it goes, your final five questions. Are you ready?

Chris: I'm ready.

Michael: Number one, what is your morning routine, what is your morning routine?

Chris: My morning routine now is wake up, have a glass of water straightaway, and then wait for girl, Isabelle to run around my side of the bed to cuddle up to watch one episode of PAW Patrol before I wake up and do my emails. I was really bad before that, Michael. Waking up, the first I do was check my emails, check social media, check bank balance, and then basically start the day off with the business controlling me. Now, I make sure that every morning I start off with watching one episode of PAW Patrol with my little girl.

Michael: I love it, awesome! Number two, this is actually in line with something we were talking about earlier. What activities give you a sense of renewal? What activities fill you up and get you ready to kind of tackle the world?

Chris: [0:59:36] for me, it is, personally, the things that make me most inspired and the thing really fires me up is I love to play football or soccer over here. That's something that I've been very crazy but more importantly, I listen to old rock, old music.

Michael: *laughs*

Chris: It might sound ridiculous.

Michael: I love it.

Chris: I just think the way in which, let's say bands like Fleetwood Mac, the way in which they created music, the way in which they wrote copy, let's face it, wrote copy, my role is mainly commercial now. As a result of that, I get fired up to do good things when I hear really great music.

Michael: Perfect. Number three, this might be harder one for you because I know you're a voracious reader. But what is kind of a one book or learning experience that kind of taught you the most, one that is going to be the most influential on your life, if you had to pick one?

Chris: If I had to pick one learning experience that was most influential in my life, I am going to say it was the Art of Communication course by Cathy MacDonald because it was my first real exposure to human emotions, human behavior. It kind of gives me now a framework in which I can manage myself and my own emotions better.

Michael: Great answer. Number four, if you could have one superpower, what would it be?

Chris: Oh one superpower, what would it be? *laughs*

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I'm going to say I'd like to be able to fly because that would be really cool, but if maybe a bit more professional one, unlimited resilience.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, I could use some of that as well. Number five, what is the last thing you tend to think about before you fall asleep?

Chris: Wow! That is an amazing, amazing, amazing question. And so, I'm going to go back to the what do I do when I wake up because I remember that earlier in the conversation, I said there was a long period of time when I was very, very stressed and overwhelmed by my business. And for various reasons, I would wake up feeling sick and I would go to bed feeling sick. In between, it was just varying degrees of how sick I felt with all the stress and stuff that was going on.

So, I'm really, really proud to self-reflect on this now and say the last thing I think of before I go to bed or before I go to sleep as I'm drifting off is how grateful I am for this core network I have. It might sound really clichéd and really cheesy. I get to go to bed next to the woman of my dreams every single night, next door to the two girls that mean more to me than anything else I can possibly imagine. So the thing I do before I go to bed is just reflect on how very, very, very lucky I am, very fortunate I am but fortune in the respect to I know I've made that fortune work because I'm a good person too.

Michael: Beautiful answer, beautiful answer. Well, Chris, you did it. That's your final five. Congratulations.

Chris: Thank you. I think I did well at those.

Michael: You crushed it. You crushed it. So as we start to wrap things up, people want to keep in touch with you, if they want to learn more about Lift The Bar Education, or maybe they're in your area listening to this and they want to come to your gym, how do people stay in touch with your or learn more about your world?

Chris: Well actually, I think more people do know more about Mark Fisher Fitness in this area now which is really weird because [1:02:59]. Because my MFF hoodie, the one that says, "Fuck that's for the bum," I get all kinds of stares in our weird little villagers.

Michael: You're welcome, you're welcome.*laughs*

Chris: In terms to find out more about me, look, over the course of the next few months, I'm actually going to keep quite a low profile because I'm trying to get involved in my study and understand things better. But my first appearances of the year really when it comes to marketing and also brand development is going to be at Business for Unicorns, so the event I'm doing in New York City for you guys in September.

If they're interested in what I've done so far in my career in respect to fitness education, lifthethebar.com, we've got lots of mini courses for personal trainers on there. They're all largely built around by the technical or human behavior side of things. And in terms of how to best contact me after this,

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chris@liffthebar.com. Send me an email you've got in terms of the concept we've covered up for the day. Or if you've got fitness business stuff that you want me to have a look at on your behalf, please send it my way because it aids my learning as much as anything else as well.

Michael: Yeah. I also just want to say, if you're in the fitness space and you're looking for a group of people to connect with, a community to connect with, liffthebar.com. It's just a really great community and they have wonderful, wonderful resources. Honestly, Chris recently helped us with our Business for Unicorns' website and gave us great feedbacks. If you want somebody to just tear apart your website and tell you how crappy it is, he's so good at that.

Chris: *laughs*

Michael: He'll do it with such loving words and it's just so, so valuable. I'm teasing. But it was really just so, so valuable. And Chris, I just can't thank you enough for spending the time to talk today. I really, really appreciate it. I'm really excited to spend some time together in a few months.

Chris: I can't wait either. Thank you so much for having me on and allowing me to share the stuff I've been learning which I'm so excited about because I think it's going to have such a big impact on where our industry is going. Thank you so much to everyone that spent the time listening to me [1:05:03] this time. Thank you very much.