



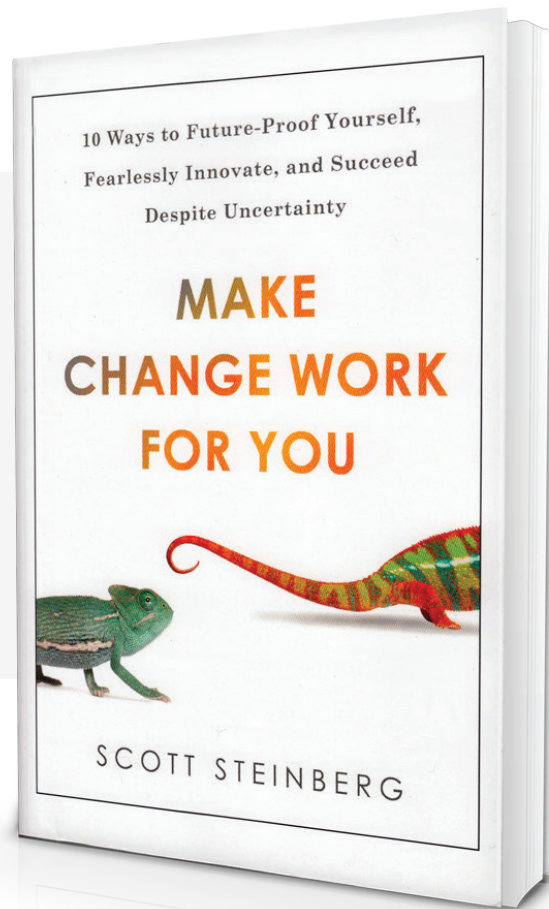
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BRIAN SOLIS

Principal Analyst, Altimeter Group

S: You've been tremendously successful – but were you an overnight success?

B: In 1991 I had joined an advertising technology firm in Southern California. I was their database architect. I built these efficient databases around a paper based system that a lot of their PR people were using as a way of tracking analysis and publications for media buying. As I was listening to the people around me and talking about technology, I was sort of in awe of how little these coworkers understood about technology, its impact, and its benefits for business. I went to the president of the agency and asked to work on some of the marketing programs to provide a technology perspective. To my surprise he said absolutely as long as I could find someone to take over on the IT side. That's where it all began. That allowed for me to have an interesting angle to attack it at because I didn't go to school for marketing. I didn't understand the laws or basics of marketing. I just knew what technology could do, what it was promising, the pains of what was, and sort of married it back together of stories of what could be. Everything I tried was successful beyond the means they had seen. For me, I didn't know what I was doing, I just had a goal. I had outcomes I needed to see. I wanted to preserve my new job. I was motivated by the performance metrics you're supposed to go by in traditional marketing. It was working well and decided I would move to Silicon Valley. When I moved there I was told that you can't work in both PR and advertising. You have to pick one and they all work in

technology. There are specialists in each. I was given an opportunity with a big PR firm and it was too good to pass up. At the time I didn't really know what PR was. I had no classic training around the writing of a press release. I found unconventional success in Silicon Valley but it was from bringing the technology perspective. My coworkers were more trained in the PR side when I came about it the other way.



S: You said you were programming. Was that self-taught?

B: Yeah. I was self-taught when I was a young kid. I was mowing grass to buy my first PCs, etc. In high school I took classes, all of which have no use today. From there I realized I got to live through the dot com rise. In 1997 the real opportunity was working with big corporations like HP and Xerox but I also wanted to work with startups. I built out this special process within the organization to work with startups. Even though startups were getting ridiculous amounts of money, they still didn't know what marketing was in general. They knew they needed users or hits. They knew they needed to reach milestones, which became my milestones. If you could use what you do to drive what they need, then what would it take to do that? I came up with new means to do so. I had this motto that I still live by today: Constraint forces creativity. The one big opportunity for me was message boards, forums, and online communities. They were existing for technologists and consumers who were interested in technology. To me, I thought I needed to be there. I realized that everything

we did at that agency was not going to fly there. In order to have success in the community, you had to become the expert. At the time I was trying to make digital photography a thing. When you get a lot of great coverage in publications, it's good but if it's not driving sales or leads, you're going to get fired eventually. I used these forums as ways to observe behavior, needs, challenges, and expectations. I really immersed myself in the technology to become the expert and spent my time answering everybody's questions and offering solutions. My profile showed that I worked with a digital camera company. Those engagements would lead to sales and it was fascinating to me. However, to do so, it took more time and resources than the way agencies are traditionally budgeted and how they want to spend their time. I broke the mold and the model and it wasn't necessarily welcomed. I felt the need to go out on my own.



S: The programs that you were tracking, you were sharing these online?

B: I was participating in general forums that directed to talk about digital photography. Yahoo! Groups and AOL. Old school stuff. There were people who were building websites using things like FrontPage which were essentially blogs. Guys like Steve Sanders. They would get amazing traffic because they were spot leaders. They just knew they wanted to talk to experts because they are experts. I started an agency in 1999 dedicated to this. It was way early. Not a lot of people knew they needed this. Startups

knew they needed these services. The more valuable you are the better reputation you have. In those darker times, which were a bit slower, I swore that if business came back around this time I would be better prepared. I lived in the lab. I swore that I would share what I had learned and was learning. With the rise of Web 2 that is what started happening. In that time you're hanging out sharing your stories with people like Mark Zuckerberg before they were who they were. That's where the blogging came in and the social networks, books, and speaking became my platforms. In 2010-11 I joined my friend's group. The big thing I had realized was that everything I was learning was bigger than me. It was really helping people in how they did business. Maybe what we were onto was something that could improve how businesses engage customers and how customers respond to companies. I hated the way I was treated as a customer so when I realized that all of these things can improve marketing and customer relationships, you're on to something. I realized I wasn't going to change business as a marketer. Even though I had a lot of research and I was sharing everything, if I could apply myself more to research I could write reports. I might have a better shot at getting people to see the world differently as opposed to the lens of a marketer if you could apply what you were learning, it would change marketing. I explored more of an analytical approach even when I was running this company. I split myself in two. I found myself working with companies creating marketing strategies and also I worked with executives to change the company from the inside out. I got into the business of change management and that is how I came to join the

company. All of the folks here were friends long before. We decided to build one strong team where I still work today.



S: I'd like to scroll back to the darker times. How do you manage to shift and come out successfully?

B: These questions are sort of retrospective. I probably don't look back enough because I'm always moving forward quickly. Thinking back to those times I guess I had built a pretty solid reputation in Silicon Valley. A reputation that was a little too good because to this day people still don't realize I'm in research. I still get calls to see if I can help markets start up. There wasn't as much demand during those dark times. You had to be creative. You took your retainers but then you also had to show that you'll deliver dividends. When you build a model driven on performance, it's entirely different how you bill, how you pay people, how you hire the expertise that you require. I had a blog called Bubbleicious that was dedicated to Web 2 and the social economy with this new technology. There was an emotional element too. I went from 40 to 20 people and I was heartbroken. In order to keep yourself going you have to fight another fire and my fire was the passion about changing the world of marketing and business.



S: What did you find to be the tipping point for you?

B: Honestly, that's a question that somebody

who thinks that they've made it could answer a lot easier. I could tell you that if I look back, I could see stages that were platforms you could build upon. One of those original platforms was when I officially launched a blog. Before I was just contributing all over the place. Between Bubbleicious and Brian Solis, those two gained incredible notoriety in their respective circles. I was still an aspiring photographer. The only way to capture the rise of Web 2 was for me to take pictures of them and share what I was experiencing. Those pictures still today are a treasure trove. I would put them up on Flickr. That page has 4 million views because of those pictures. Those two blogs and those pictures were the first massive platform. In 2007 I published the Social Media Manifesto which was the rallying cry for the impact business. I cofounded the Social Media Club with Chris Huer. Those things iteratively built upon each other that led to the conversation. Every little bit of it built upon the last thing. You would see what is intentional is the course that all of that took. It was all about steering out of PR, steering towards strategic marketing, and then steering that toward business and away from social media in general and moving towards experiences.



S: Do you think most people think like that when they are approaching their careers? Is the corporate ladder straight up or is it more of a zig zag?

B: Yeah. I was having this conversation last night. When you look at it in hindsight, it's easy to see that the way we were taught and the way

our parents were raised is very different than today's society. It's not a ladder designed to go one way. You have to go up and down and across. As a young adult maybe your dream is one thing and it's something different later. Happiness is not defined the way it was for our parents. We're living in an economy where people aren't even buying cars anymore. People aren't buying houses because they're too ridiculously expensive. They're renting and they're subletting. People are allowed to explore what makes them happy. By default, your career can be intentional. I think younger people are starting to realize that. It's older people who savor security and want to have homes. I was driven by something else. I wanted to change business. I get passionate about people telling me I can't do something. I don't have to listen to that. The difference is we were conditioned in life to be put in a box and to follow certain rules. It doesn't have to be that way.



S: Why do you think some people aren't realizing that yet?

B: A lot of it is reconditioning. Nobody found success because they played it safe. People who want to get rich either play the lottery or they make something happen. There's a greater amount of people being risk averse because it's safer. When I started my company and I had my first child. He was 3 at the time. I did something that I wasn't supposed to do. I quit a great job to start a company that who knows what would happen? You consider risks but when you're on a mission, you're given blinders. If you are driven by something else, it overcomes things

that might naturally set you back. The difference is when you are on a mission that's one thing. When you have a dream and you want to pursue it that's different. When you have an idea you have to think about how to bring it out to life. The difference between people who have ideas and people who execute ideas is the willingness to go out and do something about it. They aren't thinking about bills or student loans. They just take on all the risk and debt because they think it's going to do something. Finding your true drive is what it takes.



S: What was the scariest point in your career? Or is there another point that was scary?

B: Failure is part of everything. You have to fail. If you don't, it means you're not trying new things. You have to try enough so there are greater successes than there are failures. I didn't think about it as being scary. I was on a mission. I was already finding success. I believe it is what it took. I pushed everything in that direction and I had a motto: dream, do, deserve. What is your dream and why does it matter? Do the thing to make that happen, relentlessly. Then get what you deserve as a result. At the time it was all about the things I had to do to bring that dream to life. I was able to force a transition. Once you start pushing for things to happen, you create your own destiny. That is just true. If you are pushing against a purpose, people recognize that and support it. You force and create opportunity that unlock doors for you. It wasn't scary at the time because it was just supposed to happen.

S: When you were posting in the forums was that on the clock or during the off hours?

B: All of the above. You can't get smart just during the off hours. I was doing it on the clock too. I was also charging companies and making money from that work. It worked within their model. That creates tension because you are trying new things and it goes against what people know. Rather than dealing with that I decided to go start something different. The agency president at the time was fully supportive. They weren't blind to the benefits but thought maybe it would be better if they supported me in my own direction. It might cause issues or change everything and we're not ready to change.



S: For someone stuck, what advice would you give them?

B: I did all of this as an introvert. I still can't work a room to this day. I'm not a good self-promoter either. I have a real hard time having to say anything about what I'm doing. All of this had to be done at the same time to get people to talk to me. I found myself sitting in a corner or talking only to people I knew and that wasn't any way to expand a network. One of the gifts an introvert has is the power of observation. I advise everybody to observe what is happening around you and what is happening around where you want to be. Where I am and where I want to be is separated by my actions and words. You have to have a tangible view of

where you want to be. You have to understand what the gap is. In that whole, dream, do, deserve- doing closes the gap. My advice is to say “well look, if I can’t go work a room then I have to do research. Who are the thought leaders, etc.” Work online to answer those questions and become part of the community. As an introvert, one of the things I learned by participating in these communities is there is a sense of confidence that spills online into the

real world. That’s the best experience anyone can have. If you look at the true power of knowledge, it’s not just what you learn in the classroom, it’s the power of observation. Get your hands dirty is the best way to say it.



CHRIS BROGAN

CEO, Owner Media Group

S: Why is it more important today than ever before to stand out as a business, individual or organization? And is it really playing it safe not to do so given the rate of change and level of competition out there today?

C: There's just so much "me too" going on in business. I was speaking with Nolan Bushnell, co-founder of Atari and the guy who gave Steve Jobs his first (and only) job, and he said that the amount of "same as" thinking that he sees as an investor and advisor is just depressing. We've decided that creativity is too risky. If that's the climate, and if the people trying to make their business stand out are doing that at the core of their business, than being seen will be harder than ever.



S: What does it mean to be brave in your opinion? And does it happen overnight or is it in fact a process of training and self-discipline that builds over time, i.e. through small simple action steps and habit-forming routines?

C: Bravery is a process, a muscle, a verb. It requires action. To be brave, one must work daily on their confidence, their self-acceptance, their ability to grant themselves permission, and their execution. Doing means more than planning, and working every day on being true to yourself and accepting what has come before without dwelling on it will power one's bravery.

S: Why is it important to try new things, exercise different creative muscles, and - as Seth Godin points out - constantly be shipping or putting yourself out there? And how can people gain the confidence and strength to constantly be doing so?

C: It's astounding how many of us get into ruts. There's nothing good about a rut. Our bodies adapt and then allow for atrophy and decay. Our minds do the same. It seems that entropy is the standard state, not just rest. So whenever you're stuck doing the same old things, you're losing ground in all ways. Yes, habits matter, but apply the habits to a variety of choices. Heck, I played bass in a band the other night. I don't even play bass.



S: Do you feel that it's important to put yourself on a professional and creative workout routine and constantly be practicing, learning and improving, and stretching yourself? Why so/not? What happens if you simply do the same thing over and over again in your business or career?

C: No question. If you're not working on some lab time every day, you're missing the best way to power up what you do. Experiment. Try. Learn from the outcomes. We're so averse to failure. The thing is, change the word "failure" to "outcomes" and then accept that some outcomes aren't what you want. Done.

S: What are some common fears you see working professionals and business suffering from - and what are the costs they tend to have on these individuals and organizations? How would you recommend they react more intelligently to them?

C: People are afraid of everything. They don't want to stand out. They don't want to take an action that might lose the company money. They don't want to suggest that the status quo is boring. It's amazing the levels of fear in an organization. What has to happen? Acceptance, bravery, the notion that those who will create what's new will seem crazy for the first few years.



S: Even for successes such as yourself, how important is it to constantly be failing and learning - would be grateful for any anecdotes you could share that put things in perspective?

C: I fail every day. Ever single day, something goes wrong, or I miss something, or someone says I never replied to them, or whatever. I fail ALL the time. If I am not failing, then I'm not pushing hard enough.



S: You've had to face down many fears and challenges on a professional and personal basis: What tips would you share with readers for facing down sources of anxiety and overcoming these possible roadblocks?

C: Take the video game approach. When you show up in a video game, level 1 is all about figuring out the rules, the resources, the early strategies, the feedback, and the rewards. Everything from Pac Man to Call of Duty follows this mindset. So does life. Set yourself up at level one. Figure out the lay of the land, the rules, and figure out the feedback and rewards THAT MATTER (most people look for the systems that are in place and fall into that trap). Instead, make magic happen by figuring out the REAL feedback and then everything gets more cool.



S: When dealing with fears or sources of anxiety (e.g. having to make important decisions that involve a great deal of uncertainty), do you have a framework or model you use to help overcome these challenges, or reconcile yourself to dealing with possible negative outcomes?

C: Not at all. When dealing with fears, I look for whatever way I can tackle it while shielding anyone else from the outcome, and with some very small sense of what I'll do if I win and what I have to do to retreat. Fear is a fight and I work on it every single day.



S: Faced with sources of fear such as potential layoffs, many folks tend to default to duck and cover mode, i.e. keeping their head down at work and trying not to rock the boat. Is doing the same thing or attempting to curl up into a ball, a smart and safe

response in your mind, or is there a better choice that might be made here to help minimize risk or gain more control over the scenario?

C: Layoffs are the stupidest fear in the world. You WILL be laid off. It means that you have no idea where money comes from. YOU could make more than you make today if you were willing to own your life. To me, being afraid of a layoff is like being afraid of getting gray hair and wrinkles. That's coming no matter what. Instead, work on it. If you have gray hair and six pack abs, the world will be happy. :)



S: Most business and people tend to go through the same routines day in and day out, whether making products or performing on the job tasks. Then, they're suddenly disrupted when things shift. But could they have actually seen these changes coming, and done something more to prepare themselves in advance to meet these challenges? It seems a shame to wait for a midlife crisis or market fallout to get scared into action via a wake-up call, or so we'd imagine.

C: Steve Jobs always sought to put himself out of business over and over again. In comparison, tons of companies whose names I don't even know because they don't matter try really hard to keep doing the same thing. Which do you want to be?

S: What's the single greatest fear you've ever had to face in a professional scenario - and how did you overcome it?

C: I'm always afraid that I've bitten off more than I can handle. I overcome it by learning my way out of the hole. I've tried to minimize this in the face of clients, but sometimes, I'll drag them along for the ride. Usually we both come out better. If anyone suffers, it's me. I've done a lot of "duck swimming" (beautiful on the surface and horrible looking under the water) in my days.



S: If you had to give any advice to professionals, managers and organizations at any level about dealing with fear, risk and uncertainty, what would it be?

C: Learn how to have no boundaries. Learn how to have no enemies. Learn how to focus on yourself as the tool of business and not as a ball of ego hoping for praise and trying to dodge criticism. Once you remove those two sets of hooks from life, you'll succeed more than ever before.

S: Even once we've achieved success, or overcome a fear, can we sit back and kick up our heels, or is it imperative to constantly be working to address new sources of anxiety, e.g. shifts in the marketplace, rising competitors, or?

C: I work harder now than ten years ago. I suspect in ten years time, I'll have even more challenges in front of me. If you want to sit back and relax, check out of life.



GARY VAYNERCHUK

CEO of VaynerMedia, 3 Time New York Times Best-Selling Author, and Technology Investor

S: Social media mavens didn't exist when you first parlayed yourself into becoming one. What qualifies someone for the job?

G: I think that qualifying yourself has a funny way of working itself out. Why me is predicated on the enormous culture shift we have now that platforms are in place that allow people to break through and have opportunities that they never would have had before. If you ask me the question of "why you?" 10 or 20 years ago I would have said because somebody decided so. An editor or producer. Why me has never been more predicated on your talent and so that makes me feel better on some level because I feel like I'm competing against the world and not necessarily against the few chosen ones. There's less serendipity of breaking out than ever before because as people become educated on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter it becomes more of their own initiative to have the perseverance of putting out the content that can change their lives. For me, why me is because I have a gene that makes me think about the long term and not worry about the short term ROI which enabled me to step away from my wine retail business and start creating content that takes chances without having a clear ROI in front of me.

S: Why do you think more people don't think several steps ahead? How was your business growing at that time?

G: The business was growing very heavily. Social media obviously amplified it and grew it to the next level but my business was very healthy actually. It was growing 30% year after year for 5-7 years which is what makes me willing to shift away from it even more ridiculous, right? I wasn't shifting away from something that was stagnant. As a matter of fact, what's even more interesting is that the first month I started doing TV and trying to build my brand was completely correlated with a step back for the first time in 8 years. So it was one step backwards and seven steps forwards. The real answer is patience and having big ambitions. I want to buy a billion dollar sports franchise and that's not going to happen with one or two quick moves.



S: How much of this would have happened if you didn't put yourself out there?

G: At some level when you're an entrepreneur, you don't think of yourself as having [serious guts]. I don't know any different. To me, I consider myself fundamentally conservative because I always want to have some money in the bank and by comparison I'm dramatically aggressive and take high risks. You don't know any different when you're an entrepreneur.

S: What advice would you give others hoping to break through?

G: I think that it is screw it. We're going to be at a cross section of talent and effort like we've always been and the people that are going to win are going to have that talent and that hustle and that mix. My one piece of advice is to bet on your strengths. I think that is such a big deal. I am blown away by how many people continue to work on things they're not as good at. I think that makes them much more in the middle and it's a mistake.



S: How much does formal education matter to success today?

G: I was a very bad student. I talk about things predicated on my reality and not on theory. I was a crappy student, so what did I do? I didn't try to read more science. I spent more time studying the prices of baseball cards and in high school I spent more time studying about wine, not less. That's paid a lot of dividends for me and I can see it over and over again.



S: Why doesn't that pedigree seem to be as big a deal when it comes to success?

G: Supply and demand. There's so many people that are going through the education system and they're being pumped out to look exactly the same. The curriculum has never been more outdated because the real world

moves faster than ever and the education system is just not capable of keeping up with that innovation.



S: What have you found that the most accomplished people tend to have in common?

G: I think it's the ones who are able to block out their weaknesses and just focus on their strengths because there's a lot of variations. Some people are just grossly talented and others are such workaholics and hustlers and some predicate on their people skills. Think about how many people we know that are victorious 95% because of their people skills. The world is people driven. Other people are just so damn creative that they won't be denied. Others are so math, operations, and utility smart that they won't be denied. You have a mix too. The funny part is the people who know me best are actually mad that I have such heart for being an operator. I'm now running VaynerMedia, my creative agency with my brother AJ. I've been running it for the last 18 months and instead of more magic, I'm running a client-service business. A lot of people think it's a waste of my time. I respect operations and the ability to build a business. If you're like me and you want people to listen to you, you have to earn it by building a business. I think people can go at it a lot of different ways but the only common theme for me is blocking out what they need to work on and going all in on what they're good at. Isn't that who the celebrities of our society are? Actresses and actors, athletes, musicians? I think that's something we need to pay attention to.

S: What are the odds that people are going to be able to break through the noise today and do what they love and apply these principles?

G: Without context you don't really know. If you are under 25, for you not to make your first move trying to build some sort of business around what you love is ludicrous. The diminishing returns and the upside, the scale is so tilted. There is no time that you can waste three years of your life and not have it impact you as much as your first three years out of school. The context of one's situation has a lot to do with that question.



S: Is there any way to bridge that gap?

G: 9:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m.



S: Are we talking about pouring your time into learning and growth?

G: Yes. If you don't have a tangible something, you have nothing. Theories and ideas are a waste of time. Everybody is in the media business, which is a gateway to the service business or the commerce business. At 9:00 p.m. you can start creating content around a passion and it can lead to creating a service or commerce business. That's what people need to really realize.

S: How can someone tell which ideas are worth pursuing and which may lead to dead ends?

G: The truth of the matter is if there was a syrup that you could inject into yourself that allowed you to have more self-awareness, everybody would win. The true answer to your question is self-awareness. The problem is how do you get more of it? I have no idea. If you have self-awareness, you realize if something is not that good of an idea. It is the trait that allows me to be successful. It allows you to never put yourself in a bad situation to begin with.



S: They are comfy in their position, right?

G: Good. That's why they're there. Do you know how many few millionaires there are in the United States of America? It's a shockingly small number.



S: Let's say you start doing that. How do I know when to push through?

G: That's why I was such a big proponent of doing something you like. Making the shift of being a consumer and then being a content pursuer around it, that's quite easy when you love what you're doing. The people that just chase the money are the ones that give up after a year. The only thing that is driving them is the cash and the short term gains. The people who actually love seashells and writing about seashells, they have a funny way of actually having a business because they don't jump off.

S: How much of luck do you think is part of it and how much do we make ourselves?

G: Jay Z would not be as famous as he is right now if Notorious BIG and Tupac weren't killed. HOVA is extremely talented, has enormous hustle, executes, does all these things. Is he where he is today without those two guys dying? I don't think so. It's a mix of talent, effort, and serendipity. I do not believe any of them exist 100% by themselves.



S: Is there any way to lose?

G: No. That's why I'm so excited about this. Happiness is a funny thing. I think that if you do things the right way and you do them around things you like, that netting out at \$64,000 a year around a bowling blog that allows you to bowl more often where that's all you wanted to do when you were at your 9-5 job. That's a good situation. There's not that many people that die that say "I wish I made more money."



S: Why are the daredevils increasingly succeeding in life and business at odds with traditional successes, i.e. valedictorians and highly-decorated work veterans?

G: Because the game you play in the real world has nothing to do with the game you play for the first 18 years of your life. They're just not the same game. From 6-18 you're playing hockey, then you graduate, and everybody is playing basketball. That's why.

S: What are the new rules of the game?
What advice would you give?

G: What's ironic is a lot of this context has to do with entrepreneurship and business. If you want to be a lawyer or doctor, you have to go to school. For certain industries some things haven't changed or they've changed less. In business, you just have to do it. Sell lemonade, work retail, etc. Understanding the consumer is a big deal. Kids should work retail for one full year and stop their education. They'd all be dramatically more successful.



S: How much entrepreneurial thinking plays into the job hunt? Let's say I was a lawyer.

G: If I'm going through law school, I'd be documenting my entire journey, starting a video blog, because building a personal brand gives me some sort of edge.



S: Is it a combination of visibility and value?

G: Yes. I think every person in the world is a media brand or company. I just do. I think the more you put into that, the more doors open. Some close to a good thing. People need to value restrictions.

S: How would you tell them to deal with fear, anxiety, etc.?

G: To me that is called the bucket. To me that's

emptying the bucket. It's all about recognizing where you're not feeling great and using communication to empty your bucket. Find an outlet. I believe in the idea of psychiatrist or therapist more and more. It's hard to do that to your spouse, family, friends, or coworkers. It's easier to have that emotional dump on a stranger. It all comes down to communication. I think you're emptying your bucket when you're hitting those levels. Some people say the visit my blog talk and through me they can carry on their entrepreneurial venture. I couldn't believe I could have that kind of impact. Go watch Rudy once a month. Whatever it takes to reposition your mentality. Communication or consumption is what allows you to stay the course.



S: Is courage something you can learn?

G: I lean toward no. I'm courageous in business but not in life. I don't see myself evolving into the guy that's going to run up and grab a guy's gun.



S: Is there anything we haven't touched on that people should know?

G: I've been surprised how much communication lends itself to victory for people that don't naturally have it. It's communication/motivation. It's finding that balance of having someone to talk to and getting it off your chest and also being inspired to keep on going. There is something very magical there. Those things are what can make people evolve and be taught too. This book is for the ones who don't do this.



MARI SMITH

Social Media Thought Leader, Facebook Marketing Expert

S: How did you come to be to be a social media expert? What qualified you?

B: I am very much self-taught and I've always been tech savvy. I've always had a strong technical aptitude but I'm also very much an extrovert and a people person. Social media landed in my lap when I joined Facebook in 2007 and I fell in love with the platform. Prior to that, I've pretty much been an employee and then I got bitten by the entrepreneur bug and started email lists called "Parties and Events in San Diego." People would sign up to find out the latest events. My email lists kept evolving from the mid-90s. I could never really get into MySpace. When I pulled up the Facebook site, I figured out it was such a great networking tool and I'm chit chatting with authors who I have their books on my shelves. Because I was so passionate about Facebook and because I understood it, the etiquette of it, people started asking me to teach them how to really use the site. The following grew from there.



S: How much is failure a part of your success? I'm assuming it wasn't an overnight success?

B: It wasn't. It was ten years in the making. I've had a few missteps myself along the way. It's very much trial and error. At the same time, I have a reputation for being transparent and real. People

relate to the way I put things. You can always learn from your mistakes and do something different next time.



S: It seems like you come from an unexpected background – how did you get here?

B: I don't have a college degree myself. I left school at 16 and went straight into the work force. I could not wait to leave school and earn my own money. My dad was a single parent. He raised five girls by himself and I was the second oldest. Money was tight. I was the typical frugal Scott. I believe these emotionally intelligent skills can be taught and the people skills. It's great to have the technical skills but it can't get to the deep, human connections. I've been saying for years that there's no amount of sophisticated technology that will ever take the place of live, in person connecting. When you look in the person, you feel their energy. The next best thing is live video. The education element should not be too far removed from the human element. Let's say you read a tweet that's negative. You need to read between the lines and think maybe they just had a really bad day. Offer a kind word. It can go a long way.



S: Positive thinking seems to be a big factor. What were some of the challenges you've faced and how did you overcome them?

B: In 2007, I had a vision to set up an organization that would focus on best practices

in the social media industry. That vision realized in 2009 when I teamed up with a partner. We offered a certification program. One of the team members reached out and asked a blogger to teach a class in the program. This is the first he had heard of it and it suddenly all blew up. He put a blog post up about this program asking who I thought I was, etc. I felt my reputation was at stake. I consoled a dear friend of mine and asked him what I should do. He believes in showering your enemies with hot cold love. Don't respond or comment. Call him. I called him and I listened to him for 45 minutes while watching Twitter.



S: Who qualified you? How important is just doing it and learning as you go?

B: I think it's very important. In social media, it's still evolving. There's a stigma around the word expert or guru. There are certain people in the industry who have clearly earned their stripes. You have to keep getting out there, adding service and value, and being congruent with you are inside and outside.



S: If I want to create value for others, what are some of the things I should keep in mind?

B: The number one way to create value on social networks is to become known as a go to source for whatever area of expertise. You can become a master curator. This is something I have been doing for years. The way to do that is to share content without worrying about

competition. We are particular about what content we share so that it is quality. There are terrific free tools to use to find quality content.



S: Why do you not believe in competition? What does that mean?

B: In Corporate America it is more challenging to adopt that kind of attitude but you can stand out, innovate, be the first to market, etc. Virgin Airlines comes to mind for not having competition. You have to create legions of devoted fans. You must be innovating and providing service. For individuals, you must be you. Nobody can be you. You should own who you are and know your strengths.



S: You're talking about a leadership process. So many people are waiting for instructions. Why do you think that is?

B: They're also waiting for permission. So many adults are driven by the inner child- the I'm not worthy feeling. I see this a lot with women. They're not charging enough and I encourage them to do so. You have to believe in what you're worth.



S: What does it mean to be braver? Are there simple things we can do to be braver?

B: I absolutely do. These social sites lend themselves to us for putting themselves out there. Hollywood Squares exercise- I encourage

people to take a step to meeting one of those people in their Hollywood Squares. It might be following them on Twitter and commenting on what they've said. I have a friend who will look at what that person's favorite movie is on Facebook and go to eBay and buy a piece of merchandise from that movie set and he'll send it to the person. Just ways to get on their radar.



S: How important is that network of who you know vs. who you are?

B: There's that old saying, "it's not what you know, it's who you know." I really think it's actually who knows you. (Top Women in Social Media list example).



S: You can't be visible if you're not taking risks.

B: I didn't know this person but he found me. Or being well-networked. Radical Strategic Visibility is important and it needs to be consistent.



S: Why do most people not think like that? Do you think we make our own luck?

B: I heard once heard that the definition of luck is when preparation meet opportunity and I 100% agree with that. As I mentioned, I was an employee and in 1998, I decided to start my own business to train and do public speaking. In the fall of that year the opportunity fell in my lap to come to San Diego. I know all that

preparation helped me land that opportunity. I agree that luck is hard work. It is relentless hard work. I was married and then divorced and my life has really been a lot about my business. I literally have to discipline myself to not work all the time. Sometimes people aren't willing to do the hard work or it's just that dreaded fear of risk or failure. There's a fine line between fear of risk and fear of failure.



S: What would happen if you were simply to just coast?

B: I don't think I have a relationship with the word coast. We live in a 24/7 world. There's a study that the average response time on Facebook is under 14 hours. This other study says the average expectation is 30 minutes. There's a big, massive gap there. It creates stress. I have teams who respond to fan pages in different time zones. The coast element. There's the always checking on your reputation and there's the proactive growing. One of my team members proactively grows my twitter followings.



S: Do you have a personal routine to keep yourself growing?

B: I have an interest list on Facebook and I have over 100 sources. I have a similar list on Twitter. I also have Google alerts. This is an area, quite frankly, that causes me stress. People look to me as a leader. It's a form of brain trust.

S: Why keep going and upping the ante?

B: Good question. I don't stop to think why. It seems to be this inner drive. Last year, I invested a lot of money to bring on a coach. Her vision for me was launching a whole additional company. I got scared and it wasn't really my vision. I want to continually grow but it's all relative.



S: Do you think the inner drive is innate in everybody?

B: I think it can be brought to life. I believe every human on the planet has something in their mind's eye that they wish they could do. There was a lady at a gala I went to who came from an impoverished country and got all her degrees in America and travels the world to educate people. I think most people have that inner drive educated out of them, whether it's the education system or family. Surround yourself with people who are supportive.



S: Is there anything we haven't touched on?

B: One of my favorite books is called, "Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway." There's a great line in that book that says the mother of all fears is the fear that you can't handle it, whatever it is. The best mantra is to calmly tell yourself that you can handle it and that you're in control. I'm also a big believer in not suppressing your emotions and letting your emotions just flow. Emotions come and go throughout the day. You need to not let the fear get ahold of you. Follow your heart.



ANN HANDLEY

Author, Speaker, CEO of MarketingProfs

S: How did you get where you are today – and what tips would you give others hoping to follow in your footsteps?

B: When I was 8 years old, I wrote in my diary that I wanted to be a “writer.” Eventually I learned to spell the word, and I became a writer, journalist, editor and (when the internet happened) a content publisher.

I worked at newspapers, magazines, and became the first Chief Content Officer at one company (ClickZ, which I founded in 1997) and now hold the title at another (MarketingProfs).

I write for fun at AnnHandley.com. I speak all over the world (www.annhandley.com/speaking). Do you want more? It’s at AnnHandley.com/press.

I’ve always relentlessly focused on audience. I try to make whatever I write or speak about a little clearer and more accessible to the people in the audience. I still do that now.

In other words, focusing on others is a key to your own success. Ironic, perhaps. But true.



S: What does being courageous in life and business mean to you? What are some of the biggest concerns and fears you’ve faced and how have you overcome them?

B: Wow. How much time do we have? LOL

I was a shy, introverted, awkward child, with many fears – mostly irrational.

I used to think that being afraid of everything was a weakness. Then I learned how to “follow the fear,” and use fear to my advantage. In other words, rather than letting fear derail me, I use the resistance to fuel my momentum, much the way the sails of a sailboat use the resistance of the wind to propel forward.

So things might still be scary, but now that’s a kind of signal that the very things that scare me most... are quite often also the things most worth doing.



S: Describe "mastering the art of improvisation" in your own words. What are ways in which you have exemplified this rule in your life or career.

B: Improvisation is about accepting what you have, and working within and through those constraints or boundaries, rather than fighting against them.



S: What’s the biggest risk you’ve ever taken in life or business – and what did you learn from it?

B: Hmm. I don’t know that I could articulate a “big” risk. I think of a “big risk” as doing something dramatic, and I’m less about drama

than I am about experimentation. So I think my career has been a series of small risks.

Which isn’t to say that even those small risks weren’t scary -- many scared the bejeebus out of me.

Leaving a sure thing job at the Boston Globe and starting a company (ClickZ) in 1997 was a risk. So was joining MarketingProfs in 2002, at a time when we made no money and had only a handful of subscribers. It felt risky to launch my own blog at AnnHandley.com.

It’s scary to share your ideas and thoughts; it’s a little like exposing your soul. It’s easier to stay under the radar. But at the same time, putting your ideas out there is thrilling.

So publishing my first book (Content Rules) was scary. Publishing Everybody Writes was even more terrifying, because it’s an inherently more personal book, and it takes on a subject that hasn’t gotten a lot of respect in marketing in recent history.

Would people scoff? Would they laugh? You never can be sure, can you? And I think that’s a good thing, because the fear can either paralyze you or motivate you.



S: What's the surest way to innovate and stay ahead of the curve whether you're a working professional, business, or even renowned thought leader?

B: Listen more than you talk.



DAVE KERPEN

CEO Likeable Local

S: How did you get started? How did you get where you are today with an eye towards thinking about how we can give others some tips so they can follow in your footsteps?

B: Well, you know the story of my first company is a pretty unique one. We literally got married and started a company at the same time because we ended up getting our wedding sponsored and paid for to the tune of a hundred thousand dollars in sponsorships and twenty thousand dollars for charity. It was a great event, of course, because I got married to the love of my life, but it turned out to be a very successful marketing event as well, and a very important event for our businesses. And there was certainly a lot of fear about doing something so important as getting married in such a public and unorthodox fashion, but we were able to get beyond that fear. Of course, I'm very, very happy that we were.



S: It's interesting. So you brought up the topic of fear, right? And whenever you attempt something big, there's a certain amount of discomfort that takes place, right? I'm pretty curious, especially with an eye toward business and life in general-- what would you say that courage means to you? Being courageous, in fact.

B: Courage is perseverance in the face of fear. I'm happy to follow up, I can shoot you a link to an article that I've written actually. I was

doing a lesson on courage for my daughter's Girl Scout troupe and told this story about this girl who witnessed another girl getting picked on, and stood up to the bully. Then I was asking the kids what courage means to them and somebody said, "It's doing the right thing." And I said, "Well that's part of it," as that's partially it. But I was very proud of my daughter because she suggested that the other part was being afraid in the first place. If you're not afraid, then it's not courage. There's an important part of courage that includes fear. I think a lot of people in our society tend to discount fear, especially boys and young men who are told not to be afraid. Kids are told not to be afraid. I take the opposite approach. I think there's things to be afraid of everywhere, and I'm afraid of lots of things every single day. To me courage is persevering in the face of fear, it's accepting your fear and going forward anyway.



S: How would you say that applies to the business world in particular? You mentioned it was a fairly common concern to have. How can you be courageous in business? And why is it important to do so?

B: It's very important, fear is very paralyzing. If you act out of fear, or don't act out of fear, you're gonna miss out on a lot of opportunities, especially in business and in entrepreneurship. You need to risk failure in order to achieve success. You NEED to embrace your fears and have courage or you can't achieve greatness. Without courage, you're very limiting in what you can achieve in business.

S: What have been some of the biggest fears you've had to face in business, or the biggest challenges and concerns then and how have you gone about overcoming them, and why are you glad you did stand up and face your fears?

B: Again, I'm afraid all the time, and I'll speak about it in the present as much as in the past because I don't think fears go away, you just continue to be courageous in the face of them, hopefully. I'm afraid of failure, I'm afraid of being laughed at, I'm afraid of being rejected, I'm afraid of making big mistakes. Those are probably some of the biggest ones. To face your fears, you really can't look at them rationally, because if you look at fears rationally, you're gonna stop yourself. You're gonna have to look at them: I accept this, but I won't let this get in the way of my goals are. I'm afraid of failure everyday. I can take that fear and let it keep me from leaving the house or I can take that fear, and in spite of that fear or failure I'm gonna do my best today to succeed knowing that I might fail. And most days it works out well and some days it doesn't but then the next day's always a new day.



S: You mentioned being aware of fear, and knowing that it's present. Something we touched on here is turning anxiety into awareness. I'm curious if you could describe that in your own words and some ways that you've exemplified that in your own

career, and your own life in general, perhaps.

B: I think self-awareness is really, really important. Probably the focus of my next book, actually. I just think so often we are not really fully self-aware, and that keeps us from becoming our best selves. I'm not a fan of anxiety. Seems to me that anxiety is, I don't know what the technical definition of anxiety is but perhaps it is fear manifested in physical symptoms of fear. So if we can, in fact, turn anxiety into awareness and can in fact take our fears and take our concerns and be totally self-aware, then I think it makes it much easier to move beyond them: to let them go, to be courageous, to succeed in the face of those fears. I think the big problem is when we try to not accept those fears, to not accept reality, to not be self-aware, whether consciously or not consciously, when we do that, then it ends up manifesting itself in other ways like anxiety, and paralysis, and displacement (not to get too psychological on you). Our fears can't go away so we either accept them and let them go and are self-aware of them or we try to crush them and they pop up in other places like anxiety.

S: And can we use them to motivate ourselves, if we're feeling that anxiety? Could it not spur you into action, do you think? Or is there another way you could use it to be even more productive?

B: I mean, I probably wouldn't use the word anxiety. I would use the word-- cause I tend to

think of anxiety with a negative connotation-- pressure or intensity or urgency. Those feelings can be turned into action. I guess anxiety can be turned into action, but it can be very paralyzing, too. I guess there's a fine line between healthy excitement over anticipation of what's to come versus potentially paralyzing anxiety.

S: What's the biggest risk you've taken in life or business and what did you learn from the processes taking it?

B: The biggest risk I ever took was letting my wife go the first time I met her. We worked together at Disney. I was the number one salesperson in the country and she started working and dropped me to number two within three months, so of course I fell madly in love with her. I knew I was going to marry her and go into business with her, but there was one slight problem at the time: she was married already. Despite my wish for her to leave her husband and go into a relationship with me, she was not ready at the time. She had made a vow to her husband and was committed to him. Back then, I saw it as an enormous risk to let her go. I wanted so badly to stay connected with her, to stay friends with her, to stay close to her in the hopes that she would change her mind. It really took letting her go completely-- not talking to her for over a year-- to get to a place where I could move on with my life. I saw that as a tremendous risk. But of course, she ended up getting a divorce and we ended up reconnecting and we ended up marrying and having children and businesses together.

Couldn't be happier with the results, but back then I saw it as a tremendous risk.



S: I'm curious in terms of the business side of things. When it comes to taking risks, what would you say that the most certain way to innovate and stay ahead of the curve would be? Keep in mind, of course, you're a pretty well-known thought leader here, right, so I think it may help readers to understand how even when you're at the top of your game, sometimes you have to think about how you're going to take it to the next level.

B: From a business standpoint, there's two major risks that I've taken. One, was starting our first business. Despite the success of the wedding, we both had full-time jobs and we had a child from Carrie's first marriage to support. And it was a huge risk to go off on our own. And it worked out very well. We ended up with a very fast-growing agency that's now been profitable from the start and had triple digit growth for several years and has done very very well. But to your point, I found myself wanting more. Wanting to build something more scaleable, something more meaningful. It's very, very hard to scale an agency, so I ended up launching a second company two years ago, a social media software company for small businesses. And it was tremendously risky to walk away from a profitable business to start something that may or may not work out. But I saw my calling as this, and like many things I ultimately felt like I didn't have a choice but to

pursue. We're always taking calculated risks and some are bigger than others. Again, the reward is tantamount to the risk, or parallel to the risk. Actually, my wife will get a kick out of this if you end up quoting me on this. In my J Date profile back in my single days many years ago, I had my quote, "You can't experience the wonderful without risking the terrible." I would say that's still true. And it's true in business. The bigger game you want to have, the more risk it's going to take. Again, sometimes it works out and sometimes it doesn't. You should talk to James Altucher if you have not. He's wonderful on risk. He's started like 18 businesses and 17 have failed. One of them's been super successful and now he's very very wealthy and has enjoyed great success. It's a matter of understanding your total risk tolerance and understanding your risk versus reward spectrum.



GUY KAWASAKI

Chief Evangelist of Canva

S: How did you get where you are today – and what tips would you give others hoping to follow in your footsteps?

B: I got where I am today by willing to grind out work. That's my secret. I'm not a visionary or anything like that. I am simply willing to out-work my competition.



S: What one simple change can any individual or organization make to help them achieve their goals faster or more effectively this very moment?

B: One simple change is to stop reading blogs and get to work.



S: The surest way to innovate and stay ahead of the curve whether you're a working professional, business, or even renowned thought leader is?

B: The surest way to innovate and stay ahead of the curve is to create the product that you would like to use. This is the anti-thesis of doing market research and listening to customers. But the genesis of the great tech companies was building a product for themselves.

S: What's the best piece of business or career advice you've ever been given?

B: The best business advice I've ever been given is to never ask people—customers, employees, vendors, etc—to do something that you wouldn't do.



S: Something no one ever tells you about what it takes to succeed is?

B: Very few people are humble and self-aware enough to tell you that luck is a big factor in success.

S: What's the biggest risk you've ever taken in life or business – and what did you learn from it?

B: Honestly, I haven't taken any big risks in my life or career. Contrary to the swashbuckling image of entrepreneurs, the good ones are always trying to reduce, not increase, risk and uncertainty.



S: The most important thing working professionals need to know to get ahead in an uncertain and unpredictable world is?

B: The most important thing working professionals need to know to get ahead is that the world doesn't owe you anything. You need to go out and tear success out of the hands of failure and mediocrity.



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