

Rachel: Welcome to part one of a conversation with Tony Stubblebine, the founder of [coach.me](http://coach.me), formerly Lift. So this conversation went so well. It was going to be a shorter podcast episode. We ended up talking for two hours, and so I broke this in to two different episodes. The first one is mostly about creating goals and making them so that they actually happen. How to incorporate habits and what to do when you're not feeling motivated. And then the second half it varies a little bit but kind of started as how he was able to hundreds of thousands of people on to his app, and different business building things. How he was able to get these amazing investors, because Tony has investors in app like Tony Robbins, Tim Ferriss, the founders of Twitter, Evan Williams and Biz Stone. He's now helped hundreds of thousands of people achieve their goals.

So all kinds of goals ranging from productivity, to fitness, to stopping drinking, to meditation. He's helped so many people, and had such a big impact. So we are going to cover so much. So in this part of the interview, part one we are going to talk about how to set goals that you can actually make happen. What are the biggest things to incorporate if you want to make sure that you're actually going reach the goals that you've set, what the biggest bang for your buck habits are. And I asked because Tony has so much data having helped hundreds of thousands of people, what those are. So he shares that. The people that reach their goals versus those that don't. Different things to do when you're not feeling motivated.

So this is really cool and this is a more a conversation style I think then most of my shows. I try to make to make all conversation style, but this was very, again I can...we got so much great stuff. So here we go on to part one. Enjoy.

So Tony thanks so much for being here.

Tony: Rachel thank you for having me I feel like it's really awesome day, and I'm looking forward to talking about my favorite subject. Being awesome, let's do it.

Rachel: Awesome me to you. So the question I start out asking everybody is, the intention behind the show A Better Life, Is to show people that if they have a choice they can choose a better life. So in that spirit can you just a moment to share some of the things that you're most proud of in your life?

Tony: Yeah, I think the thing that I think about with pride all the time is having been able to create a life of meaning. I feel like, when I was younger, and this is true for almost all young people, there's this really strong desire to just prove that you belong. So when I graduated college as a computer science major and I entered my career I started out as a programmer. And the only thing that I cared about when I got my first job was prove that was I capable programmer. And then it just started dawning on me, what was I working on, and did my work matter? And that thought grew, and grew, and grew, and so I would look at my whole clear trajectory as just trying to find work that had more and more meaning. And now I'm in this position with [coach.me](http://coach.me) where we're literally working on helping people achieve their goals. I cannot think of a more meaningful way to spend my career. And I feel like, wow it took me 15 years of work, but I do now finally have meaningful work.

And I feel its work I could do for the rest of my life. I just think I have an incredible amount of pride, maybe pride's not the right word but personal satisfaction. When I lie down in bed at the end of the night I'm happy, because I know that I did meaningful work. And all the other anxiety that I think a lot of business owners have, and certainly I have the last time a started a business around, will it succeed? That's a manageable anxiety for me, because I feel like there's meaning behind it at least. Do I make sense?

Rachel: I think so, but I'd love to dig in a little more when you say, "Will it succeed?" and you feel like it's meaningful? Can you say a little bit more about that? I guess does meaningful trump success to you, or you just know because it's meaningful it will succeed?

Tony: Yeah, it balances the two. Yeah, I don't know how . . . I'm curious how you feel or how the other entrepreneurs who might be listening feel about the emotional ride of starting a business. And especially in the beginning you just have to go on faith, and that makes it very challenging emotionally. And I feel like the best thing that I ever learned was that if I cared about what I was doing, if I at least felt like I was doing good in the world, I wouldn't be terribly upset if...some of my investors didn't get our money back, or if it wasn't a huge success.

The story I usually tell goes back to my last company, which I think was much more a traditional entrepreneur in that I was defined mostly by just going hard headed. And I had no real special skills that allowed me to start this company. I just decided I'm going to start a company. I started building software, and then I started looking for people to buy the

software. I'd never done sales, I'd never done marketing, I had no idea what I was doing. But eventually I found this little niche selling software tech conferences to help the attendees' network with each other. And the whole time I was doing that I just kept telling myself, "I refuse to fail, I refuse to fail. I'm going to find a way to do this." And I was stressed all the time. And I let myself go in every way. I wasn't exercising, I wasn't eating well, I was probably a pain to be around, and in that lasted about three years. And then in the fourth year we succeeded.

We had enough customers that I was able to hire a team around me. Mostly the team did all the work, I basically was working about a day a week on this company and it was offering a good lifestyle. It was during this time my partner, Sarah, and I decided to split our time between San Francisco and New York. So I could afford to live in the two most expensive housing cities in the country and I had a lot of leisure time. Which let me then reflect on why I had beat myself up so badly in order to serve this company and it dawned on me that I had no innate interest in conferences. That I didn't think really the impact on the world was particularly big. And so why would I continue to invest in this and frankly why did I invest in it the first time? And that was this big epiphany for me that led to starting [coach.me](http://coach.me) which originally has its own very difficult path. We had a really tough go of it for a couple of years until recently where it's really turned around and it's been a great business.

But that difficult road, the reason I was able to persist through it is because I just love the topic. The topic of elite performance, how do people really push the envelope of human potential and their own personal potential, I love that. Everyday someone is saying to me, "Thank you, you changed my life." And that satisfaction is what makes the rest of the business, which I have a lot of anxiety around whether or not something is going to work, and there's a ton of failure involved in starting. A lot of things we try just don't work. And how do you manage that failure, how do you manage all of the stress that comes with the business? The lesson I learned is, you have to have an alignment around your personal life mission, and what you're working on in the business.

Rachel: I think that's a really good point. And just so people can get a background, can you tell us about what your app is and what it does?

Tony: Right, so the history of this company is, we'd originally started as a goal tracking community. We'd had a ton of visibility earlier on and built this huge community around it because of who we were collaborating

with it. The first investor that we worked with was this guy Evan Williams, who is the former CEO of Twitter. And this project, which at the time was called Lift, was the first project that he worked on after leaving Twitter. So the tech press really paid a lot of attention to it at the beginning, and we were able to build a pretty large community around it, and help a lot of people mostly form new habits. But then we felt like we weren't going deep enough. We didn't feel like we really had a business there we, weren't sure. In San Francisco, you can get pretty far with people just giving you money and funding you that way.

But at some point you have to make a real business out of it. And what it turned out is that we had this huge community of existing and potential coaches. And we started taking our most successful people in the community, and training them to be digital coaches to coach people online, rather than through face to face sessions. And that worked, it worked incredible well. And so at the beginning of this year we made a huge reboot of the company with a different name, we're now called [coach.me](http://coach.me). We're very much focused on providing personal coaching to everyone in the world and being a coaching platform for both sides. So if you're looking for a coach you can find great coaches on our platform. And the same if you're interested at all in taking your expertise and coaching people in your spare time. Either as a full time coach or a lot of our coaches really work part time, it's just one aspect of what they do professionally. We match those two audiences up as a marketplace essentially.

Rachel: Awesome. So I know that you used your app to . . . the person who coordinated this podcast, [inaudible 00:11:13] was telling me that you went from being tired and out of shape to completing four triathlons last year, so...

Tony: Yes.

Rachel: Which is awesome. So I'm curious, how were you able to get from where you were to where you are now? How were you able to figure out the right steps, break down your habits, and then use your app to make that happen?

Tony: Right, I feel like there is some corollary to the guy who does the hair club for men ads right. At the end of that he says, "Yeah I'm not only the president, I'm also a member," and he's shows you a picture of what he used to still look like right? I'm very much the active user of [coach.me](http://coach.me) where I felt like what I was getting done in life was that matching my

ambitions for what I wanted to get done. And I really wanted to build a support structure that would let me do it. And so what that structure really looks like is to break down every goal and focus first on consistency. Because if you can consistently work towards your goal, you give yourself a lot of opportunity to grow skills around that. And I think this is probably the number one area where fail as they try to go for an overnight success.

There's a phrase that I really like from one of our investors, who is also one of the Twitter founders, and he said, "It took me 10 years to become an overnight success." And I feel like that sums up exactly what we've learned about anything self-improvement related. So when we started we based a lot of our support structure around a applied physiologist at Stanford this guy, BJ Fogg and the two concepts that get used a lot is he uses this concept of tiny habits that just to really aggressively go for consistency first. And he uses this example around flossing, which I think is good for . . . it's illustrative although not particularly inspiring, which is if you want to start a flossing habit, floss one tooth. And make that your habit. And most people will end up flossing all of their teeth. But it's more that you build that habit than it is that you floss all your teeth every time.

Because most people go down on this path with any new goal, where they do a really good job once and then never do it again. And just to flip that around and go consistency first. And all the tools in our app and all the coaching works on that idea of breaking goal down in to a minimal practice that you can do everyday. The other thing that we work on a lot is this idea that it's not a motivation problem, it's an ability problem. So a ton of people, you see a lot in addiction say people who are trying to quite smoking. Non smokers often try to tell smokers how unhealthy smoking is, as if smokers have never heard that before. They know that it's unhealthy. The problem is that it's very hard to stop smoking. And so something like a nicotine patch that's the other approach where they are trying to break the habit by making it easier to break the habit rather than by trying to increase motivation.

So where this comes up in real life is around . . . so often it comes up in the environment so is something like, "I used to live in this great area for bike riding. And I commuted on my bike. I was riding my bike through vineyards everyday it was so beautiful. And then now I live in the city, I'm not so keen on the bike commute. I'm working a lot during daylight hours." And so you could say, "Well maybe I should just suck it up and wake up at six a.m. and go for a bike ride everyday, or is there a way I

could make going for my bike ride easier?" And the way that I made it easier is I have a gym literally across the street to my office that has good hours, and I get my bike riding in on their stationary bikes in the evening. And so it wasn't the solution of not motivation basis, we would say it's ability based.

And I think that's really making it easier for myself to exercise and focusing on consistency above all else. That is really how I got back in to some level of fitness. Yeah, I'm really psyched with my year where I think two years ago I couldn't swim more than a lap. And in this past year I did four triathlons and hopefully I have a couple more coming up in August and September. And it all came from just trying to make it easier to exercise and trying to get consistent. And of course I got this innate ambition that if I have time I will go for very hard workouts, but I wasn't giving myself room for that ambition to take over because I didn't have the consistency ahead of time.

Rachel: Yeah I think that makes a lot of sense. And so then I'm curious, in term so what were the actions steps you were talking everyday? Especially because I've read some of your stuff before where you talk about one priority is so important. And I know with the triathlons there is all different types of things you need to do. How are you breaking that out?

Tony: I love one priority as a much more effective way to frame prioritization. So when we work with people on productivity, usually they start out thinking, "I need to make a to-do-list and check off as much as possible." And that ends up becoming overwhelming, and then also they end up working on things that don't particularly matter, so they never really get out of the rut of feeling like they're not achieving enough. And so usually the first switch people make is instead of focusing on a to-do-list they focus on a priority list. But then if you don't force any constraint on that priority list people will come out and say, "Well I've got 10 top priorities." And then they'll still feel overwhelmed and that feeling of being overwhelmed will create paralysis. I know, I definitely I often get less done when I have more goals.

And so the one priority framing of it is pick a top priority everyday and get it done, and get it done as quickly as possible. And that's just another way of thinking of consistency or sometimes we use the word momentum. Where it's like if you consistently get your top priority done everyday, you're creating momentum for yourself everyday. And that momentum will keep going you'll get more done. And so my triathlon

goal is not a finely tuned workout plan, its go to the gym, right? Go to the gym everyday that I can. And for a while it was three days a week because I was so out of shape that I was so exhausted. I needed multiple days of rest every time I worked out. And now it's go five days a week because that's about what works with my schedule. That's an example of a tiny habit.

It's much more important that I walk into the gym, than it is that I have a detailed training plan at any given point. By the way, I come from a background where I used to have a detailed training plan set. I have a competitive running background and my coaches always gave us super detailed months long training plans, where I could tell you on September 17th exactly what my workout would be. At what pace I was supposed to be going at it and how much rest I would have in between intervals usually. And so that would be great and I think that's appropriate when you're at that level. Because there's this question how do you get from beginner to that level? How do you get from couch to 5K and there's a lot of goals you're starting at the beginner level, and you have to build up to consistency first. And so for me as my first year in triathlon, while running a company and living bicoastally and having a time [inaudible 00:20:50] my life, the action step is really no more complicated than go to the gym.

And made that easy as possible, I already said the gym is across the street. But on top of that I'd paid extra for a dedicated locker and for them to wash my workout clothes everyday. It's as easy as possible for me to work out everyday, because I've removed every possible obstacle and that's kind of the secret to it for me.

Rachel: Yeah, I think that's awesome. I didn't even know that any gyms even offer that as a service, a wash room.

Tony: It feels like a luxury. I'll say there's a couple of luxuries in life that I really appreciate. The first time I paid someone to clean my house which we consider, we sometimes call it the cleaner the relationship saver. And then it's really common in New York to use a wash and fold service just because not all buildings have laundry in them, and usually it's not in the . . . it ends up doing your own laundry, it ends up in pretty inconvenient. And so the first time that I took my laundry somewhere, and they washed it for me. I didn't have to wait around watching the washer and dryer. And then everything was folded for me, it was just mind blowing. I feel like that was a huge luxury and then the same at the gym. I had this in college where all the athletes would have their workout clothes

laundered for them. And it's just, it's huge. And if you can afford it there's certain luxuries that are out there that really make your life a lot easier. And I try to never forget how lucky I am to have some of those.

Rachel: Absolutely I remember I lived in New York last year and I did the wash and fold, and I did it in San Diego, too. And I remember the first time it was the most glorious feeling.

Tony: Yes, I'm so happy to get the wash and fold laundry back. You probably have that experience though of not having your own washer and dryer, and having to go to either a public laundry mat, or a building laundry mat, and it sucks up hours of your day. I use to time it with sporting events. I would be watching a basketball game while waiting for my laundry to do, but it could be half a weekend to be doing my laundry.

Rachel: Seriously and I remember where I lived I used to get so annoyed because people would take my stuff out of the washer prematurely so that they . . . Oh my God I hated it.

Tony: Yeah, time consuming and aggravating.

Rachel: Exactly.

Tony: Yeah, so I guess so maybe this is our top life tip today is use the wash and fold.

Rachel: There we go. If you walk away with nothing else. Awesome okay, so that makes sense. And so let's break down another goal. So I know exercise is one that a lot of people use. I saw on your app one of the other things that you joined was the habit of stop saying um as much, how are you working on that one?

Tony: Can you tell me?

That is an interesting one which actually I fell like I need to back track on and say, when we started a lot of people tried to convince us that we should limit people to only working on one goal at a time. And what we actually found is that if people chose 7 to 10 goals, the end result would be that they would be more likely to succeed at least one. So there's a glass half full glass half empty kind of work way to look at that. You could say we're creating a situation where people are failing a lot, where they're signing up for goals and not doing anything. Or the way I look at it is we're creating a situation where we're increasing the number of



goals where people are making progress. So I've embraced that whole heartedly, and I'm very proud of the goals that I did succeed in, and almost oblivious to the goals that I haven't yet succeeded in.

And this stop saying um is one that I cared about deeply for a second and then got involved in other things. I feel like I achieved a triathlon goal for example and then didn't make a lot of progress in saying um. Although, it's good of you to remind me here, because I've been doing a lot of podcast interviews lately and now would be the time for me to revisit it. Um I just said um.

Is this something that you work on as a podcast host, do you spend time on your annunciation and articulation?

Rachel: I haven't done it formerly, but I used to be in Toastmasters. And when I was there they would count all your ums, uhs, like's anything like that, and so I'm still conscious of it. And I've noticed that I've been saying like too much, and it's driving me crazy. Now I'm going to be super conscious of it the entire time we talk.

Tony: And actually it has the effect of lower, when you're conscious of it you are actually lowers the overall effectiveness of your presentation. You get a little bit stilted. And because it's in the back of your mind, you get a little bit robotic. But you saying like, it reminds me of a joke that a friend of mine says about this organization [inaudible 00:26:43] which is an arts organization. And one of the things they do is they have run story telling contests. And a lot of people know them because they have a popular podcast. And the joke is what is the first word of every story? And the answer is so. Apparently 80% of the people who get up and a story competition, they start out the story with so...

And that's just a verbal tick that everyone uses. And the really experienced story tellers obviously they're tired of hearing that, and they try to avoid it. This idea of what is quality, what is excellence, what is elite performance, it's so nuanced. Because I started out at the first startup I ever worked was this podcasting startup called Odeo. It's really only notable because it's the startup that Twitter spawned out of. But before Twitter, we were just completely focused on building a directory of podcasts. So we would meet two types of podcasts listeners, a vocal minority who I would consider to be audiophiles. They were very sensitive to what they heard, and the quality of the audio mattered to them very, very deeply. And anything that you've ever heard . . . you

ever heard the term vocal fry, or it's really common to hear a clicking sound.

I think I might have just done one right there. Those things would drive them nuts. And then we were aware of the majority which actually did not care at all about audio quality, or was not sensitive to audio quality. What they were sensitive to was authenticity. So you had the most famous podcaster in the day was this, I forgot his last name, so his first name was Adam and he was a former MTV VJ. And he did podcasts that were very high production value, but then what people actually really liked were like two guys recording themselves while driving in a car talking about whatever interested them. I still feel that way today is... on the one hand I enjoyed listening to the, who is the NPR podcast that was so popular about the murder on Boston?

Rachel: Was it [Serial](#)?

Tony: Serial right? That was a high production that was super fun. But my second favorite podcast is this podcast, [Call Your Girlfriend](#), which is two best friends talking about what it's like to have a long distance friendship. And it's just very authentic and they are best friends and it's entertaining because it's so authentic. And so for where we are, you as a podcaster and me, as a podcast guest the most important thing for us probably to be working on is to be able to say something interesting. And the ums, that's phase two.

Rachel: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. And at the end of the day I feel like people want to connect more than they want to be impressed right? It's all about connections.

Tony: Right.

Rachel: So yeah I think that makes a lot of sense. So 'um' is pushed for later then. Cool, another thing I've been curious about is, have you found that there are bang for your buck habits. Some of the biggest ones I know you talked about the one priority, are there other ones where you feel like if people incorporate them it makes a big difference?

Tony: Yeah, normally I would just say meditation. We did a lot of work on meditation as a performance practice rather than as a spiritual practice. We've helped I think 85,000 people now start a meditation practice. And then we did research behind the scenes on what led to a successful practice, and what led to a failing practice. And then at the same time, I

was using that as my foundational habit to be better at everything. and usually the way I describe it . . . Let me back up I'm curious, when you hear meditation do you think woo woo, or do you think, "This could really make me be like a super baller professional."

Rachel: Well I embrace the woo stuff, but yeah I think of it in terms of . . . Well first I would think of it in terms of spirituality then I think of it in terms of just perspective. Which could then go to business, but it's not my immediate go to.

Tony: I think these are totally valid. There's multiple valid entry points to meditation. And my initial experience with it is that my parents are old school California hippies. They were married by their tai chi teacher and I just think I feel like meditation is from that world. That's how I grew up, and then for whatever reason I turned out to be mathy and I was a programmer. I started out very rigid and then became softer and more spiritual over time as I realized the limitations of that rigid approach to life. And so originally meditation was much more interesting to me as a productivity practice. And I feel it's often important to present it that way, because people who would care about meditation for spiritual reasons have already heard about it. But there's this untapped world of people that rejected it for that reason who would be open for it if you gave them another reason.

And on the productivity side, you could think of meditation as push ups for your mind. It's the only practice I know that actually makes your brain stronger. And the way we look at it is that there's, meditation builds three different, I won't say skills but maybe there's three legs to it. One is it helps you with calmness, and a lot of people come to it from that perspective. I'm actually an advisor for a startup [calm.com](http://calm.com) which is a guided meditation. And obviously calm is a big goal there. And there's something about the breathing exercise in the way many people practice meditation that really does produce a physical effect on the body of calming you. And there's so many reasons in life to be anxious, there's a lot of value in it for calming.

I was in a hospital recently where I saw a dedicated meditation room. It was really there for pain management in that leg of meditation. But if you look at the practice of meditation, there's two other legs. And that's . . . often when meditation is taught is that you focus on your breath, but you also are on the lookout, you become aware of when your mind wanders. And people who only think meditation is about calmness actually get frustrated when their mind wanders, even though it's the most natural

thing in the world. My meditation teacher says "If your mind doesn't wander we should take you to the hospital." Something is wrong with you if your mind doesn't wander. So your mind wanders and you are supposed to say, "Oh I'm aware, I'm aware that my mind just wandered." Look at it, hold it in your mind for a second, acknowledge what your mind wandered to, and then bring your focus back to the ground.

And so that process of your mind wanders, you become aware of it, and then you bring your focus back to the ground, that's what I would consider a push up of every time that happens, you're doing a repetition around awareness and control. And this ends up coming up in every aspect of your life. I talked to a procrastination researcher about meditation as actually the cure for procrastination, not because of the calming aspect, but because mostly people are procrastinating for very trivial emotional reasons. He calls it low level fear avoidance. Where essentially you are a little bit afraid that the task that you need to do is going to be boring so you don't do it. And if you never acknowledged that that's what you are really avoiding, you'll never actually get to it. So if you think about that skill of awareness and then control of focus, is when you catch yourself meditating you're aware the subconscious emotional thread around your next task that's the awareness skill.

And then to say, "Okay I'm aware of it right? I'm going to non-judgmentally hold this concept in my head, and then let it go, and then move on to actually doing it. That's the control of your focus. And it comes up with multi tasking. I was writing a completely unrelated blog post essentially before this podcast started, and how quickly can I move from that blog post which has nothing . . . we've not covered a single thing in that blog post as part of this podcast to what we're talking about here. That for me is being aware that I was having these thoughts that are no longer appropriate and putting them down, and then bringing my mind to what I want it to focus on which is talking to you right now. And basically everything in my life relies on that. And I think that's a great entry point for a lot of people. I certainly have spiritual experiences through adopting meditation, but the initial attraction was just I thought I would be more productive.

Rachel: Yeah you make some really good points. I don't think, as you said the performance thing is not one of the first things that I would think of. And especially going through and being able to focus on one thing at a time. That's a really interesting point.

Tony: It is. I saw this video the other day of LeBron James, one of the top basketball players in the world, sitting on the bench during a time out, I think, with his eyes closed, taking deep breaths with the exact rhythm that you would recognize immediately from meditation. And I was shocked by that. Here is someone whose performance is his job. And you could imagine that maybe something emotionally frustrating happened to him on the court, there was a break in the action, and then he just took 10 seconds to meditate, clear his mind, and get back into the zone. And that's what we've learned is that there's this entire other realm of early adopters for meditation that includes hedge fund managers. There's a big debate in the mindfulness community right now about whether or not it's appropriate to teach meditation to the military. Which the debate is essentially, are you making more efficient killers or are you making more mindful killers?

And I think the people who are teaching they'd feel like, "Wow. It would be way better for people in the military to have much increased mindfulness." These are all people that are really attracted to it for the performance aspects. But then you stumble in to these spiritual aspects. There's a startup in my building that actually brings in a meditation teacher three times a week. And what he taught the CEO is he said, "You know, I think your performance reasons for bringing me in makes sense, but I just want to warn you there's a chance that someone might be meditating and one day decide this isn't what they want to do with their life, and then just quit on you, is that going to be okay?" Absolutely that is a possible outcome. You can have these big epiphanies, but those are hard to predict. Whereas the immediate life benefits of meditation are pretty easy to predict and happen very quickly.

And I think we talked about action steps, although I didn't say the one major outcome that came from our research was that, people that succeeded at building a meditation practice defined it in a way that was impossible to fail. And the people that failed defined it in a way that was impossible to succeed. So people that succeeded meditated for three minutes a day at first, and did not judge themselves if their mind wandered. And the people that failed would also do exact same thing. They would say, "You know all I tried to do was meditate for 30 minutes, but my mind kept wandering. Maybe I'm not cut out to be a meditator." Of course any experienced meditator is rolling their eyes, nobody keeps their calm for 30 minutes that just doesn't happen. Your mind wandering it's okay.

I think that's actually why guided meditation ends up being so important, is if you listen to a guide every couple of minutes they'll say, "Did your mind just wander? That's okay, that's normal." And they just need to keep reassuring you that it's okay to wander, and so if there's any one listening who wants to try meditating they should think of it as it's something incredibly simple. Sit down, close your eyes, count your breaths maybe to 30. And if your mind wanders, acknowledge it, and then go back to counting your breath. And that's it, that's meditation. If you feel like your mind wanders a lot, then your mind wanders a lot. If you feel like your mind doesn't wander that much that it doesn't really matter as long as you sat down and were able to count to 30. And that is a very good initial meditation practice. And if you ever catch yourselves thinking, "Uh I was terrible today." That's the only way to do meditation wrong.

Rachel: Good point. I also love what you mentioned about the guided meditations. Because I remember when I started meditating I was living in Rio de Janeiro at the time. And I had got there and I was so excited about learning Portuguese and then I just hated the language.

So I just no desire. And it was making me lose my Spanish, and so it was confusing for me. I can't say it was making me, but anyway. So I just started going inward and I was getting really into mediation. And I would get frustrated with myself, same thing, about my mind going all over the place. And so I started looking for guided meditations. At the time I didn't find that many. Actually had me creating a company were I was selling guided meditations for a while because they were so helpful. The ones that I could find just completely kept me in line.

Tony: Well yeah I definitely I learned on Head Space. I'm a Calm user. We have guided meditations on [coach.me](http://coach.me). And I often use these ones from the UCLA's mindful awareness, I think is who they are. Anyways, every guided mediation I've used has been great. And one thing I've learned from guided meditations is that it's actually to have diverse group of teachers actually ends up being really helpful to me. Just see the same topic explained in a couple of different ways often really helps it click with me.

Rachel: Yeah good point. [Inaudible 00:43:44] include those initial notes for people. Another thing I wanted to touch on, I know you had a Periscope about this and you talked a little bit here about when you're not motivated. So can you share a little bit more about what people can do when they're not feeling motivated?

Tony: I really liked the discussion we had and so this is...we have an adviser to the company, this guy Buster Benson, who's really the person that I modeled the company after, because to me he's the godfather of trying to use technology to help people achieve their goals. He's the first person I've ever seen build something successful at all in the . . . around 2005, he created a goal setting community called 42 Things, and then he still has a writing community, 750 words around a daily writing practice. And so he's just been doing this a lot longer than me, and I have a ton of respect for him. So occasionally we'll record our own podcast. So we did this as a Periscope, as sort of a live recording where people can ask us questions. And someone asked the question that you're asking now, what do you do if you're not motivated? My mind, because I'm so solutions oriented I was like, "Alright what...you know how do we solve this problem?"

And he just re-framed it masterfully, he said, "What if you thought about your lazy period instead of fixing it as, how can you make the most of it?" And so he suggested this idea of cat mode, which is to really embrace your laziness and be the most lazy person. Have the most awesome lazy experience possible. I often think about that during my downtime now as like, "Wow, how can I have really great downtime right now?" And so my partner and I we've worked really hard and have one of those California relationships where we've been together 10 years but we were not married. So it's tough to say girlfriend, but we have two cars together. So what do you call that? And we both work really hard. She's an entrepreneur also and often has giant ambitions along with me. And that's a lot of what our bond is about. And one of our big life goals though is TV. We really celebrate finishing a season or a series.

Last week we finished off season five of Louis and . . . new Amazon show, I forget the name. But like a comedy of . . . it's a new Amazon comedy. We finished the first season of it. And we were psyched, because for us that's our leisure time, and we want to have great leisure time. And we don't really beat ourselves up about it. And so I'm curious, I feel like that's the starting point is if you're feeling lazy is this something to be fixed or something to celebrate? And sometimes people try to lie to you and say that all people are productive at all times. In my experience that's either not true, or the person is on drugs. And I think that some people do go through periods of extreme productivity that are essentially drug induced. And I'm not recommending that at all.

And so none of us should buy in to that, we should all accept that we are going to have periods of extreme leisure. And I love this idea of thinking of it as cat mode because what other animal is better at leisure than a cat?

Rachel: I love that and so then I'm thinking the natural thing people might think next is well, what happens if I just embrace laziness for a really long time?

Tony: Right, what if you never get anything done ever? People have the weirdest fears right? The people that are afraid of this will have an impossible time achieving it. It's like, where does that fear come from? It comes from your innate ambitions. It's like you're sitting around going, "Oh I want get a ton done if I allow myself to be lazy I'll never achieve anything in my life." But no, that fear is like spawned by the energy you have and drive to try and achieve something with your life. I don't know, this is a question for a therapist. I feel like it's almost like . . . I know in myself I don't think it's . . . Sometimes I'll just punt on a question. So this is something that happens to me often when I fly from New York to San Francisco, I often take a really early flight and my sleep will be disrupted which is not particularly healthy.

And one thing I noticed is that my mood is bad that entire day. And so I just have this thought process that anytime I have a decision to make, if my emotions are telling me something about that decision, I just punt on the decision. I'm incapable of making any decision that day that is in any way emotional, because I'm just so much more likely to have a negative reaction to something. And I think it's the same, maybe that might happen, but until you actually see yourself achieving nothing in life, let's not worry about it. What is something else that you can worry about? And that goes back to value of adopting a momentum view of the world. What small achievement could you achieved today in order to try and build momentum to something more. We think a lot about our different Stanford researcher Carol Dweck who does this work on mindset.

She observed that a lot of people are carrying around either a growth mindset where they believe that they can change personally change and grow, or a fixed mindset where they feel like their capabilities are basically set in stone. And the nice thing is that that mindset is flexible. You can actually change from one to the other, and certainly it's more useful to change into a growth mindset. And it actually turns out to be important, because with their growth mindset that mindset is predictive of future results. And one thing we found by working on consistency.



First, is it also has the side effect of changing people's mindset. An example that I often give is, a user of our site, this person, Robin. Robin wrote in and said, "You know I'm so happy I just lost 10 pounds, because I adopted the habit of low carb lunches. And now that I've lost 10 pounds I'm trying to build the habit of studying Vietnamese and Italian, because I'm planning to take a year off and travel the world."

And I was like, hold up, full stop. What did losing weight have to do with traveling the world? Nothing, logically those things should not be tied together in any way. But what really happened behind the scenes there is that Robin was a little bit stuck, because of the self judgment around weight. And whether or not . . . in this story Robin is actually he, whether or not he could lose that weight. And then the second he lost that weight his whole world view about what he was capable of achieving changed. And that's almost always our advice is if you feel in anyway stuck, do something small, make some small progress. I talked to someone else in this vein too who'd gotten divorced. And you know people who've been divorced are really self critical and almost paralyzed by this. And this story was just they adopted the habit of making the bed everyday. And it was not a habit they had before the divorce. I don't think it was a contributing factor to the divorce. And so they went from feeling completely out of control. So they woke up, and at least one thing in their life was completely in order. And that was the progression that led to digging themselves out of a pretty dark time in their life.

Rachel: Yeah I remember Tim Ferriss was talking about that too. He was saying that when he just felt completely overwhelmed at all kinds of things, and that the world was coming at him just making his bed every single day brought serenity back to him, and helped him realize that he was in control that leads to one little thing.

Tony: Right, it's amazing how powerful a small habit can be sometimes, and how it can be the stepping stone to much bigger things. That might be the biggest lesson we've learned in all of the work we've done.

Rachel: Awesome that makes a lot of sense. And so you aren't kidding we're totally going long, which is awesome if that's still okay with you.

Tony: Yeah, it is still okay. Sometimes I say that what we are doing is my life's work. And I feel like where that really comes out is in a podcast interview, because I would love to talk to you, and go back and forth, and have a discussion on this for 10 hours. We could be talking for another six hours because I love this topic. This is so fascinating. What

works and what doesn't work. You're learning about people, you're hearing all of these inspirational stories, and there's no angle of it that isn't fascinating to me at least. Hopefully, the people listening find some value in it too. Obviously they already learned about the wash and fold that could be a real life changer for them.

Rachel: This kind of thing fascinates me too. I could talk about it forever. I just love human psychology, and why we do the things we do. And I think that there's already been a lot of really good practical things that people can think about in terms of their habits. And we'll considered this part one of the interview, and then we'll do part two and I'll ask for the business folks just questions around, how you were able to get your company to where it is now.

Tony: Yeah, let's do business, okay.

Rachel: Awesome.

Tony: And you're ready for that?

Rachel: I'm ready, actually before one quick question, well it's still a little bit about the other, but I'm so curious to know. Do you ever feel like . . . I guess two parts number one, do you ever feel sick of growing yourself? And the second, I'll ask you that first. Just I don't know, we'll go with that.

Tony: It's a good question because from me personally I have a topical kind of joke that I've been telling friends recently, which is, for a bunch of reasons I just got braces. So I'm 37 years old, I know very few peers that are wearing braces right now. This isn't high school when a lot of people had braces. I needed them for orthodontic reasons, not purely vanity. But I'm very self conscious about them even though they are clear brackets. I spent two days with my dad recently and he didn't even notice. Someone had to point it to him and then he was, or maybe he needs glasses. But no one notices the way that I notice, but I feel them all the time in my mouth and so I'm really hyper aware of them. And so what I've been telling people is that this is I have finally over committed to self improvement.

This is way too much. It's almost like when you see a plastic surgeon and they look a little funny almost like they've had too much plastic surgery themselves. I feel like that's a profession that's over committed to their own self improvement and now maybe am I having that same experience. But mostly that's just a self deprecating joke. I find self

improvement addictive. That it's fun. It's fun to go through the process and the outcome is fun and something that you can take a lot of pride in. And I know in personal satisfaction if there wasn't so much connotation around it I would describe myself as a hedonist. A lot of how I've organized my life is to have as much fun as possible. And one of my big observations is that there's a little bit of temporary fun that comes from something like a great meal, and then there is a lot of long term fun that comes from a great accomplishment. And so if you organize your life around accomplishments, those are accomplishments that you could be thinking about 20 years later, and that will give you satisfaction and pride that will last forever. Whereas yeah I had probably three great meals last week. But I haven't thought about them at all this week. And so I definitely, except for the braces, I'm pretty satisfied with this life.

Rachel: And what would you say to people who feel that constantly working on improving yourself makes you never happy with what you have, and just not grateful, and just not in a good place emotionally?

Tony: That's an interesting question. I so rarely actually run into that in practice. I think because there's a world of people that start down the path of self improvement with a depressed sense of self worth and confidence. And that depressed sense affects them in a lot of different ways. And a lot of times just a slight raise in your confidence level opens you up to tackle other issues. So if there's a deeper issue of self worth. It might be really difficult to work on at all when you're confidence is low. And raising your confidence through some rapid wins it gives you some room to work on those deeper issues. Yeah I kind of tend to feel like they're not, I would say that they're separate. The working on individual skills, or habits, or a lot of goals are often separate from the deep emotional work that a lot of us need to do. Does that make sense to you, does that resonate with your experience of the world?

Rachel: Yeah, I was just appreciating hearing you respond, because I would have never thought of it this way, but it makes a lot of sense. So I'm liking the way that you look at things.

Tony: That said, I feel like I often at it two ways. Sometimes I look at founders as the most . . . because I live in a startup ecosystem. I have run in to a lot of people that are starting companies or have started companies. And I often wonder if what they are doing is the most inefficient form of self medication ever invented. Sometimes . . . this happens most often with guys where they'll feel they're not . . . their romantic life is lacking, and therefore they have to achieve more. So

they're going to start a business, and then if that business turns them in to a billionaire then they'll be able to find a girlfriend. That's the thought process. That's an actual thought process that men in the world are having right now. If you break that down and look at that rationally, that is the most inefficient, least likely to succeed strategy that you could ever give.

I often want to be a dating coach. So that I could just give the advice of it's a three fold process. Wear clean cloths, get a job, look at women in the eyes. It's just there's a lot of people doing more work than they need to. At the same time there's so much good that comes from that process of trying to achieve more. I feel like you end up figuring out along the way and maybe you're not emotionally ready for the easy answer early on. I know personally sometimes I've wondered about myself, if I have a just a little bit of social anxiety, that if you throw me in to a party where I don't know anyone, I don't know I'm going to gravitate towards to the wall and be a little bit of the wallflower. And one thing that's helpful about being a CEO is it just gives me a lot more to talk about in a lot more situations which I like, because at heart I'm very social I just have this anxiety, and I wasn't sure how to get over it.

But again I would say about myself that that was the only thing I was trying achieve through starting a company, is got to be the least efficient way to do if possible.

Rachel: Yeah, but it's a great side effect.

Tony: For sure.

Rachel: Awesome. Well okay this has been great. So thank you so much, I've been loving this. And I guess what I'll do is I'll end this recording and then I'll start another up one for part two.

Tony: Wonderful, let's do it.

Rachel: Awesome.

Rachel: Welcome to part one of a conversation with Tony Stubblebine, the founder of [coach.me](http://coach.me) formerly Lift. So this conversation went so well. It was going to be a shorter podcast episode. We ended up talking for two hours, and so I broke this into two different episodes. The first one is mostly about creating goals and making them so that they actually happen. How to incorporate habits and what to do when you're not

feeling motivated. And then the second half it varies a little bit but is started as how he was able to hundreds of thousands of people onto his app, and different business building things. How he was able to get these amazing investors, because Tony has investors in app like Tony Robbins, Tim Ferriss, the founders of Twitter Evan Williams and Biz Stone. He's now helped hundreds of thousands of people achieve their goals.

So all kinds of goals ranging from productivity, to fitness, to stopping drinking, to meditation. He's helped so many people, and had such a big impact. So we are going to cover so much. So in this part of the interview, part one we're going to talk about how to set goals that you can actually make happen. What are the biggest things to incorporate if you want to make sure that you are actually going reach the goals that you've set, what the biggest bang for your buck habits are. And I asked because Tony has so much data having helped hundreds of thousands of people, what those are. So he shares that. The people that reach their goals versus those that don't. Different things to do when you're not feeling motivated.

So this is really cool and this is a more a conversation style I think then most of my shows. I try to make to make all conversation style, but this was very, again I can . . . we got so much great stuff. So here we go on to part one. Enjoy.

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