

A BETTER LIFE WITH RACHEL ROFÉ

**A CONVERSATION WITH
CHAD
HADSELL**

**IF YOU HAVE A
CHOICE, CHOOSE
A BETTER LIFE.**

Rachel: Hello everyone. Today we're here with Chad Hadsell. Chad is an information junkie, self-improvement fanatic, and social responsibility advocate. Through his work at <http://chadhadsell.com>, he aims to help others create the best possible lives for them, their community, and the world. He draws on a variety of experience including extensive work with at-risk teens, corporate and nonprofit team building, fitness training, and a deep love of research.

He currently lives in Portland, Oregon with his wife and his cat and looks forward to soon becoming a father. I actually recently met Chad via Twitter. He told me a little bit of his story about how he turned his life around and I was impressed to see all these major changes he was able to make. He really switched his life around for the better and after I read his story, I immediately knew he'd be great to have on the show. Chad has a lot of great things to share and I've been looking forward to this interview. So Chad, thanks again for being here.

Chad: No problem. I'm really happy to be here.

Rachel: Me, too. So, the intention behind 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 take a minute to just brag with us and share some of the things that you're most proud of in your life?

Chad: Absolutely. I'm really, really proud of the lifestyle that I've created for myself, which is one of responsible prosperity. That's really huge for me. I think that sustainability and success go hand-in-hand and they're often not talked about together, though. I want the world to be full of people who live successful lives and in order for that to happen, they also need to be sustainable otherwise success won't last.

So, what I've done for myself is create a life where I know that I'm being responsible in terms of the environment, in terms of my community, in terms of the world. At the same time, I'm having a fantastic time. I live in a house that I love. I have a yard and garden that is a massive passion of mine. And I have all sorts of things that I never thought could be possible in my own life and at the same time absolutely responsible, absolutely socially and community based, and environmentally conscious.

So, there's that. A couple of other things I'm really proud of—a bunch of years back I rode my bike across the country. That was actually one of the things that got me into learning about people and the environment and how people and the environment work together. I spent a summer teaching in China, which opened my eyes about how the rest of the world is. And then, just overall, just being able to create the life that I've created from starting out with less than zero, really. I was tens of thousands of dollars in debt and now I'm in a much better place.

Rachel: Wow, I didn't realize a lot of that stuff. Like I said in the intro, "Guys, I just met Chad, so this is going to be super fun for me, too." I know that right now you're in a really great place in your life. You've changed so many things around. I know, just from that blog post that you shared with me and the little bit I know about you, that you've worked really hard to get to where you are right now. Can you describe a time in your life when you felt like things weren't going the way that you wanted or you felt trapped and what the situation was like for you then?

Chad: Yeah, absolutely. When I was right out of college, I was working in the media industry. I was working for this television show, The History Channel. I thought that somehow I had gotten to the point in college where I thought that working in media was where I wanted to be. I definitely realized at that point, that I was trapped, but instead of at that point learning the empowering behaviors that would get me out of that and really defining who I was, I just kind of kept running to these different places.

I knew already at that point that I needed to make a difference in the world, so I kept looking for things to do that would be altruistic or otherwise something that would improve at least someone else's life. But the one life that I was forgetting to look at was my own. So, I bit off way more than I could chew, and then just found myself strangling on everything I had done because I wasn't taking care of myself first.

It really all culminated where I ended up at this camp in Florida. It's sort of like a boot camp without the boot for kids who had been arrested and instead of going to jail, the judge gave them an option to go to this camp. It was a really fantastic idea that was implemented maybe not ideally. So basically, I was living in a tent in the middle of the swamps right on the edge of the Everglades in South Florida. I was in charge of a group of 10-12 teenage boys who were in there for things from stealing a Snickers bar at the local pharmacy to selling crack on the corner.

It was really intense. It was a 24-hour a day, five days a week job and I was in way over my head. I was stuck there because I had created for myself this idea that I needed to be the kind of person who did good things for people, but I didn't really take the time to specify what those things were and what my strengths were and how to best use those. So, I ended up in this situation; it was really tough. Kids would wake up at 3:00 a.m. and start fighting and I had to get up at 3:00 a.m. and deal with it with them.

It became a situation with all sorts of sleep deprivation, constantly just high stress, and it got me to the point where I was basically at my wit's end and totally burned out. I was staying up all through the night even when the kids weren't fighting because I would wake up with just suddenly

feeling like something was wrong. I'd look around and it would be all quiet. I definitely felt stuck there.

One of the other things that contributed to that is that at a job like that, they often ask for a specific time commitment because it is such a tough situation. So, I knew I had committed to two years there and I didn't want to go back on my word, but I also knew that it wasn't the healthiest place for me, so I felt really trapped.

But at the same time, I mean, this was a therapeutic camp so there were lots of concepts that we were teaching the kids and also, therefore, learning for ourselves about goal setting, about how to look at the world in an empowering way, and about how to take control of your own life. So, here I was learning all of these things and teaching them to the kids and at the same time, just absolutely in a mess.

Rachel: So what happened? Did you end up staying the two years?

Chad: I left at 19 months. I decided at that point, I was no longer any good for the kids and therefore my commitment was already over. If I couldn't be there and be fully responsible and committed to helping those kids while I was there, then just sticking around because there was time left on my contract didn't make any sense. It wasn't going to improve the lives of any of those kids. I needed to focus on improving my own life and getting my own story straight first.

Rachel: Yeah, well good for you for being able to make that decision and not just forcing yourself to do it because you said you were going to do it. I'm curious, you said that you had decided that you wanted to help people, but you didn't define what that looked like. So I'm curious, how did you know that you wanted to help people?

Chad: I grew up in a family that was very much focused on altruism and being responsible people for the world and for our neighbors, but it was always kind of nebulous what that meant. It was just an inherent part of the culture I grew up in that one should be making a positive impact on the world, but not inherent to that was what that impact looked like.

Rachel: So after you had that experience at that boot camp minus the boot, how did you figure out how you wanted to help the world? Did you do some kind of exercise or something to get more clarity?

Chad: I definitely did a lot of introspection. I did a lot of sort of just working on how I would improve my own life to the point where I wasn't feeling stuck or I wasn't feeling trapped or I didn't have a bunch of credit card debt that I had racked up because I was too focused on other people. Really, it was a matter of focusing on myself first and then keeping my eye open for the opportunities that I knew would suit my strengths.

I couldn't pick those until I really knew what my strengths were, so I had to really focus on just self-development, start where I am, start with who I am, and then define what I wanted to do moving forward. For me, it turned out that the environment is a huge passion of mine. I feel like if we want to have a successful, sustainable future for humanity, if we all want to see ourselves thriving five years down the road, a year down the road, next week, we need to have a place that we can live those successful lives that isn't toxic to us.

Rachel: Absolutely. That makes a lot of sense. I'm curious, when you were arriving to that and you were saying you had to focus on yourself and you grew up in this family that was all about you've got to make a positive impact in the world, did you feel selfish when you were focusing on yourself? How did it feel while you were kind of changing your perspective?

Chad: It did feel selfish at first. It felt intensely selfish to quit, to camp in Florida, and it felt a bit selfish to just be very focused on what do I need to do now for me? It was something that I wasn't used to. I liken it to what the airline flight attendants will say when you're about to take off and they're doing the whole safety spiel. They say, "In case of an emergency, if the oxygen bags fall, you've got to put your own oxygen mask on first and then you can turn to help someone else."

It seems obvious when they say it and it seems a, "Well, duh!" kind of thing, but until I really lived it and got to the point where I was running out of my own oxygen, I really didn't realize just how important that is that you really have to take care of yourself first. This is what I came to: If I didn't take care of myself and I became more of a burden on the rest of the world, then that was even more selfish.

Rachel: So how did you end up coming to that conclusion?

Chad: Yeah, well I mean, I got to the point when I was at camp where I realized that I was basically headed down a path of self-destruction because I was not taking care of myself and I had to choose: Do I either just let myself go this way or do I make a big change? So, I decided to make a big change. I left camp and I started to look into every single possible self-help group I could find. I read everything that Tony Robbins wrote, Guy Finley...

I started taking yoga, lifting weights, riding my bike more. I threw myself into self-improvement with as much passion as I had previously thrown into helping other people without that self-improvement component. What I discovered, through time, was that everything I was learning from all the people I was reading, from all the people I was talking to, from all the lessons and different activities and things I was taking part in, was that there are basically four things that it boiled down to, for me anyway.

I think it holds true across for most people, that if you practice these four things, it really can help you turn your life around. And those are gratitude, mindfulness, grit, and time in nature. I just created for myself a situation, a routine where I made sure that every day I was practicing gratitude and I was practicing mindfulness through meditation and yoga and I was practicing going out into nature. Then grit actually is a more interesting one to practice because the whole point of grit is sticking to things. It's sticking to things. It's perseverance, which is not something you practice on its own, but something you practice through persevering through other things.

Rachel: That's really interesting. So how did you practice gratitude? Did you have a specific practice?

Chad: I did at first. I don't do it anymore, but I used to do a gratitude journal. That's one of the classic ways of practicing gratitude. Before I left the camp in Florida, in the very beginning when I was just using it to get through my day, I had a watch that had a timer that would just reset every time it went off. So, I set it for half an hour and every half hour it would go off and I would stop it from beeping. No matter what was going on, I would smile and look around—force a smile on my face even if I didn't feel happy and I would look around at my surroundings and I would find at least one thing to be grateful for.

There was always something. That practice alone got me through so much stress and so many bizarre situations that would happen at camp. It was immensely powerful and basically, I think it saved my sanity there. Then once I got out of that situation, it led to immediate improvements in my own feeling of self-worth and feeling about how the world was in general and that gave me the positivity to move forward in an empowering way.

Rachel: That's such a great practice. It's true that standing up taller, doing a smile, it starts to just change all the patterning in your body and you start to basically fool yourself into thinking you're happy.

Chad: Absolutely. There's a great [TED Talk by Amy Cuddy](#). I don't know if you've seen it about how you can hold your body in certain positions that actually are able to impact your neurochemical and hormonal balance. Basically, it's like a fake it until you make it kind of thing, but it's not even faking it. It's just you literally put yourself in a specific position and that changes how you feel in your brain.

Rachel: That's such a good piece for everyone listening. Even as you're listening now, you can practice just moving around in different ways and see how you feel. The classic example is when you're slouching, so you slouch, put your head down, and see how you feel. Then sit up straight and you feel

completely different both ways. It's so cool that we have all these resources just within ourselves to be able to make that big of a change.

Chad: Yeah, absolutely.

Rachel: I'd just love to touch a little bit on each of the four pieces because I've never heard anyone break it down like this, so it's really interesting. So, gratitude—that makes sense. I think that's a great practice. Then, with the mindfulness, you said you were doing meditation and yoga. Did you have like a specific schedule that you followed for it or was it one a day? I'd love to hear more about that.

Chad: Yoga, I tried to practice every day, but made a commitment to do it at least three days a week for an hour at a time. I also had sort of a wake up yoga routine that I did every day. I still do. That's part of my every day wake up, before I eat breakfast, I do about 20 minutes of yoga-based stretching and then I do about 15 minutes of meditation. I say something specific or crazy, out there spiritualist just literally sitting for 15 minutes and focusing on just breathing, not running after the thoughts.

If thoughts pop into your head then you just sort of let them be there and you don't have to chase it down to follow and think, "Oh, what am I going to do today?" and that leads to, "What am I going to do tomorrow?" and that leads to overall goals. You just don't have to chase the thoughts down that track. "What am I going to do today? Did I forget to turn the furnace off because it's way too hot out now.

Well, it doesn't matter right now." Then, that combined with moving meditation. Moving mindfulness in daily life, letting yourself have a moment in whatever's going on to just sort of be fully there and not thinking ahead about what you need to say next or what you need to do next or where you need to go next. It really allows your brain to then focus on some of the things that it would have otherwise missed.

Everyone's got sort of a bandwidth in their head—a certain number of things to focus on before they run out of brain capacity. It's about the same for everyone in terms of number of things. There's been a bunch of studies done that focus on how you can keep in your head about five to nine different things at once, which is why phone numbers are seven digits long. When you exceed that, things drop off your radar.

There's so much going on in the world all at once that if you try to focus on everything, you would be in the hundreds and thousands of things that you could be thinking of. When you allow yourself to be preoccupied and when you allow yourself to over-think and consider all of these different possibilities for the future all the time, that means you're missing out in the daily right now, right here, what's going on.

That means that there are probably a lot of opportunities that are just flying right by and you never even knew they were there. It means that there are things to be grateful for that are happening all around you that you may never see because you're just focused on your five to nine other things that may happen to be negative. So, it's just the mindfulness aspect is really about being aware of where you are and letting go of having to think about everything all the time.

Rachel: What is it about yoga that you find so helpful?

Chad: The mind is—it's in your brain and body combination. Your brain is part of the body; your body is a whole unit. As human beings in Western culture, we tend to kind of separate the two and we think of education as brain stuff and exercise as body stuff. But the fact of the matter is, they go together very closely. Exercise changes your brain chemistry, like I was saying about the research studies done.

Your physical position changes your brain chemistry. Doing something like yoga takes a whole bunch of things that can affect how we think and then combines that with the physical aspects of what you do with your body that also can affect how you think. So, when I'm doing yoga, it's something about the movements and the motion and holding different poses makes it a lot easier for me to be in the moment. It gives me something to focus on that is here and now.

It empowers my brain to be totally focused on just that. I know that there are people, who that doesn't work for quite as well. They'll talk about being in yoga class and constantly thinking about what they're doing the rest of the week. That's something that comes with practice. There are different practices that are more effective for different people. For me, yoga is a very effective way of getting myself into a position physically and metaphorically where I'm able to just focus on the moment.

Rachel: For being out in nature, I know you're in Portland now so it's easier to get to some beautiful, beautiful areas. I know there are just gorgeous gardens. I'm curious, for people that are living in cities, what would you tell them about getting out in nature? How could they do that?

Chad: Nature's always a lot closer than you think it is. I lived in Boston for a while. It may take a little bit more planning to get to somewhere that's a great wooded, sort of secluded area, but it can be done. I grew up in Connecticut and I went to school close to New York City so I know where the places are around there, too. But even when you're in the middle of a city, just a city park, just anywhere that when you look around you, you see more leaves or nature. If you're in the desert, maybe it's not leaves, maybe it's cacti, but if you see more nature than houses or more nature than cars.

It doesn't have to be the wilderness. It doesn't have to be the sort of prototypical forest with the babbling brook sort of thing. It just needs to be somewhere that you can feel at all connected to the non-human made world. Sometimes the best you can do are potted plants. Even if it's a human curated version of that natural world, like an arboretum or something, it's still amazingly helpful to your body and to your mind to have that connection with the greater system that is this whole rhythm.

Rachel: Yeah, I can see how being out in nature just pulls you into the bigger picture of just this isn't all just about whatever's going on for me right now or whatever the problems are right in front of me, but just to really get that expanse of perspective of all these different things going on. There's an exercise that I heard about a few years ago.

It was basically like if you think about all your problems and stuff, imagine them in kind of like a little black speck and if you put this huge white circle that is the world around that black spec, it's amazing even just doing something that simple to show you like it's just one little thing in this huge world. There's so many other things going on. Just being able to step out of that is just super helpful.

Chad: Yeah, absolutely.

Rachel: Did you say you go into nature every day?

Chad: It depends on what level of nature. Every day I make sure to spend some time, so I ride my bike when I commute and I ride it all over town whenever I basically go anywhere. Even if it's just the moment of wheeling my bike out from the mudroom down the path to the street. I have a garden. It's not huge.

I live on a smaller than average city lot, but I've taken the space that I have and filled it with plants and nature and things that attract wildlife as well. Every morning, I wake up to the sound of birds that people who live two houses down don't have those birds because they didn't set up the plants that the birds like. So, I've just sort of created an environment where every day I am sort of in nature.

If that's not possible because of being in an apartment, then potted plants and any kind of plants that you put around you just if you can create a nook somewhere that has more green around you than you can see wall space. That's sort of the daily level one. Then I also make a concerted effort to get out every weekend and go on a hike. Now, that is easier here in Portland than it is in some places.

But, I don't think I've ever been anywhere that there wasn't somewhere that if you planned ahead, you could hop on the bus or in a car and get somewhere within half an hour to an hour just know that you could walk

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around and be in nature. If it's harder, then maybe that's not every week, but as often as you reasonably can.

Rachel: Yeah, I've been thinking about it. I've been to so many different places. I can't think of anywhere where I haven't been able to, at least within a half an hour, go out into nature. So the last thing, grit, what does that look like for you?

Chad: Grit is stick-to-itiveness, it is perseverance, it is the character trait that has been extremely studied and looked over and found to be basically the highest predictor of success. People who rate high on having grit, on having that trait of sticking with it when things get rough, sticking with it when things get boring—that is the greatest indicator that whatever your goals, you will probably achieve them.

Really, what it comes down to is sticking with it through tough times, through when things get difficult. I think even more importantly because we're in such an easily distractible world right now, sticking with it when things get boring. There are a lot of goals that in order to achieve them, you need to go through some long stretches of either detail work or not much happening.

Grit means keeping your focus 100% even when there's very little to be focused on, even when it feels like, "Oh, I want to go over here and look at this other thing." In terms of physical tasks, when you're in the middle of working on a project, you get to that last little stage where there's all these little details that have to be done but it's mostly done, it's really easy to get distracted and move on to other things because you know you're almost done. Grit is the practice of sticking with it and not going off to those other things so you really are 100% done.

Rachel: As soon as you said the piece about the boring, it's like a "ding" went off in my head. It's something that people don't really talk about very much, but I think it's a really, really strong point to think about.

Chad: Yeah, focused, committed, consistent action.

Rachel: Love it. Do you have any resources around that, which you like? I know, for me, I love the book, [The Slight Edge](#). Was there anything that helped you learn more about it or is it just kind of something you've been practicing?

Chad: It's just kind of something I've been practicing. I had a really crazy time in Florida. But I'll tell you, there's nothing better for practicing grit than being in a situation where you can't walk away, where you can't get distracted by something else. So, that's one of the things that I do, is I create that kind of situation only these days I'm more mindful to create it where it won't be

quite so unhealthy consequence for me to be in Florida where we were there with that situation.

You just pick a thing that, this is going to be my grit practice. Usually, it's something else that I need to do anyway or maybe for someone it would be the time in nature. Maybe time in nature and a grit practice would be the exact same thing if it's not something they've ever been used to doing. Just making that commitment and telling yourself that you'll do everything you need to, to make that happen on a consistent basis.

That could be a way of practicing grit. The other thing that is sort of approaching it from the other side, just like our brains have a limited capacity to process the world around us, we can only focus on a certain number of things at once, also we have a limited amount of willpower. Basically, you wake up every morning with a certain amount of willpower. You're going to use some of it for some things, and willpower will replenish, but only over time and usually overnight with a good night's sleep. A lot of people don't get very good night's sleep, either.

But, that's beside the point. The main thing here is that if you wake up and spend your morning deciding what kind of latte you're going to have, which clothes you're going to wear, and focusing all of this willpower on these little things that maybe don't matter in the big picture, then you're going to use up the willpower that you have for the day before you get to the big decisions, before you get to the important ones, before you get to the point where you're trying to wrap up a project and you just can't seem to keep your brain focused.

You want to wander off and do something else. So for me, one of the greatest ways to improve my own capacity for grit is to make sure that I'm not over-thinking and spending too much time and willpower on the things that don't matter as much. So, for me that's done creating a routine. This is what I do when I wake up in the morning and it becomes automatic.

It's interesting; I was just reading an article about why you often see CEOs, presidents, and prime ministers—they have a closetful of the same suit. They don't ever have to decide what they're wearing in the morning because they want to save even that little bit of willpower for the important decisions that they need to make later in the day.

Rachel: Chad, you talked about this routine thing and I felt like I wanted to get up out of my desk and just dance around. That is such a good point. Nobody has brought that up yet on the podcast. I got so excited. That is so true. For people listening, some of the things you can do that are super helpful are just like planning out your meals for the week in advance. You can batch up your food and have it in your freezer, or make a menu of what you're going to make every day to take the decisions off from you so that you can focus on your creative time. Such a good point.

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Or having your to-do list ahead of time, like making them done so that when you wake up in the morning you know exactly where you're going to get going. You don't have to think about things. You don't get derailed by email—all this stuff, just to be able to get in there and get going. It's such a high-leverage activity. I am so glad you brought it up.

Chad: Yeah, it's hugely powerful. A lot of people think of routine and planning ahead as a time management thing and it is, but it's not only good for your time management, but it's great just for your ability to focus on the world around you.

Rachel: I love it. What are some of the practices right now that you're working on for grit?

Chad: Right now, there's a lot of big things happening, a lot of opportunities, and it's really easy for me to say, "Oh, I want to just jump right in to this day and not do my morning stretching and meditation." Or, just kind of skip breakfast and move on to this great project I have in mind for the day. For me, it's really making that time and getting that morning routine happen and making sure that no matter how excited I am about what's coming up next that I make sure that I'm doing everything that's just a regular day-to-day kind of thing.

Rachel: Have you seen that app, [Way of Life](#)?

Chad: I have not.

Rachel: It is spectacular. I'm loving it. Basically, you just go through and put in everything that you want to get done every day and then you just check off if you did it or not, so "yes," "no," or "skip," or whatever. "Skip" would be if you only want to do something a few times a week. It is so helpful. It's kind of like that site, [Don't Break the Chain](#). I don't know if you've ever heard of that, but basically—

Chad: Yeah.

Rachel: You have, yeah. So, it's basically like that for those of you listening. Don't Break the Chain is something that, I think Jerry Seinfeld created. Was it he was trying to create jokes every day or something?

Chad: I think so.

Rachel: So basically, he wanted to create the jokes every day and to make sure that he did it every day, he would put a big checkmark on his calendar for every single day that he wrote some new jokes. He kept doing the checkmarks and he never wanted to have a big red X for not getting it

done. Just that little check mark helped him out so much that he ended up having this calendar system.

It ended up becoming this thing, Don't Break the Chain where basically you can go through and just put a red check mark—I don't know if it's red or green—but the point is, you put this big checkmark every time you get something done and you just keep riding the momentum of the checkmarks. Way of Life is just like that.

I have all the things that I want to get done every day, so like take my probiotic, do eye exercises, exercise, drink 80-ounces of water. It's just such an easy way. You get a little green light every time you do something. Then they'll do trends and they'll show you how many green lights you had and everything. I love it.

Chad: That's awesome, yeah. That sounds great. I do that sort of on a more informal, not immediately tracked by any sort of tool level, but every morning, I set myself three intentions for the day. They have to be smart goals, they don't have to be measurable, achievable and realistic and time based. I'll set those in the morning, then every night as I go to bed, just review, go over how did I do on my goals?

Just like the things that you set, sometimes if I realize that I've been dehydrated a lot lately, I'll set a goal to drink a certain amount of water in the day or whatever, just to make sure that I evaluate that at the end of the day. It's not even so much about reward or punishment whether I achieve the goal or not, it's just about notice. The more you focus on just noticing, on whether you're actually doing the things you're intending to do, the more you find yourself actually doing them.

Rachel: Absolutely. I like that you do the three intentions. You don't overwhelm yourself with having ten or something like that. A good practice and like you said, the mind knows it can focus on five to nine different things so if you're putting too much, then you're not going to get anything. It just feels overwhelming.

Chad: Yeah, absolutely.

Rachel: I'm curious, when you were in that boot camp and then to where you're at now, you obviously had to make a lot of mindset shifts and choices and you've told us about some of them. Were there any other choices or beliefs that you made or that you told yourself that you haven't told us yet that just really helped you evolve?

Chad: Yeah, there's this one concept that I'm kind of in the middle of fine-tuning how to explain it right now in a concise and easy way, but it's something I call Story Shift and it's the idea that as human beings, we are creatures of the narrative, we are storytellers by nature is how our brains remember

things. It's how we process things. It's how we make sense of the world. It's just our story.

The idea of Story Shift is to take the story that you're bringing, it's creating naturally for yourself and that it being also put into your head by the world around you and to take control of that and shift it in an empowering direction. For me, that was a focus when I was in Florida on situations where things were stressful. It was a reframe of the situation. Instead of why is little Joey climbing that tree and throwing rocks at the other kids, it was what can I learn from this situation and how can I be most helpful to Joey who's sitting there in the tree, who's obviously got some sort of need that's not being met.

For me, it was how do I step outside of the immediate moment and look at this in a way that allows me to make a better decision. The process that I came up with is to step back, sometimes literally, and imagine five years from now, if I tell this story to someone, what story am I telling? What are the actions that I take that I want to be telling five years from now? What's the moral of the story that I'm going to have even if there's no action that I can take that changes things in a significant way?

It's an empowering thing to step back and get yourself out of a moment when there's something stressful going on, out of it enough to really look at it through the clearer eyes of someone who's not right in there with it with you. If that someone is just you five years from now and whoever your imagined audience is that you're telling the story to, that's one way to do it. So that idea of in the moment Story Shift is one thing and then the other side of that point is the past.

I am a firm believer that the past has no control over us except for what we give it. It's gone, it's already happened, and there are consequences to things that have already happened, but moving forward, you start where you are and the past has no control over where you go from there. It may have put you where you are, but it has no control over where you go next. What I like to do is take the stories from my past that I feel like I'm having a hard time letting go of them or of the consequences or of where I assume that means I need to go in the future and I literally rewrite the story in my head.

I'll do different ways of doing that. I'll either literally write it out in a more empowering way or I'll use neurolinguistic programming techniques and I'll do techniques to sort of review in my head memory and sort of change it into a more empowering one. I find that to be tremendously powerful in terms of just priming your brain for where to go forward without letting past stories or the story we've created for ourselves from past events—turn it into something much more empowering and much more positive.

Then, on top of that, there's been a lot of research recently about memory and I find it absolutely fascinating what they discovered is that every time you remember something, every time you bring up an event, you literally rewrite that memory in your neurons, in your brain cells. Every time you remember something, you're making a new copy of it and rewriting the old one. So, why not take control of that in an empowering way?

Why not make sure that every time you remember something, even something that feels really negative, that you just add one more tweak of what was empowering about this? What was great about this? If it's something that isn't going to be in control of my life from now on, why don't I just rewrite it to something that's awesome about my past instead of something that's crazy.

Rachel: This has come up in a couple of podcasts and I think it's such a good point is we're constantly just acting out of past things. Our new responses to things are often shaped by what we used to do, so if we just change around what happened, like you're saying, and we have new stories then we basically just get to create new responses, which is so cool and so empowering.

When people can really get the freedom in that, it's just the most liberating, life opening perspective ever. The other thing that I wanted to touch base on is you were talking about future pacing, so basically, you were saying, "What can I say about this five years from now?" Have you read, [Man's Search for Meaning](#) by Viktor Frankl?

Chad: A long time ago, yeah, I vaguely remember it.

Rachel: Yeah, so basically, for those of you listening, this guy, Viktor Frankl was in the concentration camps and the Holocaust and he was in Auschwitz, I believe. He just has this book about how he was able to get through it. One of the things that he talks about is that future pacing where he would sit there and would watch people dying in front of him and being tortured and the most horrific stuff that you could possibly think of and he would, in his mind, step out of it and think about what life will be like after he got out of there.

He would think about all the positive things. He said that was one of the biggest things that was able to help him get through it and come out a survivor because so many other people, he said, just made the decision like, "I can't get through this," and basically, they just lost their will to live. At that point, they were counting the days until they died. It's amazing how powerful our minds are.

Chad: Yeah, absolutely.

Rachel: It's such a good book.

Chad: Something that I would use with the kids, too, and actually after moving out of Florida, I did end up working in a program with at risk youth in a YMCA, from a much more empowered starting point. I used this technique with them. Even just everyday little things when someone was really stressing about something or when two kids were in an argument over something, it was like a personal preference argument, "Oh, I like this better than that," creating all of this stress around it.

It's such a nice reminder sometimes to say, "Hey, five years from now, when you look back and tell the story of this moment, is that decision going to matter about whether you get the green one, blue one, or whatever they're arguing about? A) Is it going to matter? and B) What story do you really want to be telling? Create now the history that you want to be telling in the future."

Rachel: I like that, create now the history that you want to be telling in the future. You're really good with words. There was something else you had in the blog post, "If you bite off more than you can chew eventually you'll choke," I love that one, too.

Chad: Thanks.

Rachel: Yeah. The thing I wanted to ask you about Florida and even just outside of Florida, when you were making all these changes in your life, when you were considering yourself selfish in the beginning, I'm curious, how did this all impact the people around you?

Chad: Yeah, absolutely. The main thing that once I made a commitment to take care of myself, the melodrama and the stress and the weight that I had been putting on the shoulders of people around me was lifted from them. So it was, again, one of those things where if taking care of yourself might feel selfish, but ultimately, it's more selfish not to because there's so much I didn't realize I had been pushing people away, I had been casting my own stresses, negative feelings, and thoughts on all these people around me.

When I started to take care of myself, it was like, "Hey, Chad, what's going on? I want to hang out with you again." I was like, "Oh, yeah. Oh, cool. Okay." So, it was really great for my relationships with people around me. I have one story that is sort of the ultimate proof of what taking yourself could do. I had been feeling so stuck at this place in Florida. I was feeling so stuck at this place where I was internally.

When I made the commitment to take care of myself, to make a change, and to do something different, I got out of the situation, but I didn't know where I was going so I figured, "Okay, I'll just move back in with my parents for a month or two while I figure out what's going on." I was 25 at

the time and it was like, “Okay, I can figure something out. I’ll just go live with my parents for a couple months.”

I didn’t have any clear goals other than to take care of myself. But, I’ll tell you what happened was, instead of flying to Connecticut, the flight from Florida to Boston was, it turns out, significantly cheaper than from Florida to Connecticut and Boston’s just a few hours bus ride away and my sister was living in Boston at the time. So, I bought a plane ticket to Boston figuring I’ll visit my sister for a couple of days, hang out with her, then I’ll take a bus down to Connecticut and figure out what I was going to do for the rest of my life.

Well, three days in Boston turned into a week. I really enjoyed it there. By the end of that week, I had a job and an apartment and I had met the woman who would become my wife. This was all within one week of right after having started to take care of myself, get myself into a better place mentally, physically, geographic and make that change and really start focusing. It was literally the best week of my life. It was the immediate result of taking care of myself and then therefore fostering the relationships with people around me.

Rachel: Yeah, I think there’s something to when you decide and when you make a clear, full-body decision that you’re going to do something, I feel like things just kind of line up to support you with it.

Chad: Absolutely.

Rachel: That’s such a great story. Basically, it seems like, for you, you decided to take care of yourself and everything was positive. You didn’t have any pushback from friends who said you were changing or anything like that?

Chad: I left them in Florida.

Rachel: So what about when you left? Were the people mad at you or how did that go?

Chad: Yeah, I definitely had some coworkers and friends there who didn’t understand. They were more suited at their point in their life to be in that situation there and they didn’t see how it was affecting me that I wasn’t ready for it. For them it was harder to understand like, “Why are you leaving before your two-year commitment?” But, honestly, when people go to work at that camp, more than half leave before six months.

So there was a little bit of, “Well, at least you stuck it out this far.” But, yeah, there were definitely people that I burned some bridges and I just had to be, “Hey, that’s their decision. I’ll be open to talking with them in the future if they decide that they’re ready for it.” There are so many people in the world with so many possible, powerful relationships with people that

aren't going to chew my head off about something that I know is good for me, so I'm just going to focus on that.

Rachel: That's what I was going to ask you, what you told yourself. That's a great anchor point so that when you have the conversations, you don't get sucked into, "Okay, you know, maybe you're right. Maybe I'll just stick it out here for the other five months." I'd love to know, because I'd like to make it real for listeners, in your experience, what's something that people usually don't share about improving yourself, either it's not sexy or it just doesn't paint this like rainbows and butterfly kind of picture?

Chad: Yeah, so one of the big things that I had to learn and it seems to be...I don't know, I see it everywhere—this idea that you can have it all. You can do anything you want to. That's just not true. I don't mean to say that in a disempowering way, but life is about making hard decisions. It's about making choices that, by their nature, choices cut off possibility to go the other way.

If you have two paths ahead of you, you cannot walk them both sometimes. Sometimes you can find a way to combine things. That's great, that's awesome and I encourage people to look for ways to combine their passions and make the best of every possibility. But there are certain incompatible forward paths that you just absolutely cannot take. For me, I could not stay on a path of trying to help those kids in Florida without getting myself out of there and helping myself.

Those were not compatible paths. I think that the not so sexy idea is that you can't have it all. You have to make clear and well considered decisions about what you do want to have and go after those. Otherwise, you're just going to stress yourself out chasing different dreams in different directions that just won't come together.

Rachel: Interesting. I haven't heard anyone say that, but it makes sense. So, how do you decide?

Chad: Yeah, that's the question, isn't it? That's for me, where everyday practices come in. When I am taking care of myself and when I'm focused on gratitude and mindfulness and when I'm taking time in nature and when I'm making sure that I'm practicing grit—sticking with the things I've already decided with until they no longer serve me, it becomes a matter of the choices going forward, they get helpful.

I'm not going to say they get easy. I mean, there are hard choices in life that are just not going to be easy, but they become more of an empowering thing. Instead of, "Oh, no, I have to decide." It's, "Awesome, I get to decide." When I'm taking care of myself coming from that place, it becomes much more easier to step back, take a look and, "Okay, this is

what I'm going to do." Then, also, the idea that you don't have to stick with one thing over the course of forever.

Practice the grit, stick with it until you know what your results are looking like and then re-evaluate. Always re-evaluate because sometimes your goals may shift. If you're not even aware that your goals have subconsciously shifted, then you're chasing after a dream that no longer is really your dream. So, for me, doing the hard choices and deciding what to do it's really just about being present in the moment, being aware of what I deeply want most and then making sure that whatever action is leading toward that.

Rachel: What is something right now that you're struggling with, that you are working through right now and how are you getting through it?

Chad: Right now, my wife and I are in the process of doing an adoption. It's a process that is a constant learning process. The one thing I'm having the hardest time right now is that we've been in the waiting pool for this adoption to happen for a year and a half now. Every day my life is, I could find out today that I'm going to have a baby tomorrow or it could be two years from now, or longer.

The practice of really figuring out how to be okay with that, how to live life in a way that is still fully living life while I'm also kind of on hold in this one regard, is a daily effort to be not discouraged that it hasn't come through yet. We decided to go this route at least three years ago now and to just keep on keeping on with this decision. This is what we want to be doing and even when it's stressful and even when we think, "Oh, my gosh, this will never actually happen," to stay positive, and to stay focused on the goal of creating an awesome family. At the same time, how do I design my life around this uncertainty?

My brother's getting married this summer and he's back in Connecticut, so I'm going to be flying out to Connecticut. There is this constant, ever present possibility that we could get a call from the adoption agency saying, "We need you to go to the hospital right now. There's a baby with your name on it." Making big plans is really difficult right now, especially involving travel.

So, it's just how do I balance all those things? That's really what I've been working on right now is how do I keep living life and keep making sure that I'm moving forward in a positive direction while there's this factor of no matter what I plan right now, it might all completely change with a phone call tomorrow.

Rachel: Oh my gosh, like you're telling me this and I'm feeling so much tension running through my body because just the idea of not knowing what tomorrow's going to look like, that's a huge lifestyle change, obviously. So,

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what are you doing? I know you said you have your normal practices. You're doing the yoga, the mindfulness, are you just pretty much doing those four things? I mean, I'm sure that's helping a lot.

Chad: I'm sticking to my four core practices. Those are very centering and just focusing for me and then at the same time, I just have to sort of come to terms with if I decide to travel, maybe I'm going to have to spend a bunch of money to hop back on a plane and come right back up. That's just something I've had to make peace with and set aside some money in a bank account. If I go anywhere and do stay, just making sure I get travel insurance.

Most of all, it's just about staying focused on the idea that the process that we're doing, which will result in an open adoption. That's one of the reasons why it's a long process because it's sort of this matchmaking effort between finding the birthparent and the adoptive family that go together because it's an ongoing relationship, at least at some level, so that the child grows up knowing both sides of the story, both sides of the biological side of the family and the adoptive side of the family.

The open adoption concept is something that I believe is really important to the healthy psychological and emotional development of an adopted child. It is the reason why this is taking longer than a regular closed adoption that they used to do in the past, but it's also by far the best decision for the life of the child that I'm raising.

When things get stressful and I get annoyed that it's taking a long time or that we have a potential match with a birthparent and we meet them and she doesn't choose us and either get depressed about it in some small way or aggravated that things aren't seeming to work out, I just have to trust the process and know that I'm working with people who are experts at this at the adoption agency and I'm working with this process that has been created that is going to result in the best possible future for the child.

That's what I keep my focus on. It's a lot easier for me than to deal with the day-to-day not knowing what's going to happen next and the day-to-day disappointment of things taking longer than I expect them to, it's a lot easier to deal with that when I know that it's ultimately by far the best for the child.

Rachel: Yeah, one of your biggest keys to success, it seems like, is just constantly keeping perspective.

Chad: Yeah, absolutely. It's plane shifts; it's the huge story that whatever lens you're viewing your current story through is the one that is most empowering because you have so many choices in your day-to-day life. You can choose to look at the world—this is the cliché—through rose-

colored glasses. That's way oversimplifying things, but it's true that you can choose the lens through which you view any situation.

You can choose how you interpret someone's meaning and you can choose the context around that meaning that gives it its place in the greater overall picture. Sometimes it's really hard to choose that in the moment, but even then, you can take a step back afterwards and sort of reconfigure it and, "Okay, this was really stressful and here's what I thought it meant, but maybe it's really something else. Maybe it's something more empowering." You can always choose that more empowering option.

Rachel: Yeah, the way I see it is, there's really no point not to. I mean, even if it's not the right one, at least it makes you feel better.

Chad: Right. The idea of whether there is a right one, the idea of whether there even is sort of an objective, real world is something that even physicists are having a hard time with right now. Quantum mechanics is the idea that an electron—you can either know where it is or how fast it's moving, but as soon as you measure one of those, it automatically changes the other.

So, there's this whole uncertainty thing about how literally do you make the world impact what's happening in the world and conversely, how you process that in your head. I mean, everything's so uncertain and so dynamic flowing and moving around you. I don't think there even is a right answer necessarily all the time, so you might as well choose, of the many ways of looking at the world, you better choose the one that's more empowered, otherwise why not?

Rachel: I love it. One of the things that I'm going to be doing soon is remember those choose your own adventure kind of books?

Chad: Yeah.

Rachel: So, I've been just writing about basically just giving people different storylines and then coming up with like you can respond this way, you can respond this way and see the different chain of events from how each one goes. It's just been so much fun to see how people can take one event and go a zillion different ways with it and have completely different experiences.

Chad: Yeah, that sounds awesome.

Rachel: I can't wait for it. So, a lot of people right now might be listening to you and inspired by you, but still scared to make changes in their own life. What advice would you give them?

Chad: Start out with yourself. Don't do what I did and focus on trying to make change in your life by trying to make changes in someone else's life. You have to put that oxygen mask on yourself before you can help anyone else. Start out with yourself and start small. One of the things that I do, I take concepts from permaculture, which started out as a simple agricultural science and has since warped into an overall design philosophy that uses the laws of nature and best practices of nature-based concepts of how things work together and translates that into not only design agricultural gardening type things, but also communities and structures.

I'm applying it to my own life. One of the concepts of permaculture is that there are these different zones. Zone one is the zone closest to you and it goes all the way out to zone five and beyond, which is the community and the rest of the world. So, always start with zone one. Start right outside your door. Start right inside your head. Make those small changes that you can right now and then build up toward the bigger ones.

And then the second part of that is in order to make those changes, you have to know what you're changing toward. You have to define who you are. If you're going to get from point A to point B on a map, you have to clearly define both of those points. You can't say, "Oh, I'm just going to make an improvement." You can try all you can, but you don't know where you're going to end up. If you have an A of improving your life, you have to decide what an improved life looks like and then you have to clearly take a look at where you are now so you can plan the route to get from here to there.

Rachel: Totally. I'm writing a goal-setting book actually right now, too. I actually this morning wrote exactly what you just said about you need to have, even if there's something that's like you can say, "I want to have a better relationship or something," so that's one of those things that's hard to tenderly say. Like with money, for example, maybe you say, "I want to make \$5,000 a month.

But if you want to have a better relationship, you can then break it down and what will it look like to have that better relationship? Maybe it's, "My partner really likes words of affirmation," so writing love letters or saying what you appreciate or whatever, but having that clear action plan that makes things so much easier. Otherwise you're, like you said, the family that you grew up in with the great intentions, but it's all nebulous so you don't really have anything to hang your hat on.

Chad: Right. If you don't set your definite goal then it's just playing the game of hot or cold. The game that everyone plays when they're a kid where someone hides something and they tell you to find it and they tell you hot or cold if you move toward it or away from it. If you don't clearly define your goal and know where you're going, then you're just going to be

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randomly moving around and hoping that someone or something inside of you will tell you whether you're getting warmer.

That can be a pretty stressful, long, drawn out process. It's a way to go about things if you really have no other idea about what you're doing. Most people, if they take the time to sit down and clear their mind of everything else and just think about, "When I am more successful at (blank), what does that look like?" And, you know, sometimes you have to revisit that. Sometimes you realize that your goal needs to change from what you originally thought, but as long as you do that periodically and keep moving in that direction, then you will make forward progress.

Rachel: Absolutely. Chad, this has been awesome. There are about six million gold nuggets that you dropped in this and I'm sure everyone who listens is going to take away something else, but I think there's so many different options for people to take away. Really, anyone who listens to this is going to walk away better for having listened to you. So, thank you so much for your time. I'd love to know, where can people go to learn more about you?

Chad: <http://chadhadSELL.com> I just started that about a month and a half ago because I finally realized that I needed to get back into...well, I work at a non-profit so I do all sorts of life-improving things every day, but I felt that I needed to get my story out there and start really helping people who are in a worse situation than I was directly in. So, I'm putting together this website and I've got the book about gratitude practice right on there, and it's just constantly being updated. Every day or two, I'm posting something new, so a great place to keep updated.

Rachel: I'll definitely be checking it out. Yeah, thank you. Thank you so much. This has been great and hopefully we keep in touch because you're amazing.

Chad: Well, thank you much.

Rachel: Talk to you soon.

END

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I really appreciate you.

With love,
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