

Rachel: Welcome to part two of our conversation with Tony Stubblebine. Hopefully you've already listened to [episode one](#) and you've enjoyed it. Now we're going to switch gears a little bit. We'll still cover habits a little bit, but I also wanted to dig in and ask Tony questions about how he was able to build this huge business that he has. Hundreds of thousands of people have used his app, which is incredible. He has investors like Tim Ferriss, Tony Robbins, Twitter founders, Biz Stone and Ev Williams. I wanted to ask him questions about how he was able to get those investors on board, the types of things he said to them. I wanted to ask him about his vision for creating the company. Was it motivated by money or do they have other motivations, like the honest truth, because there's people that say all kinds of things. I wanted to ask him about that.

I asked him practical things especially at the end. We go over how he was able to get this app that has hundreds of thousands of users. He gave some really good tips there. We talked about people who want to be coaching for [Coach.me](#). Right now, there's crazy amounts of opportunity if you're interested in becoming a coach. Funnily, he said that amateur coaches actually had better results than professional coaches a lot of times. There's a side of money/very fulfilling opportunity for you there, too. Then we also do touch into the habits as well. We cover all kinds of ground. Again, this is another really good one. I love listening to Tony's perspective on things. I think he's just a really great thinker with a new way of looking at things and I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did.

Okay, so here we are in part two and now we're going to dig into business building and how you've been able to get to this place where you are now, where you have hundreds of thousands of users and iTunes called out your app as one of the best and you have been backed by Tim Ferriss and Twitter founders and all this good stuff.

Tony: We mentioned Tony Robbins, too, as one of our investors. It is a well-supported company for sure.

Rachel: Okay, so now I need to ask first. How did you get on all these people's radars?

Tony: There's this fantasy about starting a company that all you need is funding and so the first step is that you should just go get funded. You hear these stories about people that got funded just like over coffee. There's two ways that I could describe the start of this company, and

one is that I took Evan Williams out for coffee. He's one of the founders of Twitter and a former CEO of Twitter and I pitched him this idea and he said, "This sounds really fun. Let's work on it together. I'll fund it and help you design the first product and then be on your board and help you with a couple rounds of funding. I'll work with you for the next four years." That did happen, and I think that's this incredibly unhelpful and dishonest way to tell the story, because there's something we said in the last episode, one of the other Twitter founders' phrase, "It took it took 10 years to become an overnight success."

I think the question that everyone needs to ask themselves is, "How did I get that coffee with Evan Williams?" That story is much longer and, I think, much more helpful, which is I always knew I wanted to work in tech. I knew this in high school even. I went and I got a computer science degree, that took me four years. I went and I got a job. I was not doing particularly meaningful work, but I was a professional, I learned what it meant to be a professional. And I started to get the bug to do more important work, so I left that job, which was very comfortable, to work for a company that was less comfortable, where I felt like I was learning more. And I worked very hard there to move from just being an individual contributor, writing code, to actually being a leader and eventually managing people. Then I left that company to work at a startup to be the head of engineering for a startup, and this company was, maybe, 16 people and 12 of them reported to me. This startup is where, really, I feel like the trajectory of my career really started to accelerate. I started at this podcasting startup Odeo, and the CEO of that company was Evan Williams, who was already well known for starting a blogging company, [Blogger](#), which at the time was one of the top 10 most trafficked sites on the internet. Then, again, became even more famous by being a founder of Twitter and one of CEOs of Twitter. They've had several CEOs at this point.

It took many years to put myself in a position where I could work for Evan Williams, and then I did a good job there and I kept in touch with him. And started a company in the meantime that wasn't the best company, but where I learned a lot and became a much better product designer. There's more to running a company than just being able to write code. You have to be able to create something people want and market it and grow it. For me that's 15 years of work, starting with going to college, before I could sit down with Evan and have this coffee. Then once I had the coffee a lot of good things happened there and a lot of our investors are people that he made introductions for. I was at a baseball game with Ev and he asked me who my ideal angel investor

was. Like who's my fantasy, what famous person would I like to invest? I was like, "Well obviously Oprah." He grimaced and said, "Well, I don't think I can get Oprah. I'll try, but I don't think I can." He said, "Who would be number two?" I said, "How about Tony Robbins?" It turns out Tony Robbins follows him on Twitter and he was able to send him a direct message through Twitter and Tony responded right away. We had a meeting set up before the baseball game was over. Which isn't that Ev did all of it, but he did a lot of it. It's true with Tony Robbins and with Tim Ferriss, once I got the meeting, I had to present myself credibly and present the idea credibly. All of that was really made possible by having had a full career in tech.

I feel like entrepreneurs really skip those steps all the time. You hear so many people saying, "Well, you know I have this great idea, it could be a world changer. All I need is for someone to fund me." I always think, "Why on Earth would they fund you? What have you done to make that possible? And if they don't fund you, what are you going to do? Are you willing to spend the next 10 years making yourself more fundable?" I think most people don't really think that way.

Rachel: You mentioned that you're an investor for companies. What do you look for?

Tony: No, I'm not investor, but . . .

Rachel: Advisor?

Tony: Advisor, I am an advisor for companies. I always just care about impact. Is it something I believe in and can I be helpful? I love being an advisor. Hopefully, I give more than I receive, but I learn a lot and it's always worth my time just for that.

Rachel: Absolutely. When you were pitching to Tim and Tony, do you remember any of the things that you mentioned to them, that helped them get on board?

Tony: Yeah, I don't really remember the Tony Robbins pitch, because I was so scared. It was such an intense thing and I'm not sure I did a great job. It may just be that he thought it was a funny lark and for him, the amount that he was investing was not that big a deal. I remember the Tim Ferriss pitch very clearly because it just felt so high stakes to me. I really wanted to work with him and he's hard to get a hold of. And I remember the way it went down is, I'd come home on a Friday evening. I

was really just exhausted from the work week and I had fallen asleep on my couch and then Tim Ferriss called me. He woke up from a dead slumber and I was like, "Well, I have to switch." This is a meditation thing. Being able to switch from wherever you are right now to where you need to be is definitely a skill that I was learning through meditation at that point. So I went from a dead sleep to like completely on and focused in the moment, and he said, "You know I think I live pretty close to you, do you want to go have dinner?" We went and had dinner in our neighborhood and of course I'm watching him like a hawk. I'm like, "All right, is this guy going to put a single carb in his body." He is famous for being a low carb practitioner and it was funny to watch him. And I gave him the general pitch, I felt like no one has really done self-improvement at scale and there has got to be a way that . . . What would happen if there was an always-on force of self-improvement in your life? It could be framed a lot of different ways. It's like, what if you could outsource some of your will power? What if you weren't the person solely responsible for your self-improvement?

Actually, I used an example which I think worked really well for him, which is that I was a little bit jealous of the training we were giving to our dog, because in dog training and all animal training there's a lot of work on shaping. You can't yell at your dog. Your dog does not know what words you're saying. You have to take this other approach, which is gradual shaping of new behaviors with positive reinforcement. I just thought, "This sucks. Here this dog is getting a really thoughtful self-improvement routine that me and my partner Sarah designed." Our dog's name is Eggs by the way, like Eggs Benedict. "Why doesn't anyone do that for me? Maybe I had a little bit of that when I was younger, but I don't have that now. Why is that missing?"

The pitch is all to people that get, immediately, the power of having that. So the pitch originally was just, here's how we think we can provide it and everyone innately bought in to the idea, to the belief that if you could provide it, it would be world changing. That's true with that. When you look at people that we think of them as geniuses and then you get their back story, you just realize, "They're not geniuses, they just had a completely different support system than I had." It's like Mozart's dad was a music teacher. No wonder he was a prodigy. That's a way better way to become a prodigy than your parents don't know anything about music, don't even play music in the home. I would say that Tiger Woods' dad was the best coach of three-year-olds that's ever existed, right? On down the line, a lot of times prodigies have these back stories where they just got trained differently, and if we all had that training and

coaching in our lives . . . The gap between who we are now and who we could be, is not small, it's giant. It's pretty easy to tell a story about making a huge impact in human potential. And most of the people we talk to believe that human potential and human performance and human happiness are all pretty tightly correlated.

Rachel: Yeah. I'm glad I asked that question, because I learned then that it's about, obviously, finding people who have the same core values as you, and then enrolling them in that big picture vision.

Tony: Yes. We've raised money a couple times and we actually have one time where we tried to raise money and we failed, and that was really my takeaway, is that it's okay to fail. In raising money, all that is, is this message that you're not ready to raise money and should go the other way. I think this is a lesson that I really learned around entrepreneurship is, you never have to raise money. There's always a second option. The last company that I started, while I wasn't happy with it at the end, I'm pretty proud of the process, which is I was not qualified to raise money from anyone. The idea wasn't big enough. I wasn't established enough, so I just bootstrapped it. I found paying customers. I built the first version myself. And it never matched my vision, but the company was always constructed in a way that fit within my means. The vast majority of entrepreneurs have the option of keeping their day job or working part-time and bootstrapping their entrepreneurial idea on the side. There's actually a really big benefit of doing it that way, which is you're never forced to go out of business. If you never take on debt, if you never take on investment, if you never really leverage yourself, you always have the option of keeping it small and growing it organically. That could be a really healthy way to start something.

Having started two companies now, that was really the lesson I learned. When it was easy to raise money, we raised money, and when it was impossible to raise money, we did it the other way. That goes back, I think, to that general momentum philosophy. I really don't like to be blocked, and I think in most cases there is no reason that you should let yourself think that you are truly blocked from doing what you want to do. You might be slowed, that happens all the time, but I think you're very rarely blocked.

Rachel: Let's talk about that in terms of, you mentioned when you first started Lift there was that initial momentum, and then it slowed down for a while, and then it picked back up. How did you handle that during that period? What did you do to get over it?

Tony: I think it's really a story of personal faith that, regardless of the outcome, we were doing good work. That the net effect on the world would always be positive. Now I think I'm far enough away from the worst of it to have some perspective. It's like, the trajectory of the company is that we had a lot of undeserved fanfare, that I think I bought into a little bit. I thought, "Wow, who has it better than us? We've got the best supporters in the world. We're going to do great," and then we launched what we launched, which helped a lot of people, millions of people even, but it wasn't going to succeed at the scale that we wanted it to. And we had to change. Change or go out of business were our choices, and I think, because I have so much this in this field, that's the thing I want to be working on for the rest of my life. The change did not frighten me, but it absolutely frightened some people in the company. And so it was a real big shake up in the company, where we had to ask a couple people to leave. A couple people asked to leave themselves, including my co-founder about a year and a half ago.

Co-founder breakups are always incredibly traumatic. For me, I understood his reasoning and I support him a ton and I wish him a great career and in no way judge him for wanting to leave. But it was just heartbreaking for me because among the many goals I had for this company, I really wanted to build a company collaboratively. I bootstrapped my previous company. I was just lonely. I had done it by myself, I didn't have a co-founder and I was very lonely. To lose my co-founder, for me, I was like, "Oh my God, I'm going to be doing this by myself," and I didn't want to do it by myself. It took me a while to back out of that and so I was like, "All right, no matter what, we're going to find out what works. We still have an opportunity here, let's take advantage of it," and that worked us towards coaching until relaunching as Coach.me, which has been great. It just turns out there is an incredible pent up demand for coaching, that's not served by the current coaching market. Because in the current coaching market it's too hard to find a coach. Where would you find a coach? Why would you pay that much money for a coach, often hundreds of dollars, or a lot of coaches ask that you sign up for a 10 session package of a couple thousand dollars. That's a really high barrier to entry.

By moving coaching online and decreasing the price point and doing a bunch of things that made coaching a lot more accessible, we were able to reach all the people in the world that wanted a coach, but never were able to figure out how to get one in the past. From a business perspective, this is the most optimistic I've ever been. Even, this is better

than pre-launch, because now we are launched, we see what works, we see how it's going to grow and it feels incredibly good. And really, in the last month is the first time I let myself think through, "Okay, it's better to think of this as just a different company." Even though it was the same investors and the same corporate entity, it's a different founding team. It's not the same team that launched Lift originally. It's people that have been with me for a while, been with the company for a while. It's a different team and I'm a different entrepreneur. I've learned more about myself, what is my ideal version of the company? That's a big thing that I'm thinking about a lot, and I think it's common for entrepreneurs that, a lot of what energizes them is their own, probably unrealistic, vision for what the company could be. But that vision is so important, not just for the team, but really for you individually, because it's a spark. It's what gets you up in the day. And I find I'm really realizing how hard it was have to have that vision during the darkest days. That's where I really had to just fall back on persistence and faith, which are there. I don't know where they come from sometimes, but definitely there because of the topic that I chose for this company.

Rachel: Totally. When you started your company, were you thinking about monetizing it also, or were you thinking more about the meaningful impact that it could make, or both? I'm asking specifically because I read a lot of people say that these successful companies that they build are all about just super wanting to put into the world and they're so passionate, and the money was a side effect. Then other people, I was reading Felix Dennis' book, [How to Get Rich](#), I think it's called. It's like, "Anyone who says that's a liar." I'm curious of where you fall into that.

Tony: I feel like I tried that first approach on and that it didn't fit me. My first company was a pretty easy to describe business. I could say who the customer was, where the money was coming from, why they were spending that money, where we'd get more customers, where our margins were. It just was a traditional small business, and that felt very healthy to me. I liked the dynamic of that. I loved getting checks in the mail, because I felt like that was validation that we were doing good work for people. Then when I started Lift, which became [Coach.me](#), I felt like I had an opportunity to try it the other way. I remember the Twitter founders would always say, "We're focused on building value first and we'll figure out monetization second." And in a lot of ways I think they're right. That there's never been a company that reached massive scale that didn't then find a great business to add into that. Facebook is a great example, Google is a great example. Google makes a lot of

money off of [AdWords](#), their advertising platform. And I think when they started out as a search engine, they would have had no idea that that was an opportunity for them. That story does work, but also I find that it doesn't fit. It makes me uncomfortable. When we switched to [Coach.me](#), a lot of things made me a lot happier about that switch, and one of them is I understood how the company worked for the first time. It suddenly became so much easier to create these win, win situations where we're working in partnership with a community of, right now, 1,000 coaches, but probably, I expect, tens of thousands of coaches over the lifetime of the company. We know how we're going to stay in business. Having revenue helps clarify exactly what the product is.

Also, in self-improvement, the things people pay for are the things that are most important. And I just find that very satisfying, to work on bigger problems. When we were a goal tracking community, Lift, a lot of the things that people used us for were really trivial habits. Someone would say, "Tony I love your app, now I floss and my dentist is really happy with me." I'd be like, "That's great." Actually I talked to an oral health researcher once who said that the research on the effectiveness of individuals flossing was actually completely inconclusive. There's no actual research that says that you and I should be flossing. If a hygienist flosses, they do it differently and the research actually says that what they do is pretty effective. But your average person is actually not 100% doing good work for themselves. I actually haven't seen the research. I'm not 100% that that was a useful thing to be helping people do. Now a lot of the coaching that we do ends up being business coaching and so people really say like, "My goal is to get a promotion or to have more impact at work," or "My goal is to learn how to meditate," or "My goal is to adopt this diet and lose a lot of weight," or "My goal is to run a marathon." I feel a lot better about those accomplishments. Those seem like a higher level of accomplishment than we might have been achieving before. We're able to help more, because we're able to bring a real live personal coach to those people. And we're able to do that because we're able to charge for these things. Whereas we're not selling a lot of flossing coaches, which I think tells you something about how badly people want to floss, which is not very.

Rachel: Absolutely. On the coaching end, because I know you're still looking for coaches, what do you look for when you're getting people on?

Tony: We found something very interesting, which is that if you change the definition of coaching away from being this generalist that will coach

any goal or any category of goals and help them specialize a little bit, you actually really broaden the world of who might be a coach. Offline we talked a little bit about whether or not any of the listeners might be potential coaches, and I absolutely think that they might, and I want to give a little pep talk for that. Essentially, what we hear over and over from our coaches is that they're finding this to be the most fulfilling work they've ever done, because they're playing an active role in another person's success and it's just amazingly fulfilling. What we've been able to do is provide basic training, basic certification and customers for a new category of coaches, which we call Digital Coaching.

Basically what we think is that us and maybe some other peer companies have created a new branch of coaching. And the two main previous categories would be athletic coaching, someone like a football coach or a running coach and that's one branch. There's this branch of life coaching. A lot of pre-existing certified coaches work in that world and they're defined by this weekly face to face meeting. Actually it's the same format that therapy is given and they're focused very much on facilitating self-examination and epiphanies, but that's a format that works very much for a weekly meeting. They don't work very much on immediate action and immediate results because it's hard to do when they just see you once a week. In online, that format of coaching allows for the coach to talk to you every day. It's not an hour long session. It can be a very quick interaction and it's almost always framed around a daily goal. For example, a lot of companies right now are hiring us to bring business coaches in to their entire staff. And they'll say something like, "We want the staff . . . We want to coach them on how to be leaders without being managers," how they can have more of an impact inside of their company. The way that we actually coach that, we say, "Why don't we start with the habit of setting priorities every day?" Set your top priority and then once you have that habit, you can say, "Was it a good priority? Did I achieve my priority? What's getting in the way of me achieving this top priority? Having achieved it, was the impact what I was expecting?"

These are very simple conversations that are facilitated by having an habit, and so the coach can have a two minute conversation, it'll be a text chat, essentially, five days a week. And that ends up being way more powerful than talking to a coach once a week. So this new format of coaching, digital coaching, because it's new, really anyone has the potential to work well in this format. They just need to be trained [inaudible 00:29:48]. We just opened up our platform to more coaches. For a long time, the coaches have just been people from our existing

community, but now we've opened it up to everyone. We put out a training system. We put out a certification program. All of that is free and I really wonder if anyone listening has an expertise that they might want to share with the world, or maybe as a freelancer or has a business and is looking for a side business. Most of the coaches on our platform who take it seriously are making a couple hundred or a couple thousand extra dollars a month. It slots into other things that they're doing. More and more we're having coaches where coaching on the platform is their full time job, but really we're looking for people that have some expertise that they want to pay forward. I find that, absolutely, it's a business opportunity, but also, we like for our coaches to think of it as almost a spiritual opportunity. It's the kind of career that ends up being really to the soul.

Rachel: Yeah, I agree. I do these power hour call sometimes and I forget that I even . . . I don't advertise them that much and every time someone books them, I find that I dread it a little bit because I don't like things on my calendar. And then every time I end up finishing one, I'm just so high on life. It feels so good to be able to directly impact somebody like that.

Tony: Yeah it is. We talked in the last episode a little bit about my background, I think, and maybe on this one, about how I started off, I was very regimented for this program or background. I'm often surprised by things that end up being really fulfilling. And coaching is a great example of that, where it's inherently interesting because it's about human psychology. There's a reason that Psychology 101 is always the most popular class in college. We're all just interested in how we work and how other people work. It's such a complicated and rich field that it's just fun to learn about. That's sort of how I got into it, but then we started getting results. It's a life-long high to be hearing every day about the successes that we play a role in.

Rachel: Absolutely. How can people sign up to be coaches?

Tony: It's really easy. The process is go to our website, Coach.me, there's a link there for [Do you want to be a coach?](#) That works you through the process. Really, the easiest thing in that process and the most fun thing is just to go through our certification, which is a really simple training along with a graded test. That might not sound fun, but it is. What we find is that it's like a quick little course on human psychology. I guarantee that if you go through it, you'll learn something interesting about people, and even if you never put that to use as a professional coach, you'll find yourself in some situation in your life

where you're acting as a coach. And the lessons learned there, I think, are really, really valuable. A lot of people make coaching certification their business and we just feel like, "No, our business is growing Digital Coaching as a field, and coaching certification should be a free service that we offer if it helps grow that grow that field." That's probably the first thing that happens as you sign up, but then if it feels like it appeals to you, it's just a matter of creating a really simple profile for yourself and it's low commitment. You can take as few clients as you want. You can set it up that you want to do chat coaching. You can set it up that you want to take the occasional phone call.

Anyone with an expertise is really welcome in our system. Let me give some examples. We have an unlimited need for business coaches who could go into a company and coach the individual contributors on how to make more of an impact within the company, and by unlimited I mean we barely have this launched and we already have a waiting list of 90 companies that we don't have coaches for yet. So I have a huge supply and demand problem there and we're always looking for that type of coaches. We find that we have a lot of entrepreneurs hiring coaches. We're always looking for marketing coaches, people that can help an entrepreneur build the habit of marketing. A lot of entrepreneurs are dabbling in social media marketing, and a coach can really help them clarify that and build good habits and build a good strategy that works. And they can't just give you the strategy, because so much of marketing is trial and error and so they can help you interpret the results of what you're doing. And it turns out we've had a lot of meditation coaches that have done really well.

We have a lot of diet coaches. I think one thing that's different about our platform is that we do diet coaching that's specific to specific diets. I think of two other companies, [Vida](#) and [Rise](#), as kind of in our peer group. They both do online nutrition coaching, but theirs is very general. They're backed by nutritionists, but the format is very similar. If you post a photo of your food and you get an immediate response from one of their nutritionists. The thing though that I always feel like when I talk to people that are on a diet is they didn't start off thinking they wanted a nutritionist, they start off thinking, "I read this book, The 4-Hour Body, and now I want to put that into practice." We're able to give you a coach that's done that diet, the same for Paleo or Bulletproof or vegetarian, any diet that is popular. We're always looking for people that have succeeded in that diet, and then we'll help you become a coach there.

And then, always anything fitness related. I always feel like we are a little bit weak here. This is the area where I wish we had more. I bet you we don't have a single volleyball coach out of the thousand coaches we have. Isn't there somewhere some parents wishing to give volleyball coaching to their kids? I'm always looking for the full gamut. Relationship coaching is another area that we always like to have coaches available in. Finances ends up being big a lot of times, too. Throwing those out as examples of specialties that would really be welcomed if anyone wanted to try their hand at coaching.

Rachel: Great, I want to go through that coaching certification. I think that it would be so interesting to go through it, and what better than to go through something that Coach.me created because you've worked with so many people, you know what's the best in terms of people reaching their goals. I feel like you have such good data.

Tony: Right, this is what I think it's really revolutionary about digital coaching is because you have all the data, you can say for sure what works and what doesn't. We came at coaching with a real beginner's mindset. We weren't sure. We wanted to let the coaches figure out for themselves how they wanted to coach. That's where we started and by doing that, we were able to see what worked and what didn't. One of the most shocking things to me is that all of our top coaches were amateurs. They weren't certified. They weren't working as professional coaches anywhere else. So the top coaches were these amateurs who were outperforming, significantly, like by factor of three, the professional coaches that were already coaching for a living. And so that just really sparked this big question, "Why? What are these amateurs doing that the professionals weren't doing?"

Those are the things I think you have to define digital coaching on and that's where our certification came from. I'm so happy that we didn't start off by giving very rigid training, because I would have trained people the wrong way. We learned by watching. Having done this for, I think we've had active coaches for about 10 months now. Now having that 10 months of data let us really say for sure what works. If you're curious to learn about humans it's like you should be thinking as you go through the certification, "Why does this work on people?" and also "Why don't coaches do this naturally?" I'll just say the thing that caught me off guard, that I didn't realize we were training people in, was the value of active listening. It turns out that the number one skill of a successful coach is being a great listener. And, of course, the naive idea of coaching is that you're giving great advice and a lot of people try to jump

directly into the advice giving stage. We just found that's not what matters. What matters is if you're a good listener then your client will open up to you. And a lot of times your client has the solution inside of them, they just needed a sounding board. And if you're a great listener, they're going to treat you like a great sounding board. All of these success stories would come and all of these opportunities would come from just the coach being a great listener. So we give a lot of training about active listening.

And then in my real life, I catch myself all the time thinking, "I'm giving advice when I should really just be a great listener here." That was an amazing lesson that I wouldn't have believed, probably, if I hadn't had so much data. What's great is we can actually read a coaching transcript and the coach will say, "I thought I was giving such great advice but my client canceled on me and rated me as unhelpful. I don't understand why." And you just read the transcript and there's always a moment in time where it's like, "Oh, the client didn't feel heard and they bailed at that moment. They lost faith in their coach." Well, whereas the coach was oblivious to this. The coach thought they were doing a great job and kept on coaching the way that they were coaching. Meanwhile the client was sitting at home. They can't see each other, they can't read each other's expressions, the client is sitting at home stewing and upset and trying to figure out whether it would be easier to pick a fight with their coach or just cancel. And of course they're just going to cancel. We just see that all the time, and I'm constantly reminding myself "Man, I should just be a better listener. I would be so much more effective in the world if I wasn't trying to talk all the time." I say this as we turn a 40 minute podcast into a two episode, two hour, monstrosity, right?

Rachel: No, it's been great. I'm curious when people are coaching and there is that moment where somebody just feels like they're not being heard because it's not face to face. Are there any tells that people are feeling unheard?

Tony: It's a hard tell because there's a couple ways to interpret it. We teach the coaches about persona, "Your client is not necessarily like you, and so here are some common types of clients and then how you might adjust your strategy for them." One of the personas we just call AWOL. Essentially they've disengaged from the coaching. And there's a couple of reasons that they will go AWOL, and one of the big ones is that the coach screwed up somewhere. Really most clients don't argue. They're not excited to argue and they're not good at it. Most people aren't really great arguers and aren't that confrontational. So almost

always they'll choose silence over direct confrontation. That's the main tell, is a client signed up for you. You asked them a question, they responded right away. You responded to their response, and then nothing. Either the client got very busy or your response was wrong. That's the number one thing that we try and tell the coaches to look out for.

It's funny, I think you called it a tell. I think there's a lot of parallels to online poker. It used to be that top poker players were always pretty old because in person poker moves so slowly that in order to become an expert it takes decades. But then 10-15 years ago, there started to be this a big rise of online poker and suddenly all the best poker players in the world were 22. And they had learned how to be a top poker player in like one or two years because the pace of the lessons they were learning had gotten so fast because they didn't have to drive to a poker room. They could play six poker games at a time and they just played so much more poker, so much faster that they were able to get this pattern recognition. One of the things that you learn in online poker is how do you look for a tell if you can't see the person's face? And one of the most obvious tells in online poker is how long a person thinks about their decision. If they think for a long time there was a decision to make, and if they don't think for a long time, if they move quickly, that's usually the tell that there was an easy decision. That's the only information you have. It's kind of the same in online coaching, whereas the coaches improve very rapidly in the exact same way that online pokers players do, because they get so many more repetitions. But also the tells are much more subtle, and you don't have the full expression of someone's body language.

Rachel: Interesting. That's very interesting. My headphones just did something really weird. Fascinating, I didn't know that. Okay, I guess, then, to change gears a little bit back to the business building thing, as far as, are there tangible things that you did to get more users or was it because you had so many really good investors they were able to do a lot of the PR for you?

Tony: Definitely a lot of PR early on because of the investors. I think having been in tech for a long time, there's this really common pattern, which is new platforms pop up and for a while those platforms are really rich sources for marketing and then they dry out and they stop being that important. For a while it was SEO, then it was Facebook, and Twitter was big for a long time and stuff like, I have a Twitter account with half a million followers. The reason is because it was one of the

earliest Twitter accounts that was a featured account for a while and it was able to grow as Twitter grew. I think it's a lot harder now to grow a new account on Twitter because Twitter is not growing at the same rate that it was when I joined. I'm like the sixth user of Twitter. It's like "A rising tide floats all boats," and that's one of the things you're looking for in a platform. For a while one of the things we took advantage of was Apple. They really like to feature high quality companies that are on trend with what they're promoting. We're just very aware of what Apple is announcing and making sure that we do the things that allow us to be featured. So they end up being a great partner for promoting us. I think that's still a viable opportunity for a lot of people, if you happen to be an app developer.

Medium is something that we're investing in right now. We feel like here is a growing blogging platform where you can still be one of the earliest authors. It has a built-in amplification. One of the things that we believe we have is by having a community of coaches, they can help promote each other, and in a lot of ways we have to serve those coaches. Whatever it takes to make their business better, makes our business better and we often provide marketing support for them. One of the things is we have a group blog [Medium](#) and the best posts all get up-voted by all of the coaches. Which means that it's possible to take a really good blog post that might not have a lot of visibility naturally, put that into this publication we run on Medium called [Better Humans](#), and then give it initial momentum by having all the coaches go and vote on it. And then that gets it into the top stories list, which means that everyone who uses Medium will end up seeing it. And that's something that's easy to do on a new platform like Medium and then basically impossible to do on an older platform like Facebook or Twitter. That's a strategy that we're always looking for. Where are new places that we can be active? I think you mentioned Periscope earlier. Definitely that's a place that we're looking at.

Twitter owns Periscope and they also own this video sharing site called Vine. I remember when Vine first launched, I thought, "Oh, this is really fun," then I never ended up using it. And then I wondered how it was doing and so I went back and I looked at it and I tried to find the most popular people on Vine. And I see all of these people with like, one and half, two and a half, four million followers, and none of them are people that I've heard before. It turned out that Vine was a platform for a new wave of, seems like, Hollywood up and coming actors who I've never seen act before, but they were able to create a following for themselves

and to become famous because they really adopted a new platform. That is the secret that I'm always looking for.

Rachel: I think that's an awesome point and you're right. Anybody can still do it. I was doing coaching for a while. I had a podcast coach and he told me that one of his biggest success stories was he was talking to people at [Stitcher](#) and he just wrote to them and basically said, "Is there anything that I can do to help Stitcher with my podcasts?" They said, "Well, we're looking for these kinds of things. Let us know when you have these kinds of guests." So he sought out those kinds of guests and then they featured him. Even though it's not as big as iTunes, he got so much traffic from it, it was unreal. Either going through and being some of the first users or even just reaching out to those companies and working with them is great.

Tony: The other tried and true strategy is cross promotion. We have a super casual podcast. It was the natural thing, if we had that actually up and running. It's certainly a desire of ours, because we love to be able to interview people. The natural thing to do would be to have you as a guest, right? That is how a lot of people end up promoting themselves is, "I'm a guest here. You're introducing me to a whole new audience and then I would love to have you as a guest and introduce you to a new audience," and so you create these win, win situations. This is something I've really learned from Tim Ferriss, where he'll do a collaboration with us, often one or two times a year. And I'll think, it's so great, he's an investor, he's really helping us. Then I'll look at the structure of it and I'll realize, "Oh, we're doing a lot of good for him too," and he's the master of this win, win cross promotion. I think that's a lot of how he ended up being really successful. I learned this technique from him about how to get a best-selling book. He did it and that I also saw Eric Ries, who wrote this New York Times bestseller, [The Lean Startup](#) do a lot of book bundling at launch. Essentially the secret of the New York Times bestseller list is you need to sell about 8,000 copies in the first week in order to guarantee being on the bestseller list. Just being able to say you're a bestselling author is so valuable, that it's worth doing almost anything to reach that. And so the trick that both of them used is that they went and created partnerships where you would get like 50 copies of their book and this other thing, and this other thing would be worth more than what you were paying for the whole bundle.

It's like we use a lot of Amazon services to run our servers, and for \$400 we'd get \$500 worth of Amazon credit and 30 copies of a book. Like who wouldn't buy that? Of course we bought that. And so that was like this

trick they use to boost their sales by a couple thousand units and to become a bestseller. Being good at cross promotion, that's a skill. And I feel like a lot of marketers talk a lot about tricks and I'm always looking for the fundamental skills. And I think being able to pick new platforms and being able to be good at cross promotion, those are the fundamentals that matter no matter what is going on in the world.

Rachel: Great tips. Oh, my gosh, this has been awesome.

Tony: Okay, we should say good bye.

Rachel: I know. I was just going to say, I actually have to be at a mastermind meeting here in a little bit. We have a once a month meeting with some friends here in Vegas. I can't believe we've talked so long and I know you're crazy busy, I'm sure. Oh, my gosh. Thank you so much, this has been awesome.

Tony: Rachel, a pleasure. I hope this ends up feeling useful to the people that are listening and certainly, I had a good time and this is one of those "limit the downside" examples. At minimum, this was fun, and hopefully it was also useful to people.

Rachel: I think it was very useful. Can you let people know where they can go and find out more about you?

Tony: One hundred percent, I want people to visit our site, Coach.me. You could come at it as either a tool for your own self-improvement. We have three tiers of coaching, two of which are free. One is the self-coaching tools for self-improvement, the other is community coaching, where a really active Q&A and community model cheering you on, and the third is personal coaching. You can hire a personal coach at really reasonable rates. Then the other reason would be if you would potentially consider being a coach. We'd love to have you. The starting point is just to remember the website, Coach.me and that is the URL. And beyond that, just go out and be awesome and make a difference in the world. Rather than you finding us, hopefully we run into you because you're doing such great work.

Rachel: I love it. Thank you so much. You've given so much great information. I've really enjoyed this, too. Thank you so much.

Tony: All right, take care.

Rachel: You too. Bye.

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Thank you in advance!

I really appreciate you.

With love,
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