

social triggerstm

Podcast Transcript

**Tim Ferriss on
Suicide, Fear of
Failure, and the
Secret to Success**

Derek: Hey everyone. This is Derek Halpern and you're listening to Social Triggers. Today I have an awesome guest for you. I know you know who he is. His name is Tim Ferriss. You might know him because he is the best-selling author of *The 4-Hour Workweek*, *The 4-Hour Chef*, and *The 4-Hour Body*.

You also might know him because he has segued his success as an author, as a blogger, into something much bigger than that – someone who scores equity stakes in hot start-ups, someone who lands TV shows, someone who is essentially the top of the food chain when it comes to lifestyle bloggers.

I have Tim here today and I want to dig a little bit deeper into how he became Tim Ferriss. How did he pull off everything that he did? To set the stage, I know that people always ask him questions like, “How do you get so much blog traffic?” or “How do you sell so many books?” or “How do you land early stage advisor roles?”

I always believed that those questions people asked are often misguided. I want you to talk about that, Tim. Are you here with me?

Tim: I'm here, alive, in-person.

Derek: The reason I bring this up is because I think people ask you things like traffic, selling books, how do you land gigs, how do you network, and people think that's your secret. I think maybe that's part of it, but I know a lot of people who get a lot of traffic that don't score equity in a company like Uber. Even though few people sell as many books as you have sold, even fewer turn success as an author into success in almost everything else.

I have a few theories on how you did it, but I want to take some time to unpack this today. Does this sound good?

Tim: It sounds great. I'm good.

Derek: I want to start with something I recently read on Reddit. The reason I want to bring this up is because a lot of people – or at least, successful people, both friends of mine or people I've read about – I've noticed a lot of successful people have a lot of ups and downs in their life. I noticed that you recently confessed to a down point in your life. I'd like you to talk a little bit more about that.

Tim: Definitely. I talked about, for the first time, an experience I had towards the end of college where I went through a very dark period. This has been something that I've wrestled with on and off for many years – differing degrees of depression. I think the entrepreneurial roller coaster attracts people who have that type of tendency and it also magnifies both the ups and downs, but this was before I had started any real companies.

I was in college at Princeton, which is a very high pressure environment. I always beat myself

up. I was my own worst critic and I think there are benefits to that but I hit a point where I was feeling very cornered as it related to my senior thesis and having to write a senior thesis where I felt I was being forced unfairly to incorporate a lot of research in Japanese – original research – that was not part of the thesis or shouldn't have been.

What this meant was, in practical terms, I didn't think I was going to be able to finish the thesis before graduation. I'm not sure if it still does, but at the time, it counted for some astronomical percentage of the GPA. It was one-third or one-half of your departmental GPA. I had been a very good student up to that point and I felt like this was going to destroy the accomplishments and record that I had worked so hard to put together starting towards the middle of high school.

I reached a point similar to some of my other friends. Both in high school, in college and after college, unfortunately, I had a number of friends who have taken their own lives. I hit a very low point where I took a year away from school and was given a pretty caustic ultimatum by a professor I won't name at this point that made me think I was going to be given a horrible grade on my thesis no matter what because I was copping out and taking a year off.

It was during that year off that I contemplated killing myself and actually went really deep into looking at potential ways to go about doing that. Ultimately, it didn't happen obviously, but I think what's really important to underscore there is that the question I was asked on Reddit was, "What did you learn from that experience?"

What I learned was by considering that, I was being very selfish and I was looking at suicide as a solution to my problems or I had the belief that it couldn't get any worse, and therefore, I should take my own life or that I was never going to recover.

There were a few things that I took away. One, it clearly wasn't permanent. I've had ups and downs since, but I've also had a lot of high points and it is not a permanent state. Very rarely is it a permanent state. Second, I was being extremely selfish because my family, had I done that, would have blamed themselves for the rest of their lives for my demise.

It was just sheer luck that it didn't happen, though. I had reserved a book from the university library that was basically a how-to book for this type of thing. It's kind of a Dr. Kevorkian-type book and the address that the register at the library had on file for me, because I had taken a year off even though I was still living in the Princeton area, was my home address.

The notification of this book becoming available went to my home address. That obviously, you can imagine, sparked conversation and that was enough to make it clear to me – holy shit – as a wake-up call, that would have been *the* selfish thing I possibly could have done. So, that's the story and it's not something I've talked about because it's uncomfortable to talk about.

This is also something I haven't talked about. I had a reader come up to me recently at an

event – really nice guy – and he wanted me to sign something for his brother. I asked him what his brother would like to read. He didn't answer me for a second and he said, "Whatever you want to write."

So I thought for a second and he gave me a little bit of detail on his brother. Then he thanked me, backed away and walked in the other direction and I continued talking to other people. He approached me about an hour and a half later when I was leaving the venue and he said, "I just wanted to let you know that my brother was something like 24 and he committed suicide, but if it hadn't been for your books – and he mentioned the books of a few other authors – I think he would have done it years earlier, so I just wanted to thank you for that." Then he said, "Have you ever thought about writing about depression?"

I think he said this not even having any idea that I have battled with it myself, so I realized once again, me not telling these types of stories is also very selfish in a way. I'm going to be writing more about this. It's been a matter of trying to build up the courage to come out and talk about these things, but it's an important subject.

Derek: I wanted to bring this up specifically because this is a horrible thing that plagues a lot of people and I think there are people out there who think when you're in that state of mind that, as you said, it's permanent and you can't change it.

Even when I look back, I had a friend that was in a very similar position where they had a big thesis due and they got very overwhelmed and ended up trying to kill themselves and ended up dropping out of school. These are all things that really happened.

I wanted you to bring this up specifically because there are a lot of ups and downs on your way to success, and just because you see someone like you and everything that you have accomplished, a lot of people might think, "Oh, well Tim has had it easy his whole life." But it's clear that "easy" wasn't really in the cards for you.

Tim: I don't think so. The fact that everyone has their own demons – some externally imposed, some internally created; often times, both – no matter what their state. In fact, a number of the friends I had who killed themselves came from very, very wealthy families. I think that there is also a danger point for a lot of these kids and people where they get what they thought would fix their problems, which are a lot of material comfort and wealth and they're still depressed. They come to the conclusion that, "I will never be happy," and that's when they kill themselves.

It's very tempting, I think, in the U.S. and many other cultures certainly, to look at the celebrities on the covers of magazines who have their entire lives exposed and have no sympathy for them. This is not, "Woe is Tim and have a lot of sympathy for me," but I think it's very important for people to realize that the external dressings of success are not going to solve all of your internal existential problems. It's important to work on yourself and find tools that can help you weather storms.

For me, one of the greatest tools that I revisit constantly as an operating system for at least surviving, and hopefully thriving, in high-stress environments is stoic philosophy (stoicism). It has become a real lifeline for me in a way that I suppose religion is for a lot of other people. There are many points in my life where I've been very envious of people who have a religious face and belief system because I think there are a lot of benefits to having rules that give you guidance in times of uncertainty.

Stoicism has allowed me to practice becoming more comfortable with the uncertain and with the shifting winds of fate and fortune. It has been very valuable for me and that is something I only picked up after college. I think that that – a very secular, straight-forward meditation practice and a handful of other things – have really been critical for me trying to get better at weathering these types of storms.

Derek: And you still weather them, too.

Tim: I do, absolutely. I had a very dark period, for instance, towards the tail end of writing *4-Hour Chef*, when *The 4-Hour Chef* came out, my last book, because I took a gamble. I don't regret having made this decision, but I took a gamble as the first major book out of Amazon Publishing when Amazon announced its creation of this publishing arm to compete with all of the big publishers like Random House and so on.

I knew there was going to be backlash but I underestimated how much. The how much was that the book was boycotted by almost every retailer you can think of. Not only Barnes & Noble, which I kind of expected, but also, if I'm getting my list right, Wal-Mart, Costco, Target and many of the independents.

It basically became invisible on a retail level when it launched. What I wanted it to do and hoped it to do – and I think everybody hoped it to do – wasn't accomplished. It didn't happen. It was not fulfilled. It did only maybe 25% of what I think it could have.

After killing myself to do that – my most ambitious book in a lot of ways – in the shortest turnaround time, I felt like a huge failure and like I had had made too many mistakes and made too many incorrect assumptions, that I had potentially torpedoed my career in a lot of ways, and made a lot of enemies in publishing, etc.

Once those gremlins get unleashed, as I think most people have experienced, you start to create these narratives that tailspin. I had a very, very difficult time. Thank God that I had a very loving girlfriend I prefer not to name at the time who was just incredibly supportive and really always there as a lifeline and voice of reason to keep me from getting really into the pit of despair. But this is something that I continue to wrestle with.

The way I've tried to look at it, and there is actually a blog post written by a gentleman named Cameron Harold who I think was the COO of 1-800-GOT-JUNK at one point, but he has battled with a lot of these issues as well. He wrote a post on my blog called "Harnessing the

Entrepreneurial Manic Depressive Roller Coaster”. Not all entrepreneurs suffer from this, but I think it’s very common.

Derek: I think a lot of them do. I saw Cameron Harold speak at a conference where he talks about the highs and lows of CEOs. That’s what the entrepreneurial roller coaster is.

I remember thinking to myself just a few years earlier. I was talking to a therapist and they were trying to tell me that I might be bipolar or on the spectrum of being bipolar. I was like, “I don’t know if that’s true.” They’re like, “Well, you were feeling bad. Now you’re feeling great.” I was like, “Yeah, when I was feeling bad, something bad happened. When I was feeling great, something great happened. I happen to live this black-and-white life where everything is either shit or it’s great. What’s the problem here?”

You’re bringing this up and I wanted to bring this up today. I didn’t want to start so dark, but the goal here is to help people understand how Tim Ferriss became Tim Ferriss. A lot of people think you have it so easy because you have the best-selling books, you have the credibility, you have the connections and yet here you are, just before you got started, you battled with depression and even after you were already successful, you didn’t hit one of your marks and the only reason why you didn’t fall into a depression is because you had a support network that helped lift you up.

Tim: That’s great. I just want to add one more thing. It’s a topic a lot of people don’t talk about but I would argue that the way we just started is not dark because the fact of the matter is I thought I was in a place I would never get out of and here I am. For people listening, if they are suffering from this type of challenge, I think there are two things to take away.

1) The personality traits and hardwiring that I think lends itself to this type of depression often comes with an up-side which is you have periods of extreme creativity, extreme energy and so on that is a real gift. It’s just all gifts are double-edged swords. If you’re way too tall, great. You’re wonderful at basketball, hate flying in airplanes. You’re going to have trade-offs. This is one of those trade-offs. I think it’s a gift that cuts both ways, so recognizing it that way.

2) Realizing that there is no darkness without the light, that the light can come afterwards. And it does always come afterwards.

Derek: You know why I like that? I always tell people, like I said, I’ve been through these stages myself where I get really low or I get really high and people ask me, “Why is your life such a roller coaster like this?” You said there’s no dark without the light. I’ve always said you don’t really know how good something is until you know how bad it could be. Sometimes you have to experience that bad part. That way later in life, you can also appreciate the best parts as well.

It’s almost like a benefit where if you do get low, one, you know you’re going to get out of it if

you stick through it. Two, when you do get out of it, you're going to be that much more appreciative of everything you have as opposed to being one of those people that maybe can't appreciate things as much.

Tim: I agree. I would just add to that. On a macro level, that's true. You have these lower periods followed by the higher periods followed by the lower periods – kind of like a sine wave. I would say that even during those challenging darker periods, one of the tools that I have found extremely helpful – it's so simple – is having a gratitude list routine of some type.

I use a journal called *The 5-Minute Journal* actually made by somebody who read *The 4-Hour Workweek*, funny enough. It allows me to increase my focus from a productivity standpoint, but also count my blessings for just a few minutes every morning and when I go to bed at night. Literally, everyone has time for this. This is five minutes or less each day in two short segments. That is one of the cheapest types of insurance for avoiding falling too far psychologically and emotionally.

It's a very centering and pragmatic exercise, just like brushing your teeth. If you brush your teeth, those are your teeth, you should absolutely have a routine that is the equivalent for your psychological health. I think that journaling and specifically, writing down two or three things that you're grateful for in the morning and then two or three things that went very well that day – high points. Even if they're very small things – I saw a beautiful tree in the park as I was walking from A to B – it's really useful for maintaining a greater sense of control, equilibrium and appreciation which I think is very easy to lose.

Derek: For some reason I like to read about marriage counseling books and stuff about how to have a great relationship even though I'm not married. One of the things they often tell people is that when you're in a position where it's like, "Oh my God, I hate my significant other," one of the things they tell people to do is to take note of every time you actually like them and write that down for two weeks. Don't worry about the things you hate them, just worry about the times you like them and write that down for two weeks.

Reports have shown that people actually became more appreciative of their significant other by using that same strategy. You could do it on yourself like you're saying with *The 5-Minute Journal*, but you could also do it on other people around you as well. Instead of focusing on the negative, focus on the positive. Do it for a few weeks and then read through it when you're in a low point in the situation.

Tim: Definitely. Meditation actually ties into this. Meditation I think has a branding problem. That's why I didn't meditate or even attempt for decades because I thought it was just a "woo-woo" activity that sanctimonious hipsters would lecture me about.

What a meditative practice does – and this is only something I've very recently started doing consistently on a daily basis in the mornings – is it is an exercise in bringing your attention

back to the present state. By the way, if you want to get your work done 50% faster in a given day, meditate for 20 minutes in the morning. It's incredible.

I use transcendental meditation (TM.org) but that can be expensive. It worked for me but there are issues with it. Vipassana Meditation. There are books like *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, that's Jon Kabat-Zinn. There are others certainly. There are guided meditations on SamHarris.org that people can use.

The way that relates to what you just said is that whether we are creating a lot of strife with our significant other or creating massive depression in ourselves, I think that the commonality between those two – there are probably many – but one of them is you get tied up in a narrative, in a story, that you tell yourself. Does that make sense?

It's like, "My girlfriend does this because she just doesn't pay attention and doesn't care. She doesn't try enough, etc." Or, "My husband blah-blah-blah-blah-blah" and you have this story that basically characterizes this person as the bad guy, who is doing something that bothers you on purpose.

Similarly, like we were talking about earlier, when you are just about to pivot into becoming very depressive, I think it's usually catalyzed by some type of story that you develop about yourself: "I always do this. I'm just a person who can't appreciate anything, who is never going to be happy, who is blah-blah-blah-blah-blah, and that's that." This becomes a record on repeat that drives you into a state of despair.

Whether it's a gratitude journal or meditation, they both serve ultimately to snap you out of it and throw cold water on your face so you're sitting here and you think, "Oh, wait a second. I live in a first world country, I have a job, kids, a dog or a house, a computer or just a fucking pair of shoes." It's like, "Let me take a timeout and look at how Goddamn lucky I am on so many levels."

This is not intended to be a Pollyanna-ish positive psychology "don't look at the bad" recommendation. That's why I find stoic philosophy so helpful. For instance, *Letters from a Stoic* is one of my favorite books, if not my favorite book. In some of his letters which are very, very short, Seneca recommends practicing poverty so that you're not fearful of decisions, opportunities or problems that you might have.

If you're considering ending your job, quitting a relationship, starting a relationship, having kids and you have a tremendous amount of anxiety, what stoic philosophy will often recommend is that you practice poverty. Practice your worst-case scenario.

What is your worst-case scenario? You have \$50 per week or per month for food? Great, like I said, practice that for five days and see how bad it is. You realize, "Wow, I got rice and beans from the Mexican grocery store for \$15 and it lasted me two weeks and I decided to wear a dirty, old Hanes t-shirt with one pair of jeans for a week and everything's fine. In fact, it

reduced a bunch of decision fatigue and I feel great.”

Then when you come to that conclusion, you start to realize that the greatest things of value you have are the things that cannot be taken away if you make your mind your friend, at least some of the time. These types of practices, I think, are exceptionally valuable.

Derek: I really appreciate this. I wanted to bring this up because I feel like people need to know that there are good and bad times and there are ways to rip yourselves out of it. You’re a perfect living example.

I want to take this back a little bit further because the goal here today is to try and figure out how you became you. I think the ups and downs of success is part of it, but there is also something else that I think you do unusually well. I think it comes down to this idea of playing a bigger game.

When I look at what you do, you’re rarely *just* writing a book and trying to just sell some books. You’re writing a book, selling books, figuring out how that book is going to open doors to a new world and then figuring out what doors you’re going to be going down and how that is going to segue into everything else. I feel like you’re very calculated in all of this. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Tim: Definitely. I think a lot of gifts I have experienced look like genius planning in hindsight, but there are other things that I absolutely planned and had larger intentions for. There are few beliefs I have or rules that I follow that have made what you just described much easier for me than what it is for a lot of other people.

The first – I’m not saying that it’s the best advice for everyone out there, but it has worked obscenely well for me – is that I don’t have long-term five or ten year business goals, for instance. I tend to have anywhere from two week experiments and commitments to six to twelve month experiments and commitments.

Let me come back and explain the rules one by one. The first one is that I don’t have these extreme long-term goals because I feel like to achieve those reliably, you have to really only aim for things that are 60% of your capacity, so you’re selling yourself short.

The other reason for that is after I commit to writing one book or starting a blog and doing it for three months and then reassessing or starting a podcast, I don’t know which doors will open. It’s impossible for me to predict. One of the doors that opens could be far more attractive than anything I could have foreseen and I want to be in a position where I can capitalize on that. That’s number one.

Number two is that I have deliberately pursued very different subjects in my self-experimentation and writing so that I would not get pigeonholed into, say, business productivity. *The 4-Hour Workweek* was great and there were a lot of people who advised me

to ride that until I could ride it no more, whether it was writing *The 3-Hour Workweek* or doing revised editions and satellite products and so on related to *The 4-Hour Workweek*.

I knew if I did that, I would be talking about auto-responders until I was blue in the face and just wanted to punch myself in the face. So I decided to take a left turn and do *The 4-Hour Body*. That's another one which is doing experiments in seemingly unrelated areas to diversify my identity and my positioning.

Closely related to that, because the two things I've alluded to, the first is viewing these projects as experiments. In experiments, there is no failure. There is feedback. That's it. You have a hypothesis, test it, you get feedback and then you adjust or you do more experiments. What that does, in combination with asking myself, "What is the worst thing that could happen?" and really writing that down in detail is that I remove the fear of failure and risk.

Risk, to me, is the likelihood of an irreversible negative outcome. But if I do a short-term experiment, like I commit to doing six episodes of a podcast which is how I planned to do it. I was like, "Let me test the hypothesis which is, I will enjoy interviewing as much as I enjoy being interviewed in long form, like we're doing right now." But I didn't know if that was going to be true or not, so I was like, "Let me try it and test it."

I knew that I could cap my downside because I was paying for hosting for \$20 or \$40 per month, minimized my equipment outlay which was less than probably \$100 or \$200. I knew exactly how much money I would "lose" if I stopped but I assumed I would learn a lot in the process.

Viewing these experiments as a limited time duration removes that fear of something that is very negative, very expensive or irreversible. That's number one. Then also spec-ing out the worst case scenario.

The other criteria that I use for choosing projects – not always, but as often as possible and it's very often – is doing experiments that even if they "fail" and I stop pursuing them will teach me skills or help me to develop skills that will translate to other areas.

For instance, people wonder how I got into Angel Investing and early stage start-ups which ultimately has made me far more money than any of my publishing combined and all of my books.

How did that happen? That happened because I fantasized about going to business school, but I decided that it wasn't a good fit for me for a bunch of reasons. Instead, because I lived in San Francisco and had surrounded myself with people in start-ups, I began having conversations with people about how they were investing, some of them who were venture capitalists and so on.

I would trade with them. I was training one guy. He wanted to lose 30 pounds and I was like,

“Great. I will train you for free. Let’s go have lunch. You just have to let me ask you a lot of questions about how you do investing and how you choose deals.” He was like, “No problem. Done deal.”

I had a bunch of these conversations and then I asked him if he wouldn’t mind having me co-invest in his next few deals and I put in a very small amount of money, like \$5K or \$10K per deal. Then I said, “I will put in so much time and effort that I will be the cheapest laborer and one of the most valuable players on their cap table within their equity table.”

He’s like, “Sure. No problem,” because he had seen me launch *The 4-Hour Workweek* and the success that had and I was really good at the positioning and PR marketing. The concept in my head, which was just like the six episodes for the podcast, was let me take what I would have spent on business school, which was about \$120,000 over two years. It’s a lot. It certainly wouldn’t have to be that high for people who want to think about this.

But I said, “I was going to spend \$120,000 on Stanford Business School if I got in. Let me create in my mind the Tim Ferriss Fund and I’m going to spend \$200,000 over two years, the same duration as business school, on investing and start-ups. Then I’m going to stop and re-assess everything.” This calculating the down side. I’m going to assume that I’m going to lose all of that money. None of those investments are going to work out but I’m going to approach it in a way where I will learn at least twice as much as I would have learned in business school and that will be my real world MBA. That’s how I thought about it.

The assumption was, trademark stoic practice, was I am assuming I am going to lose all of this money, per se. None of these investments are going to work out but I’m going to approach it in a way where I ask a lot of questions, I spend a lot of time looking into these companies and interrogating my fellow investors so that, at the very least, I will be better at building businesses when I come out of this and that will be my paid tuition that is the ticket.

That’s how I got started. Some of the investments actually started to work out and then I re-assessed things two years later. I had it in my calendar and I was like, “Okay, I actually think I have the intestinal fortitude.” Weirdly enough, I get too stressed out investing in the public stock market but I can do this without being stressed out, so let me continue to do this and sort of play it by ear.

Those are some of the tenets and rules that I use but I think the experiment then without a foregone conclusion or next step, picking the most attractive, interesting door that will give me yet newer skills has been part of the reason why when people look at my activities and successes, they’re like, “Oh my God, this seems like some very sophisticated master plan that has led him into all these different directions,” but it was really just those handful of rules that I followed.

Derek: Of testing. It’s funny because I think back to some of the things that I’ve done, even when I look back to Social Triggers. Before I even launched Social Triggers, it started as an

experiment where I told myself, “I’m going to go speak at a conference about what I know about marketing,” because at that point I had built a successful celebrity blog that did 40 million visits in a year.

I was like, “Let me go talk about this and see how it worked out.” I did it. I was like, “This is great. I’m going to go do it some more.” That’s how I started my blog.

Even recently, I launched a software company called Zippy Courses in the online education industry and I decided to build that over the course of a year. I invested, between money and time, about \$100,000 into building this software. Now, it’s paying off handsomely now that we launched it and it’s becoming one of the default go-to platforms for people who want to sell courses. But I went into that expecting to lose all of the money that I put into it. It just happened to come out as a positive on the other end.

I think that’s interesting because I feel like a lot of people have this thought about failure that, when it happens, it’s the worst thing in the world but when you phrase it as an experiment like you just did, you’re not failing. You’re testing something out. If it’s working, you keep doing it. If it’s not working, you stop doing it. You didn’t fail. You made a decision to stop.

Tim: Absolutely. I think also just realizing that it’s not that hard to cap the down side. If you can cap the down side, which by the way is what Richard Branson does. That’s his first step in how he thinks about business opportunities. He’s not an irrational optimist. I think that’s a myth about entrepreneurs, that they’re these fly-by-the-seat-of-their-pants risk takers who bet the farm repeatedly on A, B, C, D, and E.

Those are certainly the stories that magazines like to write about, that get cover stories because they’re very dramatic and exciting and people want to read those, but the vast majority of people that I know – in fact, I think every single person I know who is worth hundreds of millions or billions of dollars – is not like that at all.

They are very calculated and take extremely small steps and calculated risks where they cap the down side, but they choose opportunities or experiments where the down side is capped, they’ve decided how much they’re going to spend in terms of money, time, or whatever to test it. But if it works, the potential up side’s magnitudes of order are greater or uncapped, potentially, in the case of a company like Uber, almost.

If you take that approach to life and you are a continual learner, and obviously you try to model people who have been successful before you, if you’re constantly only betting that which you can lose – does that make sense? A small amount of time, small amount of money, small amount of embarrassment which I think is really important, having the difficult conversations or being willing to ask the uncomfortable questions – if you take that approach, it should be the case that some of your bets pan out.

That’s when you suddenly can build this incredible momentum where I took *The 4-Hour*

Workweek and parlayed it into the Angel Investing. I took the Angel Investing on my own and parlayed it into having a syndicate on Angel List that has \$5 million in backing. Now I can really play with the big boys. Then parlayed the Angel Investing into developing relationships with people in Hollywood who wanted to get into tech, which then facilitated doing things and making decisions in television.

Now the television show launched yesterday and was able to parlay that into this virtuous cycle where the store that people get sent to (itunes.com/timferriss) has the TV show but right below, it has the podcast. Now the podcast has gone from number 30 on iTunes to number 12 and I try to think of things holistically in that way.

Also, another really big one for me has been – this is cliché, I suppose – but I said this when I did my *Opening the Kimono* event a couple of years about content marketing. I said, “Your network is your net worth.” There are so many people in the world who are excellent at what they do. You do not have to compromise and always work with assholes. You just don’t.

If you do, what’s going to happen is it’s going to be very high labor because you’re not going to want to spend time with these people, they’re going to rub you the wrong way, you’ll probably rub them the wrong way and it’ll end up being very transactional. You’ll have a launch, you’ll have something else, this or that, a favor to ask or God knows what and you’ll constantly be experiencing a churn of relationships where you move from one person who is adept but a pain in the ass to another person who is adept but a pain in the ass, and you sort of collect these business cards for business use only.

I’ve made my mistakes in trying to think of how I want to build a network, but what I realized was if you want to have the greatest impact and you also want to be smart about your time investment and enjoy your life, you should try to find – when I was starting my blogging and I went to South by Southwest in 2007, I would walk up to the moderators of panels because after exciting panels, the panelists would always get swamped, but the moderator would just get nothing. The moderators are often amazing people in their own right.

I would approach these moderators and say, “This was awesome. Thank you so much for doing it. I would love to get your advice. It’s my first time at South by Southwest. I have my first book coming out, don’t know the first thing about tech. I’m trying to learn more about this, this and this. On a personal level, I’m really into Japan, martial arts, wine, whatever. Is there anybody here you think I would really hit it off with? Is there anybody who comes to mind that you think I would really get along with?” That was my question.

It wasn’t, “Who can help me sell a shit-ton of copies of my book?” It was, “Who do you think I would really hit it off with?” I already know what my business objective is and then they would recommend someone that I would share a lot in common with personally.

If you look at, for instance, the people who helped me with the launch of *The 4-Hour Workweek* who were very heavily focused in the tech world, although not exclusively, I am still

close friends with probably 90% of those people. The persistence of those relationships has been incredible.

Derek: You know what's interesting about that? You just said you asked a moderator on, "Who do you think I would hit it off with?" Why I love that question is because now you have a moderator recommending you talk to someone else of importance and you're not reaching out to them for the first time cold. You're reaching out to them because they told you to reach out. It's not a cold contact. It's like a warm reach out.

It's an interesting way to not necessarily game the system, but it's an interesting and authentic way for you to meet people like yourself that you would hit it off with. I really like that. That's a tip in and of itself.

I know you have a TV show that just came out on iTunes.

Tim: Can I add one more thing? I apologize for interrupting but I think it's super important. I want to add one more thing because at the time, nobody knew who I was in 2007. Now that I'm in the inverse position where I get pitched all the time and I get e-mails all the time, it's really important that you do not exaggerate the relationship you had with the moderator, for instance, or their recommendation. I see this all the time where I get e-mails. I'll just make it up – Ryan Holliday, mutual friend.

They'll say, "Hey, I'm buddies with Ryan Holliday and he told me to reach out to you. Blah-blah-blah." The first thing I'm going to do is ask Ryan and if Ryan comes back and says, "Well, not exactly. I told him he should look at what you've done and maybe at some point, I'll introduce you." I'm never going to reply to that guy because he has effectively lied or implied a falsehood.

It's very important that when I walked up to people and the moderator had just recommended hours before or even minutes before, I would walk and be like, "Hey so-and-so, do you have a second? You don't know who I am but Jack such-and-such thought we might have something in common."

If he or she said, "Sure, no problem," I'd say, "You don't know me. I just met Jack at such-and-such panel and I asked him this question and he mentioned your name. I don't want to bug you at all, but I don't know anybody here. I would love to buy you a drink and chat for a few minutes" to try to get my bearings.

I was always very literal and did not exaggerate because people who are being sought-out are often overwhelmed and the first thing they're going to do is fact-check you.

Derek: And they're skeptical.

Tim: Yes, and they're skeptical. Even if they don't fact-check you, that kind of stuff, just karmically will come back and bite you in the ass. You don't want to exaggerate. I apologize

for interrupting but I just wanted to emphasize that because it's so important.

Derek: That is very important and actually, it's funny because I personally think that should go without saying but it obviously doesn't. I saw someone post in a group, "Is anyone friends with Sally Hogshead?" I don't mean "friends" like "I met her at a conference once." I mean "friends" like you can text message her right now and she'll respond to you.

This is a friend of mine that was asking this and I said, "Yes, I can do that." It makes me think of what you just said because I think right now, a lot of people over-exaggerate how close they are to people of importance as a way to sound better. I even think about people who write blog posts and mention me. They're always like, "My friend, Derek Halpern." I'm like, "I don't even know who that person is."

I don't mind that they're saying it, but when it gets over-exaggerated – I don't get reached out to nearly as much as you do but I do get 1,000 people e-mailing me a day asking me for something – when I get that personally, I also feel very turned off as well so I'm glad that you brought that up.

Tim: Yes. If you're going to do anything, under-sell or downplay the relationship. If you think you're somebody's friend, say, "I've known them for X number of months and we've hung out Y number of times." Play it safe. It's a lot more effective to play it safe because guess what? Nine out of ten people who are pitching that person are exaggerating, and if it sounds even close to exaggerating, they will lump you in with those people.

Derek: Perfect. I want to talk about your TV show. I know we want to go here because that what you have coming out now. What I want to talk about specifically is you had it coming out and I think this TV show is one more example of why you became you. I say that because, again, Tim Ferriss, you have all the connections in the world, you have a new TV show, you have three best-selling books and yet this TV show was yanked off the air and then you proceeded to have issues with it.

This is an example of where someone like you who seemingly has it all together still gets told, "No."

Tim: Oh yeah, all the time. The TV show is a good example of a few things. One, another very dark period that I experienced because keep in mind, this was licking my wounds coming off of *The 4-Hour Chef* which had destroyed my ego and given me a lot of challenges with my self-worth.

My next big project was this TV show and a lot of blood, sweat and tears with this incredible team from a production company called 0.0 who did *No Reservations* and does *Parts Unknown*, Anthony Bourdain's stuff, and so on. The whole team, we killed ourselves trying to put together an amazing show and it was a brutal experience because making good TV is hard. It's really tough.

We pulled it off, and then the show goes up for two episodes and the entire division that had produced it at Turner gets shut down. All of the TV shows, all of the content, maybe with the exception of one called *Cook Your Ass Off*, I think everything except for that got yanked and my show was among that. Now I feel like a failure yet again.

The show gets yanked but it was so brutal. It was so brutal because the show got yanked. Fans were confused because I made this huge announcement. Not only did I have a private failure, it was a very public failure and I felt like I disappointed my fans, and spent the better part of about a year and a half fighting to try to get it back and having it fall through again and again, not because anybody was a bad guy in the situation.

You have to understand, for a very large company like a conglomerate, a huge label or a huge network, one show that wasn't even on a major network or a major channel is not – and it shouldn't be, really – a high priority in the grand scheme of things. It's a rounding error.

It was the most important thing to me in the world just about creatively, and yet it was utterly unimportant to almost everybody else who was in a position to help me. A very, very challenging experience.

Long story short, this is another reason why it's very important. People ask me, "What skills should I work on broadly, to become an entrepreneur?" I say, "Negotiating." You have to get good at communicating, written communication and negotiating. *Getting Past No* is a good book, *Secrets of Power Negotiating* by a guy with the last name Dawson is great if you can get the audio.

I'm sure there are others but really had to try to get very creative to find something that would be a win-win including, obviously, for Turner, the licensor and finally figured it out. I got the digital distribution rights for the U.S. back about, I want to say, two months ago.

So many people told me to just give up. They told me, "You tried your best. Write it off. You're banging your head against a wall. You're depressed." But in this particular case, the drive wasn't financial because there is a very good chance I won't make the small fortune that I spent on legal, the license and everything.

There's a very good chance I won't make the money back, but this was just me having to run back with my tail between my legs when I got my ass handed to me with *The 4-Hour Chef*, saying, "Fuck this. I'm not going to give up with distribution again. I am *not* going to have that experience again."

I had to try to get very creative, pony up and really accept that this was a passion project and I want the world to see this TV show. I'm really proud of it. The team that put it together is amazing and I think it's an incredible show. That has finally come together. I have to tell you, over the last couple of days, seeing it hit number one on iTunes across every genre of television, beating *Downton Abbey*, *Mad Men* and *Game of Thrones* and it's just sitting there.

It's been number one every hour that I'm aware of for the last two or three days.

Derek: And it's only on the Internet.

Tim: Yes. It's all digital. Part of that reason is that I realized when I tried to play the broadcast TV game, I was entering into a competition in a sport that I knew nothing about. It was stupid. That was a mistake on my part. I was just so romanced by the idea of having something on cable or television that I walked in very naïve. At the end of the day, my primary audience is 20 to 40-year old tech savvy people, not exclusively but primarily.

Derek: On the Internet.

Tim: Those are people who use iTunes, Apple TV and Netflix and so on. These are not people who, with maybe the rare exception of Game of Thrones who appointment-watch. They don't sit down and turn on the evening news.

The people who watch an HLN – which my show is on which didn't make a lot of sense but it was what we could do – are really not in my core demographic. That was shame on me. I got over-confident and under-informed and went into it. When you do something like that, there's a good chance you're going to get your ass kicked and I got my ass kicked, but this time around it was just pure digital.

I don't want to mess with TV. I don't understand TV. I don't understand cable. That's not my native language, but if I can drive people to a link where they can watch it from my blog, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit and so on, that is a sport that I know really well.

Derek: Number one.

Tim: I'm thrilled. To be able to resurrect orphaned content is really a huge celebration for me. Also because there are so many artists out there – I'm not saying I'm an artist – say, musicians or people who have done films who have incredible albums that are just sitting on a shelf at a label gathering dust and they haven't been able to get the rights back, I hope this inspires them to go out, use sites like Change.org or Kickstarter to rally their fans and get the money they need to negotiate and to revive these things and resurrect them.

I'm really hoping that it ends up being a case study that gets creators really excited to try to get more of their content out there to their fans.

Derek: And maybe not even sign those rights over to begin with.

Tim: Exactly.

Derek: As you probably know, I've had people approach me offering me book deals. That's what happens when you have a larger audience. I don't want a book deal because I don't want to sign rights over of anything that I do to anyone else other than myself.

Tim: Yes. Amanda Palmer, the musician, said this to me. If you can use the man to make your art, then use the man but otherwise, stick to your solo game. Here's the thing. When I look back, very legitimately, if I had not partnered with Random House to publish *The 4-House Workweek*, I don't think anyone would know who I am. I wouldn't have the life that I have today and I'm very fortunate to have it.

There are times when it makes a lot of sense, but when you have someone else finance any major project, they rightfully are going to have the rights and leverage. They're taking the most material financial risk. That is how the game works. If you were in their shoes, you would ask for the same thing.

Derek: I would.

Tim: For my book club, when I'm creating audio books and putting out audio books for people, I am in the opposite set of shoes and I'm asking for certain protections. It's the natural, logical thing to do.

Derek: Of course. I'm not saying it's bad. I'm just saying I've personally avoided it. You know what? I'm probably going to do a book eventually anyway, but I'm still going to try and maintain as much control that I can in the meantime.

Tim: Absolutely. I think that what you've done is very smart. I can draw some comparisons that people might be surprised by or might find instructive. I think that the more you can prove that something works without other people's help, the cheaper that help will be to get later and the more leverage you will have.

For instance, the co-founder of Uber, Garrett Camp, bootstrapped Uber in the early days, bankrolled it himself which is not cheap, to get it to the point where he could already show a certain degree of traction and product market fit and then go out and raise money from people he knew, initially, to accelerate the growth. But he didn't go out immediately like a lot of entrepreneurs do these days. It's not always the wrong approach, but by approaching it that way and similarly, if you then negotiate with a book publisher at some point, you will have leverage because of what you have already established. You know your content works and has an audience. Not only that, but you can directly communicate with your audience.

The general rule in negotiating is he or she who cares the least wins. If you have publishing as one of ten options and the publisher has you as one of five promising books, you win. You will be able to not necessarily dictate all the terms – quite frankly, you want to leave some juicy bits on the table so that you don't win the battle but lose the war. You need a partner who doesn't resent you. That's getting into the nitty-gritty of long-term negotiation and how it fits into relationships.

There's an expression I also like for negotiating which is, "You can shear a sheep over and over again, but you can skin them only once." Meaning if you go to a negotiation and you

beat the shit out of someone and force them to begrudgingly accept a deal that they don't feel is a fair deal, you're sowing the seeds of your own destruction. That is a stupid move. It's an empiric victory that is going to end up with lots of tears and disasters later.

Derek: And fighting, lawsuits and probably even worse.

Tim: Yes. I'm not saying don't negotiate hard, but you ideally leave someone feeling like they won certain aspects of the negotiation. People can practice this, learn the gambits and approaches for this in some of the books I recommended and elsewhere, but that is a very long way of saying I'm super-stoked about the TV show.

It is, in a very real way, the culmination and application of all the skills that I have learned. If I hadn't taken the start-up investing and treated it like a two-year real-world MBA, I wouldn't have been able to do what I just did. If I hadn't done the experiments with the podcast and so on, and built up the audience there, I wouldn't have been able to launch the TV show on iTunes in the way that I did.

This is a great example of something that finally turned out and to make it turn out, I used skills, some of which I acquired from things that had "failed" in the past. I think it's a really good demonstration of why I follow some of the rules that I do. These are not rules that I made up. These are things that I borrowed from people who are way smarter and more experienced than myself, but nonetheless, you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

In fact, I would highly discourage trying to reinvent the wheel. Model people who have done it before, whether that's people who have inspired me in the past – Tony Robbins, the Richard Bransons – like capping the down side. Great. I read *Losing My Virginity* and read a lot of takeaways from Bransons and borrowed that. Angel Investing, I'm borrowing from people like Chris Sacca and Rita Hoffman. I borrow whenever possible from the greats.

That's something that anyone can do. You do not need to know these people. In fact, the vast majority of role models and mentors that I have had have been through content like books or listening to *Personal Power 2* with Anthony Robbins from my shitty desk job when I was in a used mini van hand-me-down that the seats had been stolen out of that was nicknamed The Molester Mobile by my co-workers. But I had Tony, in that case, as my psychological performance coach to and from work when I was stuck on 101 in horrible traffic.

Derek: I think that "borrow from the greats" is so interesting because I actually recently revealed in some blog posts that I grew up in a very bad childhood. My mom was on welfare. My dad was in jail. All this crazy stuff happened. I had other people in my family stealing money from my mom because they were heroin addicts. This is the household I grew up in.

I needed mentors and models and I found them in books. I had no connections to speak of. Most of my family didn't even graduate from college. I just read biographies and memoirs of the most successful people in the world and started borrowing everything that they said to do

just like you're saying right now. I think that's a very good point to end on.

To everyone who's listening here, I highly suggest you take a look at Tim Ferriss's new TV show. I know he has an episode on starting a business. I know many of you will be interested in watching that episode especially considering how many things Tim has built over the years. I think you're going to glean a lot of insight from it. Other than that, do you want to leave off with anything else, Tim, before we wrap this up?

Tim: Definitely. I obviously appreciate all the time and kind words. I would emphasize that the Tim Ferriss Experiment is a show primarily about two things: conquering fear and 10X-ing your learning speed which, I think, is absolutely possible in almost every area. I didn't always believe that, but I do now, so I share the reasons that I believe that in the techniques that I use.

In each of these episodes, you get to see some massive ups and downs. You get to see me, in a number of these, have the equivalent of a nervous breakdown. You get to see me get injured. You get to see me fall, literally in some cases. You get to see me stumble.

It is not the Tim Ferriss highlight reel. It is a realistic capturing of me pushing myself to the breaking point, and in some cases, coaching other people, in fact. It's not just me. I'm coaching other people to show you that, yes, this can be done by anyone to do things that they don't think are possible.

I think it ties into our conversation very well insomuch as I want people to not have a rose-colored glasses view of the world. I think you get yourself into trouble because when you end up in a depressive place, you think that you're a failure or that there is something inherently wrong with you, not realizing that this is part of the human condition. When you push yourself outside of your comfort zone to try to do anything, you're going to have these moments of darkness, doubt and you see these in the TV show. I did not want to hide those.

Some of these episodes have miraculous breakthroughs and I talk about exactly how to engineer those and how they happened. Then in other cases, you see me fall flat on my face and it's important for me to show you guys those because anything that I've been able to do – any small modicum of success that I've had – is not because I wake up happy, excited and optimistic every day and that I have it all figured out.

I have been able to do those things despite the fact that I've suffered from some tremendous depressive episodes. I have the same self-doubt that people listening do and I've built systems, checks and balances, and habits for myself to conquer that lesser self. That's something that people can do.

I don't want them to feel alone if they're in a really dark place and being very hard on themselves. Maybe they have abusive parents or people around them who fuel those demons. It's important for everyone to realize, when you feel most alone, that is precisely

when you are not alone because there are millions of people out there who feel exactly the same thing and there are millions of people who have dug themselves out of that hole repeatedly and gone on to do wonderful things that produce a tremendous amount of happiness for themselves and other people.

I would like to think that I am one example of that, but I'm not the only example. I've had a lot of readers challenged with the same things and overcome the same things. People listening can do the same. If you're in a dark place, just realize the light comes after the darkness and the most benevolent selfless thing you can do is not to take the selfish position and do anything to harm yourself where the people you love and care about would just be devastated forever.

It's not a necessary step. It's not a helpful step. Even though I know in the deepest, darkest moments it can seem that way, but it's an illusion. You just have to weather that middle-of-the-night experience, even if it's metaphorically in the middle of the night – it could be in the middle of the day – until the sun rises and it always does. It always does.

That's a bit of a sermon but it's such an important topic to talk about and I'm glad you brought it out of me because I don't talk about this enough, quite frankly. Who knows why not? I'm embarrassed, I guess. But it's fucking stupid and there's nothing to be embarrassed about because when you get a couple of drinks into any one of my friends – almost any one of them – who has been successful, they've all had moments of extreme self-doubt. It's just part of this ride of being human and you don't have to cut that ride short by doing something harmful to yourself.

Derek: I totally agree and I really appreciate us going there mainly because I do think it's important. And I do think it's important to shed the light that even after you're successful, it's very easy to pull yourself back into a depression that could make you make a decision you can't reverse, obviously. It's great that we got to talk about that.

Tim: Let me add one more recommendation. My pleasure, of course. One recommendation also for those people who are challenged by these things or who don't want to succumb to these things, I did write a blog post that was very hard for me to write, but I was very happy I put it out there. It's available for free. If you search "Productivity Hacks for the Neurotic Manic Depressive and Crazy (Like Me)", it talks about some of these challenges and some of the routines that I've developed to help me with all of this.

If you're going to take one action after this, of course I'd love people to check out the Tim Ferriss Experiment, but much more important than that even though it'll support all of this stuff, is check out the "Productivity Hacks for the Neurotic Manic Depressive and Crazy (Like Me)". If you search "productivity hacks for the neurotic" and "Tim Ferriss", it will pop right up.

Derek: That's actually a great post. I remember reading it. Thank you for joining me today. And to everyone who is listening, thank you for listening. This was the first Social Triggers podcast that I have released in quite a long time. I'm happy that I'm having the opportunity to speak with Tim about this today because I know that we had great stuff to talk about and I know you're all going to love it. Thank you for listening.