

Announcer: Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that every time your heart beats, fluid squishes through your brain and actually jiggles your brain. And we didn't really understand that. A new twist on magnetic resonance imaging, aka MRI, has illuminated those brain pulsations and ripples. Their movement's so subtle, no one had noticed them using all the imaging that we have today. And they discovered that abnormal brain motion could signal problems, like aneurysms, or traumatic brain injuries, or concussions, something that I have dealt with, and a lot of guests on the show have dealt with.

And surprisingly, about 90% of people who go through the 40 years of Zen Neuro Feedback Training Program show signs of subtle brain injuries in their electrical signaling that we look at one day one, which is amazing. So we're all these high performers out there, who actually fell down when we were two and got a little brain injury. It's fascinating.

But these scientists honed an existing method called amplified MRI, where they stitch together multiple images taken at precise times of your heart beat. They used an algorithm that exaggerates those tiny movements. This actually happened between Stanford University and Steven Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, and the University of Auckland in New Zealand. So these cross globe people worked together and figured out how to make a movie of the brain's rhythmic twisting and writhing as blood and cerebral spinal fluid move in and move out. And that new way to see how the brain moves is probably going to help scientists spot brain disorders, or just lowering of performance way before we would any other way. Which is kind of cool.

Today's guest is Ryan Cummins. And Ryan's had an amazing path of working with influential people, talking with Nobel Prize winners, lots of them, actually, major video productions that culminated in a new understanding of what he could do to allow all of us to have these life changing, amazing, once in a lifetime experiences, and support massive charity efforts at the same time.

This is something that's disruptive to the whole space of helping people, and that's why I wanted to have him on. Both because he's done some incredible things he's going to talk about, but also because disruption is something that's been wired into my brain since ... I think since I was born. I've looked at disrupting technology, at the internet disrupted phone companies, and this ... my whole career in Silicon Valley was around disruption. And Bulletproof is around disrupting Big Food so that we can actually go to the store and buy food that makes us feel good, and supports the planet, and supports our biology, versus buying stuff that tastes good and makes you feel like crap, which is the current state of affairs. So we can break that and make it better.

And what I think is happening with what Ryan's doing, along with his partner Matt at Omaze, is breaking charitable giving so that people can help in a way where they get something phenomenal potentially, but they also are creating more good than they would have before. So Ryan, welcome to the show.

Ryan: Thank you, Dave, it's a pleasure to be on.

Dave: Now you've had this amazing path before you started Omaze, and I want to walk our listeners through some of that, because it's ... because I know you, and I know that it led to your mindset, and your process for creating Omaze. You actually filmed 120 Nobel Prize and Fields Medal winners, MacArthur Genius Grant recipients, Pulitzer Prize winners and people like that as a way of just forming your mindset. And you did some other stuff around Live Earth, which was the largest concert ever thrown, in seven cities, all in the same day, and some other big things like that.

What I want to know, first of all, is what made you go from talking with lots of interesting people, and throwing big concerts, and doing things like that, into the world of charitable giving? Like what was the spark that made you do that?

Ryan: Oh yeah, that's a great question. It's funny, because hindsight's always 20/20, and you can sort of plot that path out, but oftentimes when you're on the path, you're just looking for the next steps. But I think it began because Matt, you mentioned my co-founder, Matt and I were friends at Stanford, and the thing that brought us together in that friendship was really a deep passion for storytelling. And so that brought us down to LA when we both graduated, and we began working on a number of different cause content, big campaigns, big global campaigns. So as you mentioned, I was the first director on a thing called Live Earth, largest concert ever thrown. Matt had a chance to work as an early producer on Girl Rising, it was a documentary about educating girls in the developing world, funded by Intel, and Oprah, and narrated by Meryl Streep. I went off and did that interview series you mentioned, where I got to film a lot of these world's brightest minds, and then we both came back together to executive produce A Decade of Difference, which was this globally televised event. It was a concert with ... we go to film Bono, and Jay Z, and Matt Damon, Sean Penn, you name it, just all these big folks.

And the purpose of my rattling those off is that with every single one of these campaigns that we were working on, Matt and I saw that we were creating a tremendous amount of awareness, but we were not necessarily creating a commensurate amount of impact. And you know, when we took a step back, and we really took a survey of the landscape of cause content, we saw that this was something that's fairly endemic to the space. A lot of people put on these big conferences, and concerts, and to dos, and they pull fans in, but converting those fans into donors that are passionate about the cause, and emotionally attached, and want to stick around was a much bigger feat. And we knew that we wanted to stay in this space of storytelling around impact at a global scale. We didn't have the model, so we both went back to business school, and we've spent two years as creatives looking to ... you know, we joke that we went into business school, most people come in at a 50 and leave at a 70, and we came in at like a two or a three, and just getting to 40 would be a big accomplishment.

And while we were there, we went to a charity gala, they were honoring Magic Johnson for the Boys and Girls Club of America. And Matt and I are huge, lifelong Magic Johnson fans. You know, I grew up 45 minutes down the street from Michigan State where he

played ball, and Matt grew up in Laguna, so he's a huge Lakers fan, I think his parents let him stay home the day after the Lakers lost, because he cried so hard. I don't know if he wants me to share that story, but he gets a laugh out of it every time.

And so we're sitting at this charity auction, and we're the guys that got invited by someone else, so we're at a table in the back and they start auctioning off the chance to hang out with Magic, sit court side at a Lakers game, and just have this incredible experience of a lifetime. And being the fans that we are, the auction kicks off and it's 50 bucks, and we both throw our hands up, and it's 100, and then it's 250, then it's 500, and we're sitting there thinking like, "We're on loans in business school, that's half our month's rent at this point in time." And then it's 1,000 and we sort of sheepishly drop our hands. And it goes 5,000, 10,000, it clears for 15k. And Dave, to throw some salt on the wound, we knew the guy who bought it for 15k, and he's a Clippers fan, he wasn't even a Magic Johnson fan. So we're sitting there thinking, "All right, here's this incredible once in a lifetime experience, here's a room of 200 high net worth individuals, and the guy that bought it didn't even care."

So as we were driving home that night, we started thinking, "How much more money, and how much more awareness could they have raised if for \$10.00 anybody around the world online had the chance to participate in that once in a lifetime experience?" And that was where the idea was born.

Dave: Let me walk through listeners through what a charity gala auction actually is and how it works. And I know this because some of friends run those, like the Unstoppable Foundation, and I actually donated enough to build four schools for girls in Africa in villages where girls aren't allowed to get education this year.

Ryan: That's awesome, that's awesome.

Dave: But the way these are set up is you generally spend about \$1,000.00 to get a chair, and wealthier people will buy a whole table, so maybe 10 seats, and then they'll invite some friends, or you'll spend a \$1,000.00 for a ticket to sit there. And the reason you spend the money is you know that it's going to cover the cost of this event, maybe it's at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, it's going to be swanky, it's where they hold the Oscars, or something like that. So it's a chance to have a really dress up nice, and kind of have a fancy like a prom for wealthy people, right?

But then the other reason you spend the money is you're in a room with a bunch of other people who are pretty successful, and you get to make new friends, and hang out with cool people, and you're all dressed up, and there's photographers, and it's a cool experience, right? But then you sit there and there's an auctioneer on stage, and they're auctioning off these things, and pretty soon there's people raising their hands, "Yeah, I'll spend \$50,000.00 on that." And if you're a normal person, and certainly the vast majority of my career, other than when I made that six million dollars when I was 26, I lost when I was 28, you go to one of these things, like that's a down payment on a house. That's my next car. And it's just not possible.

So it takes that idea of raising money from going to a special event, and then spending a year's salary for a lot of people, on something, it's something that is by definition limited to the number of people who can afford that, which means that while it's a great experience if you can afford it, it's also, you need to be rolling in money to do this. And that means it's small. And then you also don't necessarily know where the money's going to go, although if you go to the right events, you at least know there's quality people renting them.

So paint that picture as the current state of affairs. And so you went to one of these, and you're like, "This isn't for me, I'm lucky someone gave me a ticket to get into this thing, but it's not my game, but I still want to do these things, I still want to help." Is that a good picture?

Ryan: 100%, 100%.

Dave: All right.

Ryan: And we represent, you know, the vast majority of people out there who want to have dream experiences, and live their best life, but can't participate in these things. And so when we launched Omaze, it was predicated on that idea of democratizing these dream experiences and rewards to the masses. And so what we've gone is we've taken things like the chance to be in Star Wars, or to go wine tasting with Jennifer Lawrence, or ride on a tank and crush things with Arnold Schwarzenegger, these like totally wacky experiences, and we've democratized them to the masses.

And what we've seen is that now, unlike the traditional auction model, where they make five, 10, 15,000 bucks, maybe 50,000 if you're in a loaded room, these are making hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars for their respective charities. But what they're also doing is it's a win/win, because the talent gets to get 10 to 40 times x-rays over what they traditionally would. The nonprofits get to continue doing what they should be doing, which is boots on the ground work. And the donor, guys like you before you were 26 and made all that money, or me when I'm broke and in business school, suddenly get a chance to participate in these once in a lifetime experiences. And that's really the beauty of the entire model.

Dave: The other thing that attracted me to Omaze, and had me want to get you on the show, is that when I've donated to causes, you say, oh, you watch something on TV or someone hits you up at the mall and sort of guilts you into spending 10 bucks. And you say, "Okay, well I guess I should do it, it'd be a good thing." But you do it, and it isn't necessarily a positive thing, and giving is supposed to feel good because you genuinely know you're helping another person, so there's a selfish part of giving for everyone. Any time you help another person, it's selfish.

Ryan: Of course.

Dave: It's selfish. Because it really good to help other people. I certainly enjoy doing it, and you can help them financially, you can help them by carrying their groceries, it doesn't really

matter, you help another person, it makes you happy, right? And acknowledging that's cool, but if the way you're getting happiness from a traditional mass donor thing is you're getting happy because they've created guilt, and then you remove the guilt. That isn't really happiness, it's just kind of bringing you back up to normal.

And what you're doing with Omaze is different. Walk me through why people donate with Omaze versus an older model of mass giving?

Ryan: Sure. Well first of all, individual giving in the US is a 330 billion dollar market. And only about 7% of that is online, so right now you see how archaic philanthropy really still is. So what Matt and I were talking about is we have this background in storytelling, but what if we put that background in storytelling on top of a layer of traditional e-commerce and technology, could that really open the floodgates? In just a couple years we've now ended up raising over 100 million dollars for charity, at \$10.00 a pop. And that's from donors from 180 countries around the world. So there really is an appetite globally for people to be able to participate in these types of experiences.

But when you ask about like a specific experience, let me tell you the story I like, Robert Downey Jr. So here's a guy, he's Iron Man, he's Tony Stark, and he is a very, very philanthropic person, really wants to, as you'll find with a lot of these celebrities, celebrities are some of the most creative people in the world, they're the most passionate people, and passionate people care about changing the world. And so when we first met with Robert Downey Jr., he wanted to help build a new hospice center for kids. So it's a remarkable charity called Julius House, and what they do is they provide, essentially, a refuge for families who here these kids have been dealt a terrible hand, but then there are their parents, who sometimes only get two, three hours of sleep a night. Or there are siblings of these kids who have no idea at four, or five, six years old, why their parents aren't paying much attention to them, and what's going with their other sibling, so it really is a tough hand that these families are dealt.

And what these hospice centers do is they give those parents an opportunity to have a dignified night of sleep. They give the siblings a chance to meet other siblings, and they give these kids who really have it the hardest a chance to really play, and enjoy life. And so Robert came along and Julius House wanted to build a brand new hospice center, they said it was going to cost 1.75 million dollars, and that would usually take them two years.

So he offers up the chance to have the best night of your life with Robert Downey Jr. You fly in a helicopter over the Hollywood Boulevard sign, you go indoor skydiving, you then get suited up in a tux or a gown, have a caviar toast with RDJ, and then ride in his motorcade to the premier of Avengers before hanging out with him at the after party. You know, so like just a-

Dave: That's pretty epic.

Ryan: Nutty, nutty, epic experience. And in five weeks, he ended up raising 2.2 million dollars. They've already launched the brand new hospice center that is now serving thousands

of additional families. So that's sort of how it all comes together, and that's ... you know, donors around the world at 10 bucks a pop coming to support this, for this chance to support an icon that they believe in, but a really remarkable cause at the same time.

Dave: So now what you're doing is instead of guilting people, saying, "Think of all this suffering. Think of all the horrible things," you kind of suppress [inaudible 00:15:55], "Now for only \$10.00 you can fix everything." Right, and you could do that, or you could say, "Look, this is a tough thing, let's have compassion for these people, so why don't you donate \$10.00 and you might have a chance for this amazing hope." So it feels more uplifting to me, and I think that's why Robert Downey Jr. was able to raise more. And he couldn't go and shoot another movie, made the money himself and donated it, or he could've asked a lot of his wealthy friends to do it at a gala. But the idea is now a lot more people are engaged with that important hospice activity, and anyone who's dealt with someone dying in their family knows how important a hospice is. And they're always underfunded. So now, "Oh wait, I'm doing something good, and maybe I'm going to have this thing, maybe I can hope that I get this thing." It feels like it's a fair transaction.

Like earlier you said something that kind of pissed me off. You said, "Well how we do convert fans into donors." And it's like, ugh, no one wants to be converted. Like people want to help, right?

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: And this feels like a really clean model, and that's something that I haven't seen done before. And it's actually something I'm pretty excited about.

Ryan: Yeah. It used to be the case, you know, I always heard sort of the traditional model was you go from employee to employer, to investor, to philanthropist. And in this new age that we live in, everybody can be a philanthropist. Everybody right now can support a cause that they want through micro donations, through engagement, through sharing. And we just basically wanted to be able to provide. And what you nailed was the empowerment, and the levity. Something Matt and I would always say to each other is that laughter is the shortest distance between two people. And when we grew up in the 80s and 90s we saw a lot of commercials that were flies on the face, guilting you into donating. But really, in the world that we live in now, people want to be inspired. They want to feel empowered, and they want to live their best lives while empowering others to live their own. And that's really the model that we've been most focused on, is how do we inject fun, and happiness, and empowerment into a model that offers these once in a lifetime experiences?

Dave: Tell me one more of these completely unbelievable things that you've actually offered up for people. Just because some of these are fascinating. Actually, tell me your two favorites.

Ryan: Yeah, sure. Well I'll start by saying it was a hard road. You know, this was not a success right out of the gates, and we had a lot of stumbling blocks early on, a lot of learning.

One of my favorite experiences, which did not raise a lot of money in our first year, was the chance to play Battleship against four star Admiral Mullen. And incredibly experience, but it turns out that Admiral Mullen doesn't have a massive social media following, rightfully so. A seven year old won that experience and beat him twice, by the way, which was amazing.

But as we refined the model and learned how to add the storytelling to it, you know, we went from \$500.00 raises, 20,000, to 50,000 on up. We did one that was the chance to ride in a Winnebago with Ryan Cranston and Aaron Paul, the two stars of Breaking Bad. So that you got to get-

Dave: No way.

Ryan: Dressed up in Hazmat suits and ride in a Winnebago to the season finale of Breaking Bad with them. And that ended up raising 1.7 million dollars for Kind Campaign, which is a remarkable anti-bullying campaign started by Aaron Paul's wife.

Dave: Man, I ... Revolver Magazine once called me the Heizenburg of coffee, which was ... it was the single nicest thing anyone's ever said about me, as far as I can tell. And it turns out that some of the people behind Breaking Bad are also Bulletproof, so I have one of 300 signed prints of the diagram of the lab underneath the laundromat hanging downstairs at-

Ryan: Well done.

Dave: [crosstalk 00:19:47] which is one of my prized possessions. So yeah, I would have totally done that. And since we're talking about Breaking Bad stuff ... let's see, I think it was Brian Cranston ... I'm just going to tell the story.

Ryan: Go for it.

Dave: This is about storytelling anyway. So early in the start of Bulletproof ... a lot of people don't know this, people think I've been some sort of gazillionaire for my whole life. No, I lost all of my money when I was 28. So I had this taste of wealth, and then I worked, and I had mortgage payments, and rent, and all that stuff like almost everyone. And at the beginning of Bulletproof, I self funded this thing, so I was scraping the bottom of the barrel. And I helped a professional poker player go Bulletproof to the point he had never read a book, and when he got his brain working all the sudden he could just read. And he said, "Dave, one of my buddies just bought you a ticket to a celebrity charity event, but it's a poker tournament."

So I show up, and this is Matt Damon's charity. And I'm like ... I have no idea what to expect, I haven't been to a charity event since I was 25, and they've changed a little bit. And it's at a very, very successful Hollywood person's house, and there's all these famous people, they're all just playing poker. And I'm wearing my yellow glasses, the TrueDarks, so they think that I'm a professional poker player. And I ended up winning. I was the chip leader at the end of the first round. Not because of great poker skills,

because I'm like, it's not my money. And it's all to raise for charity anyways, so if you win or lose, there's no difference.

So I have this huge stack of chips, and I end up at the final table. Where Ryan was. Or Bryan was.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: And there's also Larry David, and Tim Tebow, and all these people. And I'm just going to admit it, I didn't recognize Tim Tebow. So he's sitting next to me, and everyone thinks I'm going to win because I'm clearly a professional poker player because they have no idea who I am. And I have yellow glasses, which means I must ... right. So anyway, I'm sitting there and I'm about to say to Tim, "Hey man, you look like you work out a lot, like what's your deal? Like I don't ... " [inaudible 00:21:56] and then someone calls him Tebow, and I'm like, oh thank god someone told me who he was. And I took Larry David's money, and he acted just like you expect Larry David to act.

But that was the first time that I met Bryan, and I saw him again years later at one of Oprah's things, but it was so funny because this event raised many millions of dollars, but these are people who just didn't mind spending 25 grand to buy into the poker tournament. I did not have 25 grand in the bank when I went to this thing. My company did, but I did not personally even have that much money, there was no way I could've had that experience, except for the kindness of a friend who I'd helped, and without expecting anything in return.

Ryan: That's awesome.

Dave: Right. And so when I think about that as a prototypical charity thing, it's not accessible to us, to almost anyone. You have to know the right people, and you have to have lots of money and be willing to spend it on a good cause.

And that was an epic experience in and of itself, but it would've been 10 times more epic, what you're saying now, for 10 bucks if you're the person who wins it to ride in a Winnebago with those guys for my favorite show ever. So it's that disparity where you just ... where these peak experiences ought to be more democratic than they are now.

Ryan: Yeah. And what's crazy, we did ... we actually did a chance to go to one of those poker tournaments with Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, so you had a chance to do a-

Dave: Yeah, Ben Affleck was there too, of course.

Ryan: Double date with the two of them, night on the town.

Dave: Oh my god.

Ryan: And they are just hilarious. And incredible supporters. You know, Matt supports Water.org, and Ben supports-

Dave: Yeah, that's what this for, it was Water.org actually, yeah.

Ryan: Right, yeah. And Ben does the Eastern Congo Initiatives, so yeah, it's awesome, I'm glad you had that experience.

We did another one, it was the chance to hang out on set with Emilia Clarke on the final season of Game of Thrones.

Dave: Wow.

Ryan: I feel like you might have liked that one. We did one that was amazing. So George Clooney, we did an experience with George Clooney, and the first one we did was the chance to be his date on a red carpet premier, and then he got married to Amal, so after that we were doing a followup experience and obviously we couldn't do the date anymore, so George offered to sit across from one winner, and for one minute start into their eyes and compliment them.

Dave: Whoa!

Ryan: And that was like one of our biggest hits.

Dave: So these are things that are just not even on the radar for almost anyone, and I've got to say, Snoop Dogg based health retreat, tell me what the deal was with that one.

Ryan: Yeah, well that was all in good fun, and in the name of a good cause. So we partner annually with Bono to support Red, which is really focused on ending the transmission of HIV from mother to child. And so what Bono will do every year is pull together a series of his different friends, and they'll offer up really incredible experiences, and so that ... the George Clooney one was one of those, we had a Julia Roberts one, we had a Channing Tatum, Neil Patrick Harris, but for that one when Snoop got on board, so for two years in a row we ended up doing a Jimmy Kimmel telethon. So it was almost like a QVC style telethon where the celebrities would come on the show around the holidays and like sort of jokingly pitch their experiences with Omaze. And Snoop was offering the chance to do a health retreat with Snoop in Colorado. This was before some of the California laws passes. So, you know, we like to have fun with these things, and he was a great partner, and doing it for a worthy cause.

Dave: So, you've now raised 100 million dollars for charity, which is something very few people can say that they've done. You being Omaze, the nonprofit is you and Matt, and just like-

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: The team there. And what I want to know though is, in order to get to the level where you can pull off something like this, because this is something a lot of people might've said, "Oh, I have this idea," but they would probably not have done all of the things right in the right order, or at least right enough in order to get there. I know that some of

your experience came from those discussions you had with all these Nobel Prize winners and all that, and I want to dig some of the biggest lessons you learned from talking with this amazing group.

Ryan: Sure.

Dave: You up for that?

Ryan: Yeah, yeah, I'm totally game. This is your podcast Dave, I'm just a passenger.

Dave: All right, good deal here. So you talked to Dr. Eric Kendel on designing memories, and that helped you think about what you're doing at Omaze. What did you get when you interviewed that Nobel Prize winner?

Ryan: Oh man. Yeah, so Dr. Kendel is one of the most remarkable people I've ever had the pleasure of meeting in my life. So his story, I think, I'll share it very briefly, but it outlines so much of how our brains create memories. So he was seven years old, living in Vienna, Austria when the Nazis invaded. And over the next two years his family lost everything and he found himself on a freighter coming across the ocean over to New York, over to Brooklyn with his brother, not even with his parents. So they're 11 and 12 on this freighter, making their way by themselves. Because of that experience, his memory of that experience, he wanted to understand the roots of brutality. And that led him to study the Id and the superego, and Freud, and then someone when he was at Harvard said, "Look, if you really want to understand the brain, and how our brains work, then you've got to study it one cell at a time. Forget about all the psychoanalysis, and really dig into the medicine."

Dave: Yep.

Ryan: And so he went to med school, started studying the brain once cell at a time, and basically over the course of his work realized that we as human beings have two different types of experiences. On the one end of the spectrum are habituated experiences, which means as you and I are sitting talking in a restaurant, there may be phones going off, or people chattering in the background, and that has neither rewarding effect nor a punitive effect, so we habituate to it, and we ignore it.

On the other end of the spectrum are sensitized experiences. So if I asked you, "Where were you the first time you became a man?" Or, "Where were you on 9/11?" You would remember those events, because those are highly sensitized events. And the difference between those two things is that with habituated experiences, those form your short term memories. With sensitized experiences, those form your long term memories. And so Dr. Kendel's work essentially uncovered that difference between short term and long term memory. And what I took from that was just this idea that we have the opportunity to actively design our lives. You are the culmination of your memories. And so the more that any individual focuses on what are the memories that they're actively creating on a daily basis through how sensitized we are, how we create the most exciting experiences possible. Then at the end of the day, when you're looking the

mirror, and you're having a conversation with that voice in your head, that voice is the culmination of all those memories.

And so if you want that to be the richest, most positive, productive, awesome voice possible, then you can take an active role in creating those memories. And that was really the lessons that I took from him, and he's just been a remarkable human being. He's still working, by the way, he's 88 years old and still focused on memory, and now he's focused on memory loss out of Columbia University. So just a remarkable guy.

Dave: All right. That's a pretty amazing thing to pick up early in your career. How old were you when you interviewed him?

Ryan: I was 27 at the time. I was 27, and when I was about 21 I'd just arrived in LA, and I wrote down that before I finished that decade, I wanted to sit down with as many of the world's brightest thinkers as I possibly could. And so after finishing Live Earth, I had a little bit of a platform there and so I went out and just started interviewing some folks. You now, Noam Chomsky, and Eric Kendel, and a guy named John Hess who now is the exec chairman of Alphabet, which oversees Google, but he was at the time the president of Stanford. And I just had a series of six questions that I was asking each of them that I was trying to figure out for myself. But then I cut a deal with them where if they liked my interview, and they liked the questions, they would introduce me to the next three people. So I went from three to nine, 27, and very quickly ended up having a couple hundred people that I filled my brain with.

Dave: That is a powerful way to accelerate your growth and your career in your mid 20s. And this is something that I didn't get when I was around that age. I grew up thinking that no one wanted to help, believe it or not. And I don't know where I got that, but it was sort of like the world's a mean place, and in fact, I can tell you where I got that now, I got that because I was born with the umbilical cord around my neck, and so I-

Ryan: You came out fighting.

Dave: I came into the world thinking, "Man, it's a bad place here." And I was wrong, and I reprogrammed all that. But it meant that I had almost a combative way of getting head, and it worked. I mean, I made six million bucks when I was 26, I'm not complaining, and even losing it was a huge lesson. But I lost it, in part, because that mindset that people aren't here to help. And I was too arrogant to learn from people.

And I look at my contemporaries who are my age who did learn from other people. You get Mark Andreessen wrote the first web browser, I was the first guy to sell anything over the internet, like he's a multi billionaire, and I'm not. Like it's because he was smart enough to go out and learn from people how to do stuff, and you were smart enough to do that, and I wasn't and I'm just catching up now.

So, what made you smart enough, or open enough, or interested enough to do that in your mid 20s when frankly, a lot of people don't get there until a bit later in life, so you

were ahead of the curve. What in your life made you ahead of the curve, to just want to go do this?

Ryan:

You know, I appreciate that question, but I feel like I honestly can't take that much credit, because when I first started doing that, those series of interviews, I think I thought I was a lot brighter than I found out that I was. You know, I started, and like I said I had these sort of larger six philosophical questions, but what happened, I listened to the first 10 interviews that I did. And thank God I listened to those first 10 before I continued on, because I saw this pattern emerge, and that was that every single time one of these MacArthur Genius Grant recipients, or Nobel Prize winners was about to just give me a complete nugget of gold wisdom, I would interrupt them with what I thought they were trying to say. And completely forego the opportunity to learn.

And that idea really completely changed me in that moment. I went from being someone who sort of ... I probably, not necessarily intentionally, but passively spoke with a little bit of an air of righteousness, a little bit of an air of knowing, and realized in that moment that I was ... by carrying that as a mindset, I was preventing myself from actually truly knowing just by listening to people, and gaining their knowledge. You don't gain a whole lot of knowledge talking, was what I learned.

And so I shifted at that moment to questions. Which is something you do so well on these interviews. I had an opportunity to sit down with a guy named Mack Maharaj who spent 13 years in prison with Nelson Mandela. They were adjacent cellmates, just breaking stones in a quarry. And I just happenstance ran into him while interviewing another guy named Gilberto Gil down in Brazil. And I didn't even know who Mack was when I approached him for an interview, he was just talking about culture and globalization at this conference, and I thought it was really interesting, and I approached him, and lo and behold I find out he's Mandela's lifelong editor.

And we're sitting there in our interview, and he said this thing to me which has always stuck with me. Which was that the most important thing for a society to do is not to focus on the answers, but to collectively come together around what are the single most important questions at that point in time. Because if as a group you can come together around the most important questions, then a myriad of answers will ultimately reveal themselves. And that was a critical moment in my life where I started shifting from thinking I had the answers to really focusing on the real value in life is in the questions. And in pulling people together around what are the biggest, most important questions, and then allowing answers to come forward. And so I've learned a lot more.

So your question was what led me to do that? There was probably something, even though I didn't admit it to myself, that there was probably a bone in my body that was telling me I don't know as much as I should, and there are a lot more people out in the world that do. And if I don't take this opportunity right now to listen, and the way that I learn is through storytelling, and so I set out to just listen to the stories of all these people, and listen to their life stories. And through what they shared, I gained a lot of these lessons.

If you don't mind me sharing, the single lesson I gained from all of them.

Dave: Yeah.

Ryan: So at the end of this-

Dave: Yeah.

Ryan: I did this for a year, and it was a pretty emotional experience, because to listen to all these people go as deep as they were, and you know, the last 20 guys and girls that I interviewed were all neuroscientists and so I went deep into rewiring the brain, and neuroplasticity, and just the sheer magnitude of learning sort of what we're capable of doing as human beings, paired with all this knowledge that these folks were giving me was a bit overwhelming, because I was just trying to process it all. It's like drinking water from a fire hose.

And the thing that I finally realized about all of them was that the thing that made them great wasn't that ... it wasn't necessarily what they were doing themselves. It was that through their work, they were empowering untold millions more to be better in their own lives. And that's when I also had sort of the shift that I think I spent most of my 20s probably focused on how I can make myself great. You know, you go to Hollywood and there are a lot of folks in Hollywood that have ... get their name, they see their name up in the marquee. And I was probably focused way too much on that, and what I realized is that if one can sort of dedicate one's life to trying to empower others to be great, then who knows whether or not I'm going to be, but at least I stand a much better chance. And I don't stand a chance if I'm only focused on myself.

And so that was sort of a critical change, and I think that's probably part of the reason that Matt and I came together to launch Omaze, was that we both sort of had these shifts around how do we empower as many other people out there to be as great as they can?

Dave: It's something that, on one hand, could sound really self serving. Like, "Hey, look at me, I'm helping as many people as I can." And I've found that, both from entrepreneurs and people working in charity, and even some of the really happy and successful billionaires that I know now, they are all doing that, whether or not they say they're doing that. Like it's what motivates them.

And I've got to say, it's a lot easier to do anything when you realize it has the potential to help a lot of other people. And for anyone listening, if you're thinking about starting a company, or doing something, and the first thing in your mind is, "Think about how much money I'm going to make," you're probably doing it wrong.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: You actually do measure it as what impact is it going to have, and the money's a side effect of that. And I did not get that earlier in my life, but that's what I do too. And you know, I'm perfectly happy knowing that my work is helping a lot of people, it's one of the reasons I do the show. But I don't really care if they remember my name when I'm

dead, that's not what it's about. It's about I'm enjoying the heck out of this, and it gets me up every morning. And-

Ryan: Can I ask you Dave, like what was that insight? When you started Bulletproof, what was that insight of improving other peoples' lives?

Dave: You know, I ... At the time I started Bulletproof about eight or so years ago, it was I started blogging before I really started making products or anything. I realized I spent \$300,000.00 in 15 years working on making my brain work better, fixing all of my biology. And then I'd gone from being obese, and arthritic, and just having all sorts of problems, including massive brain fog in the middle of my career, that I fixed all that, and then I went beyond to the point that I got an MBA from Wharton when I was working full time, and just realized one day, I'm doing this. And it's awesome, and you're not supposed to be able to do it. And then I thought, "If someone had just told me all this stuff that I've learned from all of these experts," working in the nonprofit world, interviewing experts in anti-aging and all, "If someone had just told me this when I was 20, it would've saved me about \$250,000.00, and it would've saved me years of suffering and struggle."

So I wrote my blog for myself when I was 20. Saying, "If someone had just told me this stuff ... " And I literally said, "Five people are going to read this blog, maybe, and if so it'll completely change their lives." And I'm already a VP at a big company with stock options, like I don't need to start a company, or that wasn't the intent. But when I realized that maybe more than five people are reading this, I just kept doing it, and realized wow, I'm a lot happier doing this, and this has been my passion for 20 years, and I put all this energy into it. But it was always my passion project, my nonprofit work, instead of my next stage of my career. And it was, frankly, kind of scary to leave a 20 year tech career.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: Once you've been out of tech for two years, you're not going back.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: And so I went off to be a coffee human performance guy, and ... but it was that, I'm happier knowing that I'm preventing someone else from going through all the crap I went through. That was what it was. And now that it's running at some percentage of the scale it's capable of, man, every time I walk through an airport and someone says, "Dave, you know, you don't know me but I'm 40 pounds lighter now than I was six months ago, and my brain works, and good God, thank you. I'm not struggling anymore." Like, yes! That's why I do this.

And whether or not they ever bought any of the Bulletproof coffee or not, it's not relevant, it's that the knowledge helped them. So that's my mindset anyway.

Ryan: Can I ask you one more question?

Dave: Oh, sure.

Ryan: So every time ... So I have the brain octane, and I have the bars, and I love it.

Dave: Oh you do, okay.

Ryan: But my question is this, so Mike Merzenich is another guy that I interviewed, he's a remarkable neuroscientist at UCSF, and focuses on rewiring the brain, on neuroplasticity, and rewiring the brain.

Dave: Oh yeah.

Ryan: And what I learned from him was that he really stresses that we as human beings as basically a byproduct of our genetic predisposition, which sets the basic infrastructure, the basic architecture of how we think and what we can do. And then obviously our environmental upbringing and what we do for continued learning through the course of our life. And I look at your products, and you tell me if I'm right or wrong, but when I look at a lot of the products, and any products that are out there for really improving health, and improving brain function, as those supplements that really improve environmental upbringing, right? How we continue learning. And I'm curious, like, how much does ... do the bars and the brain octane, like how much can they improve above and beyond my genetic predisposition? You know, you said like something you could read books a lot faster, you could do those things. When I'm taking these things, I can never tell ... I love them, because they make my day easier, and they give me that feeling and that sense, but I never know how I can actually measure that, and I'm curious how I can.

Dave: Here's how the genetic predisposition actually works. And actually, it's time for me to interview Mike about this. Because the old school genetics just looked at nuclear DNA-

Ryan: Okay.

Dave: In your cells. And you can look at nuclear DNA as the building plans for the walls, and floor, and ceiling of your house. What's it going to look like? And there's additions, there's subtractions you can make. But there's another set of DNA that is missing from that whole conversation, and that's your mitochondrial DNA. And this is different DNA, it comes from only your mom, and your mitochondrial DNA is the wiring diagram for that. So you have to look at both. And guess what the gateway to epigenetics is, this idea that the environment programs your genes? Your mitochondria, they're the front line sensors of the environment around you. They're the ones who interpret what's happening, decide whether to make chemicals, or whether to make electricity, how much electricity to make. And that is what controls the switch to turn your genes on or off.

So what you're doing with Brain Octane, with all the other mitochondrial enhancing supplements like Keto Prime, or Unfair Advantage, or Forbose, or [inaudible 00:43:21], all these things, you can tell I kind of have a theme around mitochondria, my last book, a

New York Times science book about them, it's because when you can provide more power to your environmental sensing, and power generation network, A, you're more aware of the environment around you. And B, you have more energy. And then that energy goes back and turns the genes on or off in your nuclear DNA more accurately, right? So you do a better job of responding to the environment around you, and if you're a bio hacker, you change the environment around you so that you respond ... your body responds in that way you want it to respond.

And what's happening here is 48% of people under age 40 have early onset mitochondrial insufficiency. In other words, they take a unit of food and a unit of air, and they don't make a unit of energy, which they're supposed to do, they make a fraction of a unit of energy. And everyone over age 40 has that. So my supposition to you would be that unless your mitochondria are working really, really well, and you have a lot of them, that they are going to be making less energy, which is going to make you less able to express your genetic potential as Mike Merzenich would put it.

Ryan: Got it.

Dave: And that said, there probably ... and then you can use epigenetics to turn on the switches you have. And if you simply don't have something in your nuclear DNA, so you can't turn it on or turn it off, as long as you know what that is, and I have my full human genome sequence, now we can know what that is, then you know your strengths and your weaknesses, and you can exercise in a way that supports your nuclear DNA. But if you don't have the mitochondria to do that, it sucks. So what we're doing is we're focusing on that sensing network and power generation network first, because that allows you to fully express your genetic potential, and to even avoid the pitfalls that are there.

Long answer, but-

Ryan: Yeah. Well the other question I have is so when I listen to your podcast, or anything that's on brain enhancement, despite the fact that I like to talk about that I interviewed all these folks, like there's still a very low ceiling for what my knowledge is of the actual brain. I have not going anywhere near as deep as you, or these guys have. What-

Dave: Hold on a second here, you're the guy who got an actual human brain in fifth grade for your science project.

Ryan: How did you learn that? Oh, it's on the website I think.

Dave: I do my research.

Ryan: Yeah, oh yeah, that was ... Can you believe that they gave a fifth grader a slice of a human brain to take home? It was literally sitting in the fridge and my parents got home and looked at it, and they were like, "What is that?" And I was like, "Ah, it's a human brain." So another story, yeah.

Dave: Yeah, keep going.

Ryan: For folks that are ... I consider myself a casual learner in this space. What's the most simple way, because Nick Foles was on, and I listened to him talk about taking in all of these different supplements, and trying to, and measuring sort of his results. Without learning the full encyclopedia of knowledge of all these different aspects of the brain, is there a simple primer for as I test and as I experiment with different supplements or different enhancers to very clearly measure, other than just emotional or feeling, like this is working, this is not working?

Dave: Well the gold standard is actually EEG neurofeedback.

Ryan: Okay.

Dave: Or you can do some unusual tests in university labs that look at oxygen utilization to see if your mitochondria work. And that said, most of us aren't going to be clinical grade, 24 channel stuff like we do at 40 Years of Zen. So there are a bunch of different apps out there on the iPhone that look at short term executive function, things like finger tap tests, like how fast can you tap, how is your working memory, and these are measures of short term executive function. And in fact, in the Bulletproof diet, we ran a study with an open source version of those things that was actually IRB, Institutional Review Board, approved, and we find statistically significant improvements in six of seven measures of executive function from Bulletproof coffee. From the actual mold free beans with butter, we didn't even have Brain Octane in it for that test, compared to street grade coffee, with or without butter.

So it turns out removing toxins from coffee seems to make a difference, a statistically significant difference in that study. Which is cool. So you can get short term, it takes about six to 10 minutes, depending on the set of tests. I wish I could recommend a specific app, I don't have one of those that I use regularly right now.

Ryan: No, that's helpful, thank you.

Dave: And speaking of that, you just gave me an idea that just popped into mind. I don't know if it would be a useful way to raise money for the nonprofits you're working with, with Omaze, but I could do a 40 Years of Zen experience.

Ryan: I love it.

Dave: Maybe like with a phone call with me ahead of time or something. And I regularly donate these \$15,000.00 five day, all intensive brain upgrade experiences at these celebrity gala things, or galas, because it's one of those things that really changes someone's entire brain. But if I qualify as a mini celebrity compared to these amazing people you work with, I'd love to support Omaze by letting people spend 10 bucks for a chance to go to 40 Years of Zen.

Ryan: I love it, so it'd be a one on one 40 Years of Zen with Dave Asprey, and then you get to-

Dave: Well, I'm not going to spend the whole five days there with them.

Ryan: Okay.

Dave: I haven't had five days there, I'd actually love to do that. But what I would do is you're getting two neuroscientists and facilitators in a two and a half million dollar facility, and I would spend one on one time with the person ahead of time.

Ryan: I love it.

Dave: And just basically ... ahead of time, an hour after, an hour where we get to actually talk about, okay, what do you want to hack in your brain and what where your results and what's your followup plan? So that sort of custom thing I don't normally do anymore. I love doing it, but I just don't have time because I'm focusing on Bulletproof, and this show, and my next book, and-

Ryan: Awesome. And what would the charity be?

Dave: We'd have to figure it out, something brain related. I'd probably talk with Maria Shriver about Alzheimers.

Ryan: Great.

Dave: A lot of the stuff that enhances mitochondrial directly impacts Alzheimer's disease. In fact, I believe that through my work at Bulletproof, that we've already reduced the incidence of Alzheimer's in the country in a meaningful way. And I can't say which products and studies do what, because unfortunately food companies aren't allowed to speak the truth in the US, but I know what I'm doing. So-

Ryan: I love it.

Dave: I like to support Alzheimer's and autism research, so I would talk to Maria about supporting some of her efforts on Alzheimer's.

Ryan: So let's do it.

Dave: All right.

Ryan: So 40 Years of Zen with Dave Asprey-

Dave: Sweet.

Ryan: To support Maria Shriver's Alzheimer's Foundation.

Dave: I just found a way to give away another 40 Years of Zen. That's-

Ryan: Omaze.com/Dave.

Dave: All right, we'll do that, I just made that up but I'm glad you asked me how to measure your brain, because that's what made me think about it.

Ryan: Oh, thank you for that.

Dave: Now, I want to ask you one more question, Ryan.

Ryan: Okay.

Dave: If someone came to you tomorrow and said, "I want to perform better at everything I do as a human being," what are your three most important pieces of advice? What would you tell them? And your answer's kind of special, because you interviewed 100 plus Nobel Prize winner, etc. etc. And you've interacted all these other people with Omaze also, so maybe you've learned from a few other people. When you offer your three pieces of wisdom, what are they?

Ryan: Oh, that's a great question. So the first thing, the first thing I would say is define your higher purpose. So this goes for both your company, or for yourself. So when Matt and I launched Omaze, we spent six months before we did really focused on the higher purpose, and we came up with this concept of we serve world changers. And for myself personally, I've developed a higher purpose, which is to empower as many people as possible, to be the best expression of themselves. And what that higher purpose does is it really gives a North Star for all behaviors and actions. You can tell very quickly whether or not the decisions you're making in life fall under that higher purpose, or fall out of it.

And paired with that, we did an experience with Star Wars, it was a chance to be in Star Wars, and JJ Abrams said something that I think sort of connects to this higher purpose. So JJ Abrams and his wife Katie McGrath are two of the most brilliant people I've ever had the opportunity to sit with. And he said this thing where he said, "You know, for a story to be truly great, the protagonist has to have something that they want to have happen with every fiber of their being, and a very clear tragedy that will result if it doesn't." And what I really liked about that is if you pull back, I've extrapolated that we are essentially the protagonists of our own lives. And so one of the ways that we create the best story possible is by establishing what we want to have happen with every fiber of our being in our own lives, and the tragedies that will result if it doesn't. And that can all fall under that banner of higher purpose. So for me the first one would be define your higher purpose.

The second one ... So I'd say this. I've learned over the last couple years that you can't help others unless I myself am in my own peak condition, if I'm looking out for my health first. I've learned that because my wife actually is one of the most remarkable, strongest people I've ever known, total warrior, and my best friend. But she has POTS, which is a disease that affects a lot of people around the world.

Dave: Including Tori Foles, Nick Foles' wife, we just wrote a blog post about POTS.

Ryan: Yeah, and I'm thankful that you did. I read that, and it's important information to get out there. But what that basically means is in her case, and I've gotten comfortable sharing this because she's comfortable with it, but she's had a level nine migraine headache 24 hours a day for the last five years. And as a result of that, we've really started focusing on a lot of different modalities of healing. Western, eastern, homeopathic, naturopathic, and I've actually even gone as far as a lot of meditative modalities, and one of the things that I've learned over that time is that I have to focus on my own health if I'm going to be able to be there for her.

And one of the ways that I've done that now is, I'm actually about to go do it in four days from now, once a year I now do a four day fast where I completely unplug, literally it's I go up on a mountainside away from the world and completely unplug for four days, and just fast in isolation. And it's one of the most important things that I've learned to do for myself as of recent, to disconnect, to find the space and the time to reset my brain, and to be able to have the energy that I need to bring my best self back to the world. And I know that sounds extreme, and I wouldn't recommend it for everybody, but it works for me.

Dave: That's a beautiful thing, I fasted for four days in a cave outside Sedona led by a shaman once.

Ryan: Oh, good for you.

Dave: I've got an idea for you that ... I don't normally do this in the middle of people answering the question, but I went fishing in Alaska with a group of friends, and my buddy, Randy, who's a Mormon bishop told me that he fasts once a month for a day. And so do all of the other people in his ... I think it's called congregation, but whatever the group of people who goes to his church, but they all fast. And then they take the money they would've spent on food, and they donate it to someone else.

Ryan: Ah, that's a great idea.

Dave: Which is a really cool idea. And I hadn't heard of that idea, but the idea is oh, if you're fasting, and there's a lot of people listening who actually do a once a week, 24 hour fast, what if you took the money you would've spent on food and gave it to someone, even just on the street? I think that's fascinating. So think about that next time you do a four day fast.

Ryan: I'm going to do it this time.

Dave: Yeah, do it, all right.

Ryan: Thank you. Thank you for recommending that.

Dave: You're welcome, I want to hear your number three answer, but since you're into charity causes and all, that's such an easy, painless way to do it. I was impressed.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: Anyway, keep going.

Ryan: And then the last one ... so I think these are all broad, but they are literally the sort of the things that have helped me the most. The last one I'd say is practice gratitude daily, and I'd go a little bit further than that. Something that I do is I do a practice called wins, wisdom, gratitude, where every morning for 30 minutes I wake up and I spent 10 minutes focused on wins from yesterday, 10 minutes focused on reading some piece of wisdom, and 10 minutes focused on gratitude. And for that last piece of gratitude, I wrote down a list of people that have had the greatest impact in my life. And I carry that list with me every single day. And what I'll do is every day, I'll choose one or two people from that list and just text them a quick note of appreciation. And it's more than, "I love you," but it'll be something along the lines of ... you know, I text my brother the other day, "Thank you for showing me a model of what it means to really show up for your kids at a young age as a new father."

Because my wife, to her, on the flip side and the joys in our life, we've got a 10 week old right now. And she is just totally rising to the occasion as a remarkable mother, but what my brother's shown me about how to show up as a father in addition to what my own father taught me has just been remarkable. So that idea of practicing gratitude daily, it connects me with the people in my life in a way that I'm not just sort of casually thinking about them, or occasionally, but I'm really intentional about thinking about folks that have really impacted my life, but setting a mindset of gratitude so that it just, I think it releases friction, unloosens the knots, and allows me to sort of walk through life a little bit easier every single day.

And so that'd be the last thing that I'd recommend. And so I'll end by saying I guess I'm grateful for you Dave, for being able to give myself, and Matt, and Omaze this platform to talk about Omaze, and for taking the time to talk about some of the people that I've had the opportunity to interview. So thank you.

Dave: Well thanks Ryan. And there's a bonus piece of content here. I've talked to a lot of people with POTS, this Postural Orthostatic Hypotension Syndrome, basically you stand up or you just have ... you stand up or at other times you don't have enough blood flow in the brain, and it's a brain disfunction thing. The most common triggering event I've been able to find, and I've had this myself, I grew up with this, I literally, I thought it was normal to see stars every time I stood up getting out of a car, because I always had low blood pressure-

Ryan: Wow.

Dave: And I don't have that anymore, I fixed it. But the most common trigger is environmental mold exposure. So look at mold as a trigger, and at treating mold, and see if her symptoms go way down. That's, I think, a path to doing it, and mitochondrial sufficiency, fixing the mitochondrial harm that mold causes, is a major hint for mold, or sorry, for POTS, and some of that's in the blog post, on the blog on it.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: So read that twice, and if you want to ping me afterwards for some hacks there, I'm happy to help.

Ryan: I look forward to ... I will definitely ping you, and I look forward to anything that I can learn. So thank you so much, thank you for this opportunity, I really appreciate it.

Dave: You got it. If you guys are interested in learning more, and maybe donating \$10.00 to help a good cause, and potentially have an amazing experience, Omaze.com, like amaze but with an O, O-M-A-Z-E.com.

Ryan: And if you want your 40 Years of Zen, Omaze.com/Dave.

Dave: Omaze.com/Dave, we'll do a 40 Years of Zen thing. Beautiful. Thanks everyone.

Ryan: Thanks so much, Dave.