

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 most Americans now think it's okay to tinker with your genes, that is if it's done in the interest of human health. The Pew Research Center just conducted a poll and found most Americans are okay with genetic engineering for many types of animals and humans if it's going to prevent a disease or it's going to make us healthy. Most Americans even think it's okay to tweak a baby's genes, but not to make the baby stronger, smarter, or faster, but only to prevent disease. I don't quite understand that entire mindset there, but people now say ... 70% of people are okay with preventing the spread of disease by reducing mosquito's fertility. Can I just say ... This isn't in the study, but can we just get rid of those little bastards? They're just not worth it. All right. Sorry. I had to say that.

Dave: 57% of people are on board with engineering animals to be organ donors for humans. Apparently, they haven't heard about stem cells yet. A majority of respondents drew the line at tweaking an animal to produce more nutritious meat or bringing back animals from extinction, presumably because they all saw Jurassic Park. Of that group, 18% said species are extinct for a reason, as in they deserved it, not because we did it to them. 23% said it, "Messes with nature or God's plan," and 14% said it's a waste of resources. Only 4% of people said they were afraid it would create a Jurassic Park scenario in which the de-extinct animals would run amuck and kill people.

Dave: Well, I've got to say, maybe it's time for us all to do a little bit of thinking about the world we want to build because we are building a different world right now, and we can either do it consciously or we can do it without conscience. I can tell you what happens when you do things without being conscious of what you're doing or thinking ahead, and usually, it's not better than it was before.

Dave: Today's guest actually has nothing to do with Jurassic Park or dinosaurs. I know, I'm tricking you guys with my incredible art of foreshadowing in my show notes, but he actually has helped to take an almost extinct philosophy and reinvigorate it and introduce it into the wild. That philosophy is called Stoicism. I'm talking about none other than Ryan Holiday, who is a fantastic author. As an author ... I mean, I have a lot of authors on here. I've got to tell you, Ryan's head and shoulders ... just seriously good writing. I don't miss any of his books, including ones you might not have heard of, I'm going to tell you about. You might have seen Ego Is the Enemy, The Obstacle Is the Way, Trust Me, I'm Lying, or the one that you should read called Perennial Seller.

Dave: He discusses complex ideas that are very, very approachable, and you might have seen Conspiracy, his latest book, where he actually dug deep with Peter Thiel and Gawker and what happened to get Gawker shut down with Hulk Hogan and all, which is just an eye-opening book and has this amazing power, which I think he got from Robert Greene, the guy who wrote 48 Laws of Power, to just look in and digest things. He's one of those guys I truly respect. I was super excited to get him on the show. Ryan, welcome.

Ryan: Thank you for having me. I've been looking forward to this for a long time.

Dave: What did you think of that intro? It's not like one you've had before, right?

Ryan: It was very kind. It was very kind. I appreciate it.

Dave: It's all real. Man, there's so much that we're going to get to talk about today that's super cool. You started your professional career when you dropped out of college at the age of 19, from the University of California. What did you do when you were 19?

Ryan: Well, I had this opportunity to be a research assistant for Robert Greene, which, as someone who wanted to be a writer was ... To me, it was the equivalent of being drafted out of college and getting to leave and going straight into the pros. I worked for another author, who I know you do, Tucker Max, and then I also had a job at a talent agency. I sort of had these three opportunities, and it struck me one day that being able to do any three of them after college would have made college a success, so what was I saying no to these things for to stay in school, to hopefully get them to come back around after I had walked across the stage at graduation?

Dave: It's an unusual amount of wisdom for a 19-year-old. I had a similar situation. I could have dropped out of college when I was about 19, actually, maybe 20. Then one of the co-founders of a company called Net Creations, that sold three years later for \$250 million to one of the big internet ad companies. I didn't do it because I'm like, "Oh, I'm supposed to get my degree." You basically had something already in your mind or your psychology that said, "I'm going to make that decision based on those things." Is that because you were pissed off at the world? Because you had good parents? What made you make that unusual call?

Ryan: Well, my parents thought it was a terrible idea, so I can't give them credit, and it wasn't nearly as compelling as working at a company that was going to sell for \$200 million. I remember, at the talent agency, which is really the only paid position of any seriousness, the salary was \$30,000. I remember thinking, "What am I going to do with all this money?" It just sounded like so much to a college student, but really, I think what I was attracted to was just the idea of getting to do the work that I was reading about. I've read all of Robert Greene's books, and I thought he was just an amazing writer. The idea that I could work for him and that that might be a shortcut to where I wanted to end up, which was to write my own books ... To me, the idea of passing on that to sit in a classroom and listen to a less successful writer tell me about how to be a writer just didn't make any sense.

Dave: Got it. So, you were pretty rational about the whole thing? Robert Greene-

Ryan: Well, it was terrifying. I mean, I'm rational about it more in retrospect. I think there's probably some gut instincts there, but it was also certainly terrifying at the time, especially with my parents basically saying that I was throwing my life away.

Dave: Parents are ... they'll often do that. I think if I had quit, I would have had the same conversation with mine. Having had Robert Greene on this show a while back as well,

that book that you did the research for, 48 Laws of Power, I made \$6 million because of that book.

Ryan: Wow.

Dave: I lost it when I was 28 because I didn't read the rest of the book, apparently, but in all seriousness, I did not understand the power dynamics of board rooms as a 26-year-old arrogant engineer. I read that book over a weekend and then came back in to work. I'm like, "Oh my god. These executives aren't nuts." You did the research for that book. I thanked Robert. I'm thanking you for that, too.

Ryan: Well, no. Look, as much as I would love to take credit for doing the research on that book, I think I was in seventh grade when The 48 Laws of Power came out.

Dave: Oh. Well, crap. I thought that was the one you worked on. In that case, screw you, man.

Ryan: I think part of the reason that I dropped out was having read that book. He talks about the idea of sometimes acting before you're ready. It's sort of this master class of wisdom. I think if I was ahead of my age at that time, it was largely because of what I had read from him, and then I was lucky enough to do the research on a book he wrote called The 50th Law, and then he wrote a book called Mastery, which I was the research assistant on.

Dave: Both excellent books. Mastery, in particular, stands out. But along the way, you became a Stoic, and you're a deep researcher. There's a certain kind of mind that's relatively unusual, people that just dig into stuff and really build a super complex model of it. Somewhere along the way, you picked up this Stoic mindset, I'm guessing in some of your research on those things. When and how did you become a Stoic?

Ryan: Yeah. I had read some Stoic philosophy in college, and then certainly dropping out was probably the most trying thing that I had gone through at that point in my life. We tend to think of philosophy as in this academic discipline, just in the way that we tend to think scientific research is only to be done by the professionals, but the irony is that the professionals tend to come up with the least practical uses for that research. Sometimes, I think it falls on real ordinary people to do that experimentation.

Ryan: What I loved about Stoicism was that here were real people talking about real problems. When you read Marcus Aurelius, he's talking about managing your temper or your fear of death, or he's talking about the idea of why you should be a good person. Again, he's not talking about it theoretically. He's talking about it as this man who is the most powerful man in the world at that time. He's the head of the Roman Empire, and he's just struggling with the stresses and difficulties of political life and ordinary life.

Ryan: I think what hit me about Stoicism was just how practical and useful it was and how different it was than anything that I had read or talked about in college. There are all these interesting questions that philosophers can ask. The popular one today is like, "How do we know we're not living in a computer simulation or not?" I think that's really

intellectually fascinating, but that doesn't change what you should do when you wake up in the morning or how you would talk to someone or how you would deal with fear or worry. Stoicism, to me, is all about those practical questions. I think I was looking for answers, and that's what it provided.

Dave: A lot of people by now have heard about Stoicism. In fact, the New York Times says that you're one of the big people who caused the resurgence in popularity, but I think a lot of people have a very mushy idea of what Stoicism is. Can you define it in a crisp way for us?

Ryan: Totally. When people hear Stoicism, they think lowercase stoicism, which means has no emotions like, "He was very stoic about it," which means he or she just sort of took it. That's really not what Stoicism is. Stoicism is a philosophy, like Buddhism let's say. To me, my definition of Stoicism, what I give to people, is that the Stoic believes that they don't control the world around them, but they control how they respond. They control what they're going to do. It's this formula for responding and responding well. The Stoics would say that we should react to everything with temperance and wisdom and courage, and if we can respond in those ways ... It's a framework for responding in those ways ... we're going to have a good life. We're going to have a happy life, and we're going to be able to deal with what life throws at us.

Dave: When you read some of the older writings on Stoicism ... and I'm not anywhere nearly as well studied as you are on it ... there seems to be this vibe of, "Look. You may not have health. You may not have wealth, but how you respond to all of those things is really up to you."

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: I mean, you're a successful entrepreneur. You have health, and you pay attention to it. You have wealth, and you pay attention to it. How is focusing or allowing or bringing that stuff into your life ... how is that a part of the Stoic philosophy?

Ryan: Yeah. That is the interest in question. One, we should realize that the Stoics lived, that the Romans lived, in a much more hierarchical, rigid world than we live in now, so your role was much more defined, but I think the philosophy very much works in the modern day. Seneca was saying ... who is another prominent Stoic. He would say that wealth and health and fame and respect, all these things ... He would call them preferred indifference. If you're not healthy, you would deal with it, as a Stoic. If you are healthy, you would appreciate it and take advantage of it. He's saying, "Look. It's better to be tall than short, but if you're short, you're short." There is that sort of spin on things, but then Marcus Aurelius had the most famous doctor in Roman times, a guy named Galen. Clearly, Galen's job was not to keep Marcus from not getting well, right? Marcus listened to the advice of his doctor. He tried to be healthy. He tried to take care of himself. He didn't sit around on a couch, gorging himself.

Ryan: What the Stoic is really talking ... this idea of making a distinction between what's in your control and what's outside your control is really the important thing. What you eat

is in your control. How tall you are maybe is less in your control. What color hair you have, what you're born with, is not in your control, but whether you exercise, whether you decide to pick up a book and better yourself ... a whole bunch of these things that maybe certain people pretend are not up to them, that they don't have any agency about, in fact, we do have a lot of agency over. I think the Stoics would embrace that agency. Clearly, your work has been sort of at pushing and expanding the margins about where we can influence those things that, up until a few years ago, people thought were not up to them.

Dave: So, maybe we have more agency than we thought.

Ryan: Yes, and if we have agency, than the Stoics say we should put all our energy into using that agency.

Dave: Ah. See, that's the part of Stoicism that I think is missing from the big conversations, that if you have agency, you owe it to yourself, or to the world, or just basically the right thing to do is to use the agency, if you have it.

Ryan: That's right. I mean, if there's a 99% chance that something is impossible, I think the Stoic would focus on the fact that there's a 1% chance that it is possible. But if it's impossible, they're not going to hurl themselves against some brick wall over and over again, and they're not going to complain about it and whine about it. They're going to say, "Hey. Maybe we try to go in a different direction instead of continuing to throw ourselves in front of this wall, or instead of sitting down and pretending that it's hopeless and helpless."

Dave: All right. That is very meaningful. So then, Stoicism is totally cool with living beyond 180 years.

Ryan: Well, the Stoics do talk a lot about mortality, and we should remember that they were living in a world that's much more fragile than our world. Marcus Aurelius saw two different plagues come through Rome during his own lifetime. Naturally, they are going to have a slightly different relationship with death than we are, but I still if it is in your control to help yourself live longer, you should take advantage of that. If a Stoic was looking at the research that said, "Hey. Smoking causes cancer and reduces life expectancy," I'm not sure they would say, "Oh, you should continue smoking because just trying to live longer is a stupid thing to do." But I think where the Stoics sort of ... the idea of memento mori, meditating on your mortality, being aware of the reality of death and that death gives life meaning. If all your research turns out to be true and you are on track to live to be 170, that's not going to help you if you get hit by a bus crossing the street, right?

Ryan: I think some people, the scientifically minded people, can take the wrong lesson from their research, which is if you think doing this work is going to give you 100 years of extra life expectancy, that doesn't excuse you from taking advantage of every moment that's in front of you right now. I think the Stoics would still say, "Whether you live to be

70 or 700, all you possess for sure is the present moment, and you should seize it as much as possible."

Dave: That matches where my mind is, where I'm planning to live to at least 180, and I'm completely happy to die trying.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: You know?

Ryan: Sure.

Dave: But if I'm not happy along the way, screw that noise. If all I get to eat is kale, I'd rather die.

Ryan: Seneca talks about ... he's saying, "Don't live every day as if it's your last," because if today's the last day, you're not going to eat well. You're going to go join an orgy somewhere. You're going to relax all your standards of discipline, et cetera. He's saying you should live each day as if it could be your last one. He's saying you should balance the books every day. Leave nothing unfinished. Don't defer anything to the future, but at the same time, don't assume that there is no future because there very well may be one.

Dave: So then, let's talk about ego-

Ryan: Okay.

Dave: ... because ego comes into that line. You did write that little book about ego ...

Ryan: Yes.

Dave: ... which I texted you, actually. My wife absolutely just adores *Ego Is the Enemy*. It is really just a big ... She was like, "Dave, this book is so good." What's your definition of ego? How does it fit into the Stoic mindset?

Ryan: One of my favorite quotes from the Stoics about ego comes from Epictetus, and he says, "It's impossible to learn that which you think you already know." I think that that's a pretty great definition of ego. If you think you've mastered something, if you think you know it all, in a way, you're right because you're not going to learn anything else.

Ryan: I make a big distinction in the book between confidence and ego. I think confidence is really important. I think ego is really dangerous. Confidence is based on evidence. Ego is based on delusion, self-absorption. It's an ignorance of our strengths. It's really important that we are confidence. If you don't believe you can do something, you can't do it, but just because you believe something does not at all mean that you can do it.

Dave: Got it. It means you're at least willing to give it a shot-

Ryan: Yes.

Dave: ... and see what happens.

Ryan: Yes.

Dave: But, also, if you believe you can live if you jump off a tall building-

Ryan: Right.

Dave: ... it might not work out the way you want.

Ryan: Yeah. Yeah. If you believe you're invincible, that doesn't make you invincible, but if you have evidence that you're strong, you persevere through difficulty, you don't quit, that's going to give you evidence that you can extrapolate out and make decisions based on. David and Goliath, Goliath is egotistical. He thinks that he's unbeatable. David is confident because he was a shepherd, but he remembers that he's fought off bears and lions. This is what he says in the story. "I fought off bears and lions with my bare hands. I'm not going to shy away from anything." He also knew that he'd come up with an advantage. He had figured out that the sling and the stone would be an advantage at a distance against Goliath. Again, Goliath is egotistical because he thinks he can do anything. David is aware that he has both weaknesses and strengths, and ultimately, that's a much stronger combination.

Dave: Got it. That fits into that definition of ego. When someone is practicing Stoicism ... and I'm getting into some of the personal development work-

Ryan: Sure.

Dave: ... that I do, some neuroscience and all. There's a set of emotions you have. You're facing Goliath or a tiger or a bear or a big entrepreneurial challenge, and you feel uncertainty, fear, terror, fear of failure, whatever is going on in your mind, or at least in your emotions, right? Then a Stoic would say, "Well, I felt all this stuff, but I am going to act with integrity. I am going to behave a certain way, even though I kind of took the hit of feeling the feelings on that."

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: How does ego tie into those feelings versus the behavior? Where does ego insert itself in that order of operations?

Ryan: That's a great question. I mean, I think the common definition of stoicism would be it just stuffs all those emotions down.

Dave: Right.

Ryan: It pretends they don't exist. I actually don't think that's what a Stoic is doing. I think a Stoic isn't not processing their emotions. A Stoic is processing their emotions. A Stoic says, "I'm feeling anger about this. Why am I feeling that anger? Is it constructive to feel this anger? If I give into this anger, what will happen?" I think the same would be true for desire or temptations or fear or worry. Marcus Aurelius has this great line. He says, "If it's endurable, endure it, and if it's not endurable, then basically it's going to go away because it's either going to kill you or it's going to end." Right? There's this logical processing of what happens.

Ryan: Then where I think ego comes in, ego is ... In a weird way, there's nobody more in touch and less in touch with their emotions than an egotistical person. An egotistical person is often driven by a very profound and deep insecurity, fragility. They've been hurt before, or they don't feel good about themselves, or whatever it is. Ego is this defense mechanism that they carry around, this sort of armor that they wear. Then the irony is they go around reacting to things because of that insecurity, but they have no idea that's what they're doing. Egotistical people are constantly feeling threatened and then reacting, but they can't admit why they feel threatened. There's this emotional blindness to what's happened.

Ryan: I think it's better to be aware of the emotions that we have, to process them and work through them, and to just separate out the unproductive from the productive or the constructive from the unconstructive. Fear, if it's helping generate prudence, is probably constructive. Fear, if it's paralyzing you or if it's irrational fear, is not going to be constructive, and so we want to work through what we're feeling and why.

Dave: How do you know when to say no? Because you've got the Stoic, rational mindset, and you've got the emotional stuff that's going on, and I deal with entrepreneurs. By the way, this is a plug, but my new book called Game Changers. The first rule in this book, which is styled after 48 Laws of Power, with full credit to Robert for figuring that out, but it's focused on the strength of the power of no. This has been a big thing in my growth as an entrepreneur, is like, "What deals that are awesome do I say no to, and is it FOMO, fear of missing out?"

Ryan: Sure.

Dave: "Or is it not?" Walk me through your ego mindset and your Stoic mindset on how you say no.

Ryan: Yeah, that's great. I mean, ego is going to say yes to everything because it can't say no. It fears missing out. Ego's also going to say yes to more than it can possibly do. That's the really dangerous ... It's going to eventually overreach. Then, also, ego is so easily gratified and needs to be validated that it's going to say yes to things because it thinks that these are making it better, more important, more wanted, more loved, whatever. I think what a Stoic would look at is, first off, given the finiteness of life, is this worth spending some of that life on?

Ryan: Seneca talks about how if your neighbor moved their fence to encroach on your land, you would immediately object and say, "Hey. You can't steal that from me," but if your neighbor came over and wasted a bunch of your time with an inane conversation, you would have such difficulty saying, "No. I don't want to do this," or, "No. I have to go." Right? It's funny how often we are precious with our money, and then we are incredibly ... generous is the wrong word. We're incredibly-

Dave: Wasteful.

Ryan: ... wasteful with our time, and that's the one resource that we can't get back. Research aside, it's the one thing we can't for sure make more of. Right?

Dave: Right.

Ryan: I think no is going to be incredibly important, and when you have a strong sense of who you are and what you're doing, then you know what to do. I mean, I was reading that biography of Evan Spiegel, the founder of Snapchat, and he was saying the best thing that can happen to an entrepreneur is to have someone come along and offer you a lot of money to buy what you're doing from you, because in that moment, you have clarity about whether you want to keep doing this or not. If you'll turn down a lot of money to keep doing something, it's obviously very important, and if you'll take money to not do it, it's probably saying that it's not that important to you. When you know what you value and what's meaningful to you, it makes it easier to say no and to do so more confidently.

Dave: That's a very interesting point. This goes to the companies who ... I think Zappos pioneered this idea. "Hey. We'll pay you five grand to quit."

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: I love that mindset, and I haven't done that at Bulletproof, but I don't think anyone would quit anyway. We have a lot of mission-driven people, so it probably wouldn't work, at this stage of the company anyway.

Ryan: Although, I think about that with my books, you know? If you're writing a book to get rich, there's way easier ways to make money. Right?

Dave: Thank you for saying that. Okay. I don't know how many people read Perennial Seller, which is one of the books that you wrote. I'm guessing it wasn't one of your best-selling books.

Ryan: No. I mean, it sold well, but not-

Dave: No.

Ryan: ... not by any means. Yes.

Dave: Here's the deal. I'm just going to say this, and you and I have no financial reason or any other deal for me to say this, but for people listening, if you want to write a kick-ass book, you want to start a company that will change the world, you want to do something that actually matters, you have to read Perennial Seller because, Ryan, you capture the mindset in that book of the amount of just effort and passion that goes into writing a book that's worth reading versus writing a book to get quick or writing a book in five minutes and-

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: ... just cranking some shit out so that you can have your name on Amazon best seller in the third century Middle Eastern studies or some category where there's no books anyway, right?

Ryan: Right.

Dave: But to actually make something that's worth someone's time to read, no one in any book or any format has capture the amount of just guts that goes into doing that in the way you have in that book. So, serious plug. Perennial Seller. You want to do something massive? This book, you nailed it. I read that book. I was like, "Good God."

Ryan: Thank you.

Dave: I wasn't sure why you wrote the book because I'm not sure how many people are ready for that, but, man, anyway. That really impressed the hell out of me.

Ryan: Well, thank you. Look, I think it is important. It's like, look, the reason Amazon and Zappos will pay you to quit is that if you take the money, you're not in it for the right reasons. You're not in it for the long haul. Starting a company or writing a book or writing a screenplay, these things are really, really hard.

Dave: Yeah.

Ryan: Elon Musk said that starting a company was like eating glass, and I think he said, "and staring into the abyss of death." It's partly true. If you're going to do that, it should be for a meaningful reason, and it should have some chance of lasting. It just kills me when I see someone spend so much of their time, which, again, they will not get back, writing a book or starting a company that's the equivalent of Fidget Spinners, just a fad that's going to disappear. It makes me really sad.

Dave: I haven't seen anyone who explained it that well. In fact, when I read that, I was like, "God, yeah. This is what happens with writing something that's worth someone's time. If you're going to sell a million copies of a book that takes five hours to read, you just burned five million hours of human lifetime.

Ryan: Sure. I didn't think about that.

Dave: You're kind of a mass murderer-

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: ... because you wasted their time. That's just how it works.

Ryan: Well, and how much stuff has an expiration date on it unnecessarily, right? You're selling food products? Of course, it expires, but why would you get someone to read a book that ... If you're going to burn five million hours of people's time, those hours should stay with them. It should provide some lessons or values, and that's why I think *The 48 Laws of Power* is such a great book. It's like that book will still be read in 100 years, or 500 years, because it captured something timeless.

Ryan: Jeff Bezos talks about focusing on the things that don't change, and I think whatever you're making, whatever you're selling, the more it's rooted in stuff that doesn't change, the better a chance it has at enduring and lasting because it's solving some ... Writing a book about how to deal with the Y2K crisis, that has an artificial expiration date on it, and I think you ultimately regret that.

Dave: I don't know. It's going to come up again for the Y10K crisis. Just give it enough time, man. It's coming back.

Ryan: Yeah, you can redo it. I mean-

Dave: I'm just kidding.

Ryan: Guy Kawasaki, whose work I'm a big fan of, he wrote this book called *Enchantment*, which has done really well and is a perennial seller. *Enchantment* is this perennial thing. On the other hand, he wrote a book called *What the Plus!* which was a guide to using Google Plus. In 5 or 10 years, which of those is going to continue to endure? I think people-

Dave: Right. What's Google Plus?

Ryan: Exactly. Exactly.

Dave: Sorry.

Ryan: No, exactly. The more you can root it in things that ... The reason we still watch *Star Wars* is that *Star Wars* is the same hero's journey as *The Odyssey* or *The Iliad* or any of the other classic tales. Again, you want to root what you're doing in what lasts and what ... Bulletproof, it's ... The ritual of morning coffee is about one of the most enduring parts of human civilization for 5 or 600 years now. The only thing better than the morning coffee ritual, I think, would have been if you'd written *What to Expect When You're Expecting*. It's just a timeless perennial thing.

Dave: Believe it or not, my first book was on human fertility, and I was so pissed off about What to Expect When You're Expecting because it's so wrong that I wanted to call the book How to Expect More When You're Expecting.

Ryan: That's a nice little [crosstalk 00:31:51]

Dave: But my publisher wouldn't let me, but anyway. It's funny you said that because I was like, "What would have the most leverage?"

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: Writing the Bulletproof Diet or that, and I can tell you, there's a few thousand babies that exist today because of that book who would not have been born.

Ryan: There you go.

Dave: That's impact, right?

Ryan: Totally.

Dave: But it wasn't a best seller, but it wasn't about that, really. It was like, "Somebody has to write this." I love that you picked that example because that's bothered me forever, but you've done something new in your writing I want to pick your brain about. You wrote a book called Conspiracy, which I think is your most recent book, right?

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: You took a modern ... Many people are aware that Hulk Hogan sued Gawker and basically put him out of business and that it was funded secretly in a conspiracy by Peter Thiel, who was pissed off at Gawker for justifiable reasons. What you did, though, is you covered a topical event which would have met your definition of the book on Google Plus, but you framed it as a working example of conspiracy, which is something that goes back for thousands of years. You explained the mindset of conspirators, and you went through history and all that, which was, I think, a creative way to sell a book and very topical, and it's actually what made me want to read it like, "I want to know what's going on," because I've met Peter Thiel.

Dave: In fact, when I first met him, I'm like, "Hey. You need to use my biohacking laser on your jaw here, man." It was a fascinating meeting of a very unusual human being. You clearly know him better than I do, but the idea that you got access to those people, you dug inside their minds, but you tied it back to history. I think that is another book that'll stand even when no one knows what Gawker was 10 years from now, that you'll be able to read that and say, "This is what happens." Why did you decide to do it that way in that book?

Ryan: I actually thought about exactly what you're saying, which is-

Dave: Oh, okay.

Ryan: ... in five years ... By nature of destroying Gawker, he's rendered it irrelevant. He won so decisively and definitively that in five or six years, no ... First off, most people in America have never even heard of Gawker because it was this New York, Silicon Valley powerhouse that didn't have a lot of flyover audience, but I think the idea was this thing is gone. How can this book continue to be relevant in the future? That was really important to me. If I'm going to spend time writing about this book, I don't want it to be merely journalism. I don't just want to record a bunch of facts. I want to show people why these facts matter, and I want these facts to have relevance over the long term.

Ryan: What I love about ancient history is ... I have a book on my shelf over here that's Cicero's murder trials, and they're Cicero's arguments when he was a lawyer defending people against murder charges. All the details have fallen away. We don't even necessarily know the names of all the people involved or what exactly they did or when they did it, but it's still incredibly compelling. I just love things that endure that way. I guess ever since I was a kid, I just loved epic stories and narratives like that.

Ryan: I thought this idea of a billionaire setting out to destroy a media outlet and then doing so in secret through the legal system, that feels like something that Rockefeller or Vanderbilt would have done. I tried to present it that way.

Dave: I thought it was kind of a badass move.

Ryan: Well, thank you.

Dave: Both writing a book but also just that Peter Thiel did that, it's like, "Well, I have this money." According to your book and your interviews with him, he was doing it to make the world a better place. He was like, "I have the means to do it, and these people are ..." Really, Gawker did spread a lot of crap, right? They were not a source of goodness in the world, I wouldn't put it anyway. I was like, "That's ballsy, but he did it," but I've got to know. How the heck did you get Hulk Hogan, the founders of Gawker, and Peter Thiel to spend enough time with you to write a book? That was an epic piece of journalism in and of itself, aside from the analysis on what a conspiracy is.

Ryan: There is totally an element of luck and right place, right time, but in the fall of 2016, within a few weeks of each other, I had gotten unsolicited email from Peter Thiel about something I had written and then an unsolicited email from Nick Denton, who's the founder of Gawker, about something else that I had written. It occurred to me that I was probably the only person on the planet talking to these two mortal enemies, and I wasn't going to let that opportunity go to waste. Peter connected with me because I had written, if not positively, at least open-mindedly about what he'd done.

Ryan: And I agree. I think it was badass. Even if you disagree with what it was, even if you hate it, it's still badass in the way that ... an action movie. You're like, "Hey. That was really dangerous. You shouldn't have done that," but that doesn't mean it wasn't really entertaining and compelling and crazy to have done. I was fascinated from that

perspective, and then Nick was actually a fan of my writings on Stoicism. I was able to parlay this chance encounter with both of them into something, and then once I had both of them on the line, the other one didn't want to stop talking to me because he was worried that it would be too one-sided, I think, and so-

Dave: FOMO.

Ryan: Exactly. Then Peter was nice enough to connect me with Hulk Hogan, and then, because I talked to them, then people on the Gawker side were like, "Well, if we don't talk to this guy, this is going to be totally a pro Peter Thiel narrative, and we don't want that to happen." Again, this is probably something I learned from Robert. Playing the two sides off of each other a little bit was certainly helpful.

Dave: I was about to say you played 48 Laws right there, but you were. Okay. That was a cool story. I don't know if you've ever told it that way, but it was amazing when I read it, just imagining this. I've got another question for you-

Ryan: Okay.

Dave: ... for selfish reasons. You're running brass check, and you're advising Google and TASER and all these big multi-platinum musicians and people like that, and you're writing in-depth researched, carefully written, quality works. You have a family. You live on a farm. By the way, I live on a 32-acre organic farm, too. Grow our own food. Have some sheep and pigs and all, so we've got some things in common. [crosstalk 00:38:39] You're outside Austin, but how do you find time to write and have a family and still run your company?

Ryan: The family thing is new. My son's only about 21 months old, so it's certainly been a balance.

Dave: Yeah.

Ryan: But I don't think I could ... Writing is such a wonderful profession in that you can do it anywhere and on your own schedule. If I was running my own company and I was a stock broker and I had a family, I'm not sure those three things would mix. I got up early this morning, and I took my son for a long walk on our farm while my wife slept, and then I handed him off to her, and then I went up and I wrote for two or three hours. Then I'll see them again in the afternoon, and then I have some calls with clients. Then in the evening, I might have a few farm chores that I have to do.

Ryan: I think it's about creating a balance, but I think one of the things that's really important is what I was saying earlier, which is that you want to have synergy between what you're doing. If you're writing books and working with people who are also selling ideas, whether it's in book form or whatever, there's overlap. Or if I'm working with an author client and I learn something, then I can apply it to my own books. If I'm researching something about ancient history, maybe I can come up with a strategy for one of my

clients. It's not like you're writing books that are totally unrelated to what you're an expert about, and so I think-

Dave: Right.

Ryan: I think it's important that people find overlap. In a way, each one of the things makes me better. I feel like if I didn't have a family, if I just turned myself into some sort of work machine, my books would be missing a human side or an ability to understand or empathize with potential readers. I think you want to make sure that you're also balanced, and I think as people become more successful, their lives can become less and less normal. Then, in a way, that messes with the quality of what they're doing because they don't understand who they're selling to anymore.

Dave: Yeah. It's different if you're 45 and you haven't had successful relationships, and you have no kids, and you're writing some stuff. You probably know things because you're an unusual person, but you might not actually have the right thing for people who are in a different phase of life.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: Right? So, I hear what you're saying there. Certainly, I've had to do crazy stuff. My kids are 9 and 11 now. Since my son was born, I started Bulletproof, and I transitioned careers and read all these books and started the radio show and all that and balanced it with being a dad, and balanced it with being a dad and a husband has been way more work than I could have ever imagined. Everyone who has kids told me, and I didn't believe them. I think no new parents believe it until it happens like, "Oh my God," but it shifted priorities for me as well.

Ryan: It definitely shifts your priorities, but I think in a positive way in the sense ... not just that a family is very rewarding, but we talked about how hard it is to say no. One of the unsung advantages of having a family, I think if you do it right, is I know that I've promised a certain amount, if not the majority, of my time to my wife and to my family. If someone comes along and asks to pick my brain for 15 minutes, if I didn't have a strong reason to say no, I think it would be harder for me to say no. The fact that I've pre-sold or pre-committed myself to a family allows me to get out of things that I might have been roped into that would have been a complete waste of my time previously. It sort of forced prioritization if you want to be a good father, husband, whatever.

Dave: Having children and family as a forcing function probably makes you more Stoic.

Ryan: Yes. Yes.

Dave: Okay. I agree with that.

Ryan: And there's nothing more trying and philosophically challenging than having an infant or a toddler, right? I can only imagine what having a teenager is like. It challenges you in

ways that I think if you can master and get better at, it makes you better at whatever it is that you're doing.

Dave: Well, mastering the art of saying no, there's a reason I put that as my first rule-

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: ... because same thing. You probably have 100,000 people who'd like to pick your brain for 15 minutes, and certainly, I do. It's just not going to happen because that's time I'm going to play with my kids.

Ryan: Yes.

Dave: That is that forcing function. At the same time, if you don't say yes to some of those things, you're not going to get the email from-

Ryan: Sure.

Dave: ... Peter Thiel.

Ryan: Sure.

Dave: You're not going to look at ... How do you sort through all of your inbound inquiries?

Ryan: No. That's true. There is the serendipity, the right place. You agree to go to this event, and then so-and-so's there, and it ... You do have to say yes, but I think it makes ... I've tried to be more selective, and I've tried to think, "Where can I cut fat out of some of those experiences?" You go to a conference. If you're choosing your own schedule, maybe you get there on Thursday, and then you're there first thing Friday morning, and then you fly out Monday instead of flying out Sunday night. All of a sudden, maybe 24 hours of meaningful interaction is then expanded to 48 or 72 hours.

Ryan: I think one of the things that's been beneficial to me having a family is it's like, "Okay. My priority is to be home. My job is very important to me. My work is still important to me." By the way, my family depends on those things. How can I do that 80/20 test and cut out the unnecessary from the necessary and get more efficient at what I'm doing?

Ryan: A friend of mine, he's a sports psychologist named Dr. Johnathan Fader. He sent me this photo, and it's a photo of Oliver Sacks on the phone on his desk, and you can see he has a big sign in his office that just says, "No." He said, "I know you have trouble saying no. You should keep this on your desk, and you should look at it." I do look at it, and it's just sort of a constant reminder to me that, "Is this thing important? Is it going to matter to me in a year? In five years? In 10 years?" Just trying to have a bit bigger perspective on the thing. Someone who wants to jump on the phone for 15 minutes, what is the cost of that, and if I invested those 15 minutes in thinking about a new idea or writing something or sending an email to someone, what's going to have the best ROI for my time? That's how I try to think about it.

Dave: I've arrived at this place in my life where I look at everything I do with an ROI lens. What I put on my plate has an ROI.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: The time I spend exercising has an ROI. Can I exercise more in less time? I'll take that.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: I started a company doing that, the Upgrade Labs thing, and same thing, every little thing. At what point, in your experience, do you think that it becomes something like orthorexia or anorexia? I'm so obsessed with having an ROI on everything I do that I didn't have the serendipity or take that email. How do you balance that out?

Ryan: Well, I have an Apple watch. As a story, I have an Apple watch, and so I have my calorie goal and my exercise goal. My calorie goal is, I think, 1,000 move calories a day. It's usually a walk and then some form of strenuous exercise. Earlier this year, somehow I had been busy and really in a groove, and I noticed that I was on a 14-day streak or something. I had done it 14 days in a row. Then on 15 and ... I couldn't stop myself. I didn't want to break the chain, which, on the one hand, it's a positive habit that I'm doing it, but I couldn't break the chain. I think 36 days in, I finally said, "You know what? This is crazy. I'm going to hurt myself. What am I doing?"

Ryan: The weird thing is stopping on day 36 was actually harder than doing it on day 35. The joke I've been saying is it's not like I got an award for doing 36 days of exercise in a row. In fact, I wore my immune system down, and I came down with mono. It set me back like two months almost of recovery. One of the things that I'm trying to be conscious of is exactly what you're saying, which is that if you're a disciplined person, if you're organizationally focused, if you're incentives driven, those skills or traits in moderation separate you from the pack, and they make you better than other people, and they help you get ahead, but if they are done out of moderation, they can become addictions or even dangerous.

Ryan: Marcus Aurelius talked about this idea of unrestrained moderation, and I love that. That's something I struggle with. When you look at people ... Tiger Woods being a great example of someone who overtrained, and it's taken him, in addition to stuff with his personal life, he has ... It's not like Tiger Woods hurt his knees playing golf. He hurt his knees overtraining to be better at golf, and thus ended up worse at golf. Not only can you suck the joy and life out of what you're doing if you're too obsessed with optimization, but it can be counterproductive at a certain point.

Dave: It can, and I don't know if it'll work yet, but I'm just working more on putting some blocks in my calendar. Every day, everything is scheduled, because otherwise, I'm probably just going to waste it.

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: But now I put two or four-hour blocks occasionally that are unplanned. "I don't know what I'm going to do here," sort of things, but for me, that's been hard to do because there's a lot of stuff I want to do.

Ryan: Sure.

Dave: I'll tell you in another six months if that's a good plan or whether they all just get filled up with phone calls anyway, which tends to happen when you're a CEO.

Ryan: Mine's the opposite, which is that I talked to my assistant about I want as few things in my calendar as possible. I had two things in my calendar. I had this with you, and I had lunch with a friend of mine. Yesterday, I had one call for my company, one consulting session with a client, and then Monday, probably something similar. The idea being that, as a writer, I need as much play time and free time to just be thinking and working. If there's something scheduled in my calendar, then my whole day is pivoting around that, or I'm thinking like, "Okay. I have a call at 12:00, so I have to start thinking about it at 11:30, and then I have to stop at 11:50." My goal is to have as much free time as possible in my calendar, and then I can be disciplined with myself, which is that free time in the calendar means writing, family, or personal time, nothing else. That's my methodology.

Dave: You're pretty unusual in that way. I'm pretty far from that, but I can't ... I could. I have a hard time imagining what I would do if I set my calendar up that way, but right now, we've got \$68 million in venture funding, and we're the top-selling protein bar in the natural foods channel. The company's just ... it's helping a lot of people. I'm all in on that, but it does mean that I don't have a lot of open blocks to say, "What am I going to do today?" and something valuable. Man, that would be fun.

Ryan: You have a lot more in the way of daily responsibilities and obligations. Frankly, just hearing that gave me slightly an anxiety attack. One of the things I try to say no to are things like that, and I think sometimes people ... You'd have to ask yourself like, "Is this going to make me happy?" because I think sometimes people end up pursuing business opportunities or speaking opportunities or whatever they are. They pursue them, and they don't ask themselves what are they going to do if they get it? Right? Is getting it a reward? Do you know what I mean?

Dave: Do you mean running for president? Is that what made you say that?

Ryan: That's a great example. It's like, yeah, if people can get so obsessed with the campaign, they don't realize that the ... They haven't seen the before-and-after pictures of Obama.

Dave: Seems to take it out of you.

Ryan: Exactly.

Dave: Not a job I want.

Ryan: Exactly.

Dave: Well, this has been a fantastic conversation, and I've got another-

Ryan: Okay.

Dave: ... question for you, Ryan. Someone comes to you tomorrow and says, "Based on everything you know, all you've written, all you've done, what are your three most important pieces of advice for me if I want to perform better at everything I do as a human being?"

Ryan: Okay. I'm going to put it pretty liberally here from the Stoics, because they're smarter than me, but I'd probably say, number one, focus on what's in your control and ignore what's out of your control. Treat obstacles as opportunities to do ... Number two would be treat obstacles as opportunities to do things that you couldn't or wouldn't have done before so that you get better when you face adversity or difficulty. Then I think the third one would be make sure that you cultivate moments of stillness and quiet and peace in your life, because if you don't have them and you're not using them to think big picture, to get in touch with what's important to you, to think deeply, et cetera, who's going to do them? Do you know what I mean? If you, Dave, isn't taking a couple hours on a random Wednesday to sit and think about the next big thing, it's not like there's somebody else at Bulletproof who's going to handle that for you. You know what I mean? That's your job.

Dave: That's my job.

Ryan: Even if you ignored every email you ever got, but you were thinking really big picture and charting the course of the company over the long term and its values and culture, et cetera, somebody else can do the other things. Somebody else can figure out who gets to sit over here, and how do we respond to this letter from the IRS? You know what I mean? All those things can handle themselves, but if the guy or the woman in charge isn't thinking big picture or finding the right inspirations, I mean, it's just not going to happen.

Dave: I love those pieces of advice. I've got a couple bonus questions-

Ryan: All right. All right.

Dave: ... for you. I said one more, but I kind of-

Ryan: I'll take as many as you've got.

Dave: I kind of tricked you there. That was my immature attempt at media manipulation, because I just wanted to see if I could pull one over on the master of-

Ryan: Okay.

Dave: ... media manipulation. See what I did there? No. That was, by the way, for people listening who don't know your first book was Trust Me, I'm Lying, which was about how to trick the media into crazy stuff that was funny.

Ryan: Yes.

Dave: What's the best book you've ever read?

Ryan: I'm trying to look here on my shelf. My favorite novel is a novel called What Makes Sammy Run? by Budd Schulberg. It's about this super ambitious talent agent who gets everything he ever wanted, and it turns out to be the worst thing that could have ever happened to him. It's this interesting novel about ambition, which I love so much. I'd probably put Robert Greene's books up there, and then obviously Marcus Aurelius' Meditations, I think, is just this spectacularly unique historical document.

Dave: I'm going to tell you a little story now.

Ryan: All right.

Dave: It has a point, so you've got to bear with me for about a minute here while I tell it to you. I run this 40 Years of Zen Neurofeedback thing, and we've got this giant mansion. It looks like Xavier's School for the Gifted, where we do brain training for executives. Maybe 18 months ago, I spent the night there. There's plenty of space, and it's a place where I can stay in Seattle. I'm all by myself on this seven-acre property, and we have this bookshelf full of books. I did a bunch of very deep meditation-style work within our feedback, like mystical state kind of stuff. I'm walking to the room, getting ready to go to sleep, and I hear a thump, and I walk out. One of the books, for reasons I still have no idea, jumped off the shelf. There's no reason. There's no mice. I couldn't figure this out, but I climbed up. There's a library with one of those ladders. I climbed up there. I'm like, "What the hell?" The book that fell out was Marcus Aurelius.

Ryan: That's incredible.

Dave: It falls open to a page, and I was like, "This is creepy stuff. What is going on?" I took a picture of the page. I put it on my Instagram or Facebook or something and wrote down what it said, which I don't have it in my head right now. I'm like, "This is kind of creepy." I go to bed, and I hear another thump. I kid you not, another Marcus Aurelius book jumps off the shelf. I cannot explain it to this day.

Dave: Now, here's why I'm telling you all this stuff. Do you believe in mystical mumbo jumbo like that or not?

Ryan: Well, maybe what happened was ... You know in the movie Interstellar where he's behind the bookshelf, and he's pushing the bookshelves to communicate a message to you? Maybe that was one of the Stoics just trying to get in touch with you through the space-time continuum.

Dave: Yeah. It was a gravity lens. I don't know, but the broader thing, do you believe in mystical stuff like that? I can't say if I believe in it or not. I can tell you that happened, and it was kind of freaky, but I can ascribe no cause or meaning. Maybe it was random. It just didn't feel very random.

Ryan: Well, I'm currently, and have been for some time, an atheist, but I do believe that there are so many things that are currently, and perhaps perpetually, beyond our comprehension and that, effectively, those are some version of a higher power, even randomness. Randomness, even if it is technically random, is still ... The fact that it fell on you, that the books fell in your house or that you pulled the lottery number at the exact moment you needed it or whatever it is, all the incredible coincidences that happen in this world, they may as well be a mystical experience, because randomness is just a way of describing an experience, that attempts to explain it, but who knows? Right?

Ryan: I definitely believe in things beyond us, and I think one of the reasons to do that, even if ... a reverse version of Pascal's Wager. One of the reasons to believe in some sort of higher power or mystical experience or something beyond you is that it's inherently humbling. It makes you think that you're not in charge of the universe and that there are things that remain beyond your comprehension. I think this properly takes us down a peg.

Dave: Yeah. I can tell you, sometimes serendipity looks kind of cool, but I don't have any particular insight or wisdom into why or how or whether it was random or not, but it's always interesting to ask people, especially because-

Ryan: Yeah.

Dave: ... you made me think of it with the whole Marcus Aurelius thing, just to go, "You know, how come it is that?" It seems like it's more common when you ask people about it than you'd think, but it's one of those things I ponder about, and I [crosstalk 00:59:21]

Ryan: Well, even how you met your wife or how you had the idea for the ... All of it could have so easily gone a different way, you know?

Dave: Yeah.

Ryan: I met my wife at a party in college, and I could have gotten in a car accident on the way, or I could have decided not to go, or I could have been sick, or should could have been sick, or we could have just not walked down a hall at the same time. So many things can change the direction of your life, and I guess one of the reasons to think about them and be blown away by them is that it's both humbling and inspiring at the same time.

Dave: Very well put. Ryan, thanks for being on the show. Thanks for the extra couple bonus questions. You've got a couple sites that listeners should go to. One is RyanHoliday.net where you collect all your good stuff, and you write about Stoicism on DailyStoic.com, which is a well-trafficked site where you've got some good stuff.

Ryan: Thank you.

Dave: Anywhere else people should go to follow you or just be influenced with what you're doing?

Ryan: Yeah. For Daily Stoic, we do a daily email about Stoicism every morning. I think it's like 150,000 people now that are all meditating on the same Stoic theme, and then I'm just @RyanHoliday on pretty much every platform.

Dave: Beautiful. Thanks, again.

Ryan: Thank you.

Dave: If you enjoyed today's show, you know what to do. Go check out some of Ryan's stuff, and I'm serious, read Perennial Seller. If you want to do something epic, you need to understand the mindset there. It's that good, and do something for Ryan or any other author, including me, whose works you appreciate. Go to Amazon and take 10 seconds to leave a review. We actually care about that stuff. If you read Perennial Seller, you'll know how much angst that goes into writing a book worth reading. If it takes you 10 seconds to say thanks, and you got four hours of value for reading a book in four hours, do the common courtesy of doing that. Thank you.