

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 47: Bryan Callen

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Tim Ferriss: Good day. This is Tim Ferriss. I'm sitting in a park. It's a beautiful park in San Francisco, and the fall weather is upon us. The leaves are turning color, and the eucalyptus are still standing tall. The foliage has not yet fallen. It's a beautiful day. For those of you who have not listened to the Tim Ferriss Show before, this is where I try to use all of my contacts and research to dissect excellence, to figure out whether it's a billionaire investor, a chess prodigy, an actor, or in this episode's case, an actor and a comedian, how do they do what they do? What are the tools and tactics and tricks that you can use?

So we dig very, very deep. But I'll start off with a bit of linguistic trivia, and I will ask apologies – or rather, not apologies. That would be a weird way to phrase it – forgiveness from the Turkish speakers. I love the Turkish language. It's a fascinating language, fascinating culture, a real collision of European and Middle Eastern cultures.

And I also have found the similarity between Turkish and Japanese very, very interesting. But I'll give you an idea of how I deconstruct languages, just by memorizing phrases. You can pick out patterns. So for instance, if you say good day, as translated into English, in Turkish – and again, I've read this, not said it a lot, but it's [Turkish] [00:03:03]. Okay, good evening is [Turkish] okay, [Turkish].

And then the way you would say child, I believe it's [Turkish] . And then you have [Turkish]. Okay, so you notice the lot at the end, so turn child in to children, you have the lot at the end. And it turns out that literally good day is good days or good evenings in Turkish. And so you can start to piece it together without a dictionary, without a grammar reference, just by memorizing a handful, even like 100 words or phrases.

Anyway, I'm a nerd. There you have it. But we're going to move onto Bryan Callen, who is the guest for this episode. He is a prolific actor who has acted in more shows than I could count certainly, but includes pretty much all the shows at the top of the rankings; Frazier, NYPD Blue, Entourage, Law and Order, CSI,

Sex in the City, King of Queens, it goes on and on and on. He's also a world class comic who travels the globe performing standup comedy for sold out audiences all over the world.

He's also one of the best read people I have ever met. So we're going to dig into all sorts of things, the craft of comedy, how he boosts his own creativity, which sounds like I could stand to gain from; ideas for improving education, both self education and institutional education; many different book recommendations, influences of his. We really dig into a lot of details that I found fascinating.

Bryan's one of my favorite people to hang out with, so without further ado, here's Bryan Callen.

Tim Ferriss: So ladies and gentlemen, this is Tim Ferriss and welcome to the Tim Ferriss Show. But we also have 50 percent of this episode, which is the Bryan Callen Show. Bryan, welcome to the show.

Bryan Callen: Thank you, sir. Thank you.

Tim Ferriss: I am excited to have you on for many different reasons, not the least of which, as we were discussing before we started recording, you are known as the best body in comedy, if I'm not mistaken.

Bryan Callen: That's right. Just think of – you guys don't have any videos. Just think of if you were to take human skin and stretch it over a cheetah, I think that's right. That's not me; that's just what my critics –

Tim Ferriss: The critics. That's what – that's the worst they can come up with.

Bryan Callen: That's not what my admirers say, but that's just what the critics say.

Tim Ferriss: And you know, I'm trying to piece together – it's been a number of years now, but how did we first meet? What was the first?

Bryan Callen: Neal Brennan, who is the creator of the Chappelle Show, knew I was into fitness and all that. And he sent me I believe a Ted Talk you had done about a guy named Tim Ferriss. He said, "What do you think of this guy?" And I watched it, and I was very taken with the way you were explaining things, and how you used your body as a human guinea pig. And I think I texted him back. I said, "Well, I know one thing; I'm going to go out and get the book, *The Four-Hour Body*." And of course, that sent me – basically I started

with *The Four-Hour Body*, and then I got into *The Four-Hour Work Week*, and then of course, I listened to – and the I read *The Four-Hour Chef*.

So I became sort of this – but what I really – some of the concepts that you talked about resonated so deeply with me, 20 percent of your effort results in 80 percent of your results, etcetera, etcetera, and here was this guy who had – who was into all the things that I was into, fighting and deconstructing the learning process. And then I heard you were going to be at this loft in downtown LA at some publicist's place talking about your book.

So my wife and I went there, and I had a brief conversation with you, not long enough, and I think that's how we first met.

Tim Ferriss: That's right.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, and then I just – I think we had mutual friends, Joe Rogan and Keith Ferrazzi and various people like that. And then I got you on my podcast I remember.

Tim Ferriss: And that's when we started dating, seriously I think.

Bryan Callen: That's when we started dating. It was.

Tim Ferriss: That's right. And actually the timing now is making perfect sense to me because I recognized you initially from having just seen *Warrior*. And you were in that movie, and I remembered the goldfish scene, among others – the bag with the goldfish. And I was very impressed with your performance, and then delved into a lot of your comedy; went to one of your lives shows, which was hilarious, and really is something that I think everybody should experience, not just your comedy ideally, but any – if you haven't been to a live standup show, it's so categorically different from dealing with audio virtually.

I mean just the interaction with the audience, everything is so unique.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, that show in particular, too, was a night where I was really trying a bunch of new stuff. I'm about to shoot my one-hour special, so what you saw was really in its infancy. And I remember having you in the audience. I said, "If anybody is going to appreciate the process," I was literally trying to work out so many of those bits. And I wasn't even sure where a lot of them were going, but it was a really receptive audience. And it was just fun to

do that for you. And I think the – you were there with the founder of Uber.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Yeah, that’s right, yeah, Travis Kalanick was there, yep.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, and so in a way, when you have people there, you want to do your best stuff and kill it, but it was – I just kind of remember myself going, “I think Tim will appreciate the sort of the process that is – it’d be fun for you to watch now when I shoot my special because it’s all gelled, and it’s so tight. And of course, now I just want to shoot it and move on to the next process, which is coming up with a whole new hour.

But yeah, I remember that. And I do think that that’s what’s fun about standup. It’s really interesting when you – comedy seems to be the great equalizer. When you do standup in so many of the places that I do it, what’s really cool nowadays is that so few of the audience are actually traditionally white. I just came from San Antonio, where it was primarily Mexican American. But if you do a standup in a place like New York City, or in San Francisco, or in Vancouver, man, it is the United Nations out there.

And what’s really interesting, I think maybe because of the internet is regardless of all the cultures and how we all come from different origins and different points of view, most people laugh at the same stuff nowadays. I mean they’re getting the jokes. I’ve been offered to do this tour in India, and I said, “Are they going to get my stuff?” And my friend said, “Are you kidding? They’ll love it. And not only will they love it, they know who you are.”

I was sitting next to a woman on the plane, and she kept looking at me. I said, “Oh, boy, here goes.” And she was from India, from Mumbai, and she said, “I’m so sorry to bother you, but,” – and she had a heavy Indian accent. And she said, “Are you on the show *How I Met Your Mother*?” And I went, “Yes, I am, and sometimes I’m on that show.” And she said, “I watch you all the time, and I watch you in India.” And I thought this is just – it’s really becoming a global marketplace. It was really wild.

Tim Ferriss: Do you find when you’re developing your material, that – I’m sure you do, and this is kind of a silly question. But what aspects are most difficult of developing material because I love watching the iterative process. And people have strong opinions about this documentary, but I, as an outsider, found it interesting to watch *Comedian*, with Seinfeld and others, just to see, like you said, how level a playing field it is. It doesn't matter if you're Jerry Seinfeld

or anyone else, if you get up and your stuff isn't funny, people are just not going to laugh.

Bryan Callen:

[Inaudible] quick. It's why – there are three things you can't really fake. One is fighting. The second thing is sex, and the third thing is comedy. It doesn't matter who your publicist is or how famous you are man, if you don't bring the money, it gets quiet in that room fast. You've got to be funny or you're dead, and it's just the way it is, man. And that's kind of what I love about MMA, and I do this podcast called The Fighter and the Kid with Brendan Shaub, who is about to fight Travis Brown next, and Brendan's got to go in there and fight the number three fighter in the world. He's six-foot-seven, 240 pounds, and Brendan better bring the heat because no matter how much we want him to win, it's him alone in that ring.

And in a lot of ways, when you're on stage, it's the same thing. But to answer your question, you know, the process – I don't think about being funny, and I certainly don't think about being universal. I think the way to write standup, if you want longevity in this business, at least for me, is to start by asking yourself personal questions. What I write from is this. I'll ask myself some very personal questions. I ask myself what I'm afraid of, what I'm ashamed of, who I'm pretending to be, who I really am, where I am versus where I thought I'd be.

Those are the kinds of things that resonate with people. I have children. I like to talk about how great they are, and I also like to talk about how fucking boring it is to be a parent sometimes, or you know, I like to talk about the fact that if my dick had a mouth, it would be saying things like, "Monogamy is for pussies," you know, whatever it is. Those are the kinds of things people resonate with, especially when they're married. My wife may not like to hear that, but those are the things.

And so, it really is – that stage is the last bastion of free speech. It's really a place that you can really be honest. And my feeling is when you write from that perspective, the comedy finds its way through.

Tim Ferriss:

And how much of a past do you have to develop your on-stage presence – or I hesitate to use the word personality because I feel like there are comedians and standup comics who have very different personalities on and off the stage. I feel like you're pretty much what you see is what you get. I mean I feel like obviously the volume is turned up, the intensity is turned up, but you're very

much the same guy in a lot of ways on and off the stage, which I think is a good thing.

Bryan Callen:

I think that's the authenticity. I certainly think when you start out, you are – you're putting on a performance and character, and you're just – you know, it's a whirlwind. But I think as you do it, the person that you really are versus the person that is on stage begins to mesh.

And there becomes almost no difference at all hopefully, as you continue to do it.

Tim Ferriss:

And can you start off, as I think a lot of writers do for instance, a lot of actors, timid, and the develop a very brutally honest way of doing comedy, or is that something you kind of have to start with to get away with it? And the reason I ask is that I feel like comedy, as you put it, is one of the – certainly in the US at least – one of the last places where we can talk about the touchiest of subjects, right. You can talk about adultery, fantasies of adultery, race, which is I think a big one. You can talk about sex and sexism, and you can say what everyone is thinking without having your career destroyed, necessarily.

I do. I think that we live in a world where people are terrified to talk about how they really feel. I mean my God, look at the corporate world. Look at how structured you have to be. But I think that's changing. I think that – I don't know if it's the internet or what not, but I do think that you – the long term approach for any company – and I believe that's for your brand as a performer – I think your long term approach should always be authenticity. Try to be as honest as you can. We'll forgive you if it's coming from an honest and compassionate place. You can talk about stereotypes, you can talk about things that are uncomfortable, as long as you have hopefully a solution or as long as it's – I don't know, it's just boy, do I feel sometimes like we're so stifled.

I think it's very – people are very hesitant to really talk about what is really going on. I mean I think our resources many times are misallocated. For example, on my podcast, I had a woman who was talking about how I have to spend more money on education. And my co-host on the show, Hunter Maats, who you know, who wrote a book called *The Straight-A Conspiracy*, had studied the learning process and said look, the biggest enemy is the fact that a lot of students, or kids in this country, just don't believe that they are capable of learning. We have these misguided beliefs. I don't

have the math gene. I don't have an ear for languages, this kind of shit, that's fed to us.

Well, in fact, maybe what we need is a shift in how we look at learning. We need a shift in how we look at ourselves. We may not need money at all. We may just need to get people to take a different point of view on how one can learn and how capable we are.

Some cultures, it could be argued, some races it could be argued, have been – I don't know what the word is, but you can make the argument that there are large swaths of our population that don't believe they are even capable of learning the way their white colleagues are, for example. That's stuff that needs to be talked about. That doesn't need money. That needs dialogue. There are bad ideas out there. And the way you beat a bad idea is with a good idea.

Tim Ferriss: No, I agree.

Bryan Callen: And I think if that's – I think if that's at the heart of what you're saying as a standup comic on stage, or as a politician, we forgive you. We'll see it. We'll feel it. Maybe that's idealistic, I don't know.

Tim Ferriss: No, I think it's better to be slightly too idealistic than too jaded or cynical, right, because idealism can at least spur you to action, whereas cynicism is exactly the opposite.

It leads you to do nothing, right, so I mean I don't remember who originally said this, but there's a quote to the effect of you know, the person who says everything is going to be alright, and the person who says nothing can be done, are both bad because in both cases, you do nothing.

Bryan Callen: Well, both cases, they get in the way of critical thinking. If you're completely optimistic, you're not being critical. Yeah, you've got to be – it gets in the way of sober thinking, both in that spectrum.

Tim Ferriss: And I wanted to just add a comment related to a point you made, echoing Hunter, that the issue is first and foremost a challenging of belief sets, in the United States at least, just limiting it to the United States. And I have to just mention for people who are interested in this, you check out an organization called QuestBridge, just Questbridge.org.

And I'm an advisor to this non-profit. What they do, I'll illustrate by example, which I just think is so fucking elegant and creative. What they've realized is that the – getting low income, let's just say, students who are high performing, right, who are getting straight As, who are in the top ten percent on the SATs into good schools or into college at all, is not a funding problem. There is tons of money at all of these top schools for giving these kids full rides. The problem is a recruiting problem. That's where the dislocation exists because these kids have no family members, no teachers, no guidance counselors who will ever tell them or convince them to apply to a Princeton, a Yale or whatever. And so, what QuestBridge will do, among many other things, is for instance, imagine that you are – whether it's Native American on a reservation, a poor black kid in the Bronx, or a poor white kid in Appalachia, it's not race or color based, it's needs based and merit based.

You get a letter in the mail, or you've see an advertisement that is offering you the chance to get a free iPad. You fill out this application because you want a free iPad. And unbeknownst to you, QuestBridge has made that application standardized as an application form to 35 of the top universities in the country. A few weeks later, you then get a letter from say, Princeton, offering you a free ride for four years. And so they're focusing on fixing that recruiting problem, and I think the number is something like half of the low income kids at the top 35 universities in the country have been fed into the system and fully funded by QuestBridge.

What this means is if you're willing – if you want to work philanthropically – I'm sorry, I got to get on my soapbox for this just because I'm so passionate about education and I recognize the opportunities I've had – that means that you don't need to spend a quarter of a million dollars to put a kid through college at a top school, which is what a lot of people perceive.

They're like, "Oh my God, I have to make millions and millions of dollars before I can make a difference." In fact, if you were to take say 50 grand to help support these types of prizes, the iPads and so on, you could put 50 kids potentially through four years at the best schools in the country, by solving the right problem, which is not a funding problem – it is a recruiting problem – and changing those belief systems. So I totally agree with you.

Bryan Callen:

And to piggyback on that, there's a guy who I just had on my podcast, Mark Deresiewicz, who wrote a book called *Excellent Sheep*. He was a Yale professor, and took a look at the –

essentially what was wrong with higher education, at these elite institutions, primarily places like Amherst and Yale and Harvard. And one of the things he said is that we're breeding excellent sheep. You've got 31 flavors of vanilla.

These kids are so obsessed with essentially achievement for its own sake, not fulfillment or meaning, but rather achievement for its own sake, so they can get into a great – become rich doctors or lawyers, or consultants or investment bankers. And even that becomes an extension of what they've been doing their whole life, which was hey, I want to please my boss, jump through these loopholes and be in an elite person. And it's an interesting book. But one of the things he talked about was that these elite institutions are – there's a feeder system of about 100 high schools in this country, about 100 high schools, and that's it, that provide students to these universities. So something like QuestBridge is desperately needed, so that we can create an equality of opportunity. That's always what it is, right?

Tim Ferriss: No, exactly, and it's – when you look at some of the recruiting efforts that are perhaps less than ideal, what they tend to do is try to recruit say low income, but high performing students from within a certain radius of the school itself, and that generally means if the vast majority of these top schools are say in the East and West Coasts, you're just not recruiting kids from the vast majority of the country, even though they're there. And I think that if you want not just a diversity of color, which I think quite frankly, could be really – it can be a very confusing and misguided conversation for people. But if you're looking for a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds and so on, you really need to get outside of a handful of zip codes.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, more of a representation of what the real world is, for God's sake.

Tim Ferriss: Right, exactly. So to totally shift gears, because I am fascinated and hugely intimidated by comedy, how do you – what does your creative process look like? So to get to – for instance, you're about to do a one-hour special. You're a highly refined, well oiled machine, biceps of steel, deltoids like a Vidalia onion with cheetah skin on it. I've seen your tattoos. But where does that start? So when you finish this and you're like, "Oh, my God, even though it's going to tear part of my soul asunder, I need to put together new material," where do you start? What does that process look like?

Bryan Callen:

Well, I find that I do better when I'm moving, so I've written all my standup walking my dog or hiking in the Santa Monica mountains. And even more than that, I've learned that comedy is a mindset. I think Francis Ford Coppola said great screen plays are written on the hoods of cars and standing in line at the DMV, something like that. And he's right. You write things a lot of times when you're doing something else. You'll get an idea. You'll get an idea. My idea – one of the ideas I had is boy, you know, if you turn my life into a movie, I don't think – I wouldn't recommend going. It was kind of a bummer. I thought I was going to be living this action packed lifestyle. But boy, do I spend a lot of time in traffic and sleeping. So it's not – I don't think that my life would make a very exciting movie. I certainly am not the hero I thought I'd be. I think in fact, instead of being the gunslinger, I'm sort of the merchant who boards up his windows when they come to fight.

I'm appalled at that. I've wrestled, and I like to box, and I fancy myself kind of the opposite, but let's look at my real life. That is very fertile soil. And so, what I'll do is I just keep coming back to that theme. I keep thinking about that. I keep thinking about how I – what my expectations of myself were when I was younger. Who did really want to be? And who am I really? That's the kind of thing. And by the way, why do I box for four days of the week? Why do I spar with 21-year-olds and get hit in the face? It's not good for my brain. It doesn't help my pocketbook. It's ridiculous. What's going on here, man? Do I really think I'm going to get in a fight? If I punch somebody in the face, I better have a good lawyer. Yet I really practice hard, and I try to sit down in my punches, and I think about it, and I shadowbox.

It's a little ridiculous at 47 years old. It just is. And I'm pissed off that I haven't been able to roll more. I mean you know, just in case I got to put somebody in a triangle, are you kidding me? [Inaudible] just ridiculous. I drive a Passat. But where does this come from? What's going on man? What is happening? Well, I had a father who was a giant, I mean a giant. I take after the Sicilian side, my mother's side. She comes from a long line of peasants and petty criminals. So, I'm built to blend in with the crowd. I can pick your pocket and you can never describe me. He was white, brown hair, medium, whatever. So these are where – that's kind of what you start to think about who you really are. Think for a second about how you behave. And then start thinking about why.

How did you get here for Christ's sake? Who are you? If you watched yourself from afar, if you met yourself, what would you

tell – what would you say to yourself? What would you tell you? Would you say, “Hey, you got to change this, this and that,” or would you say, “You know what, you’re perfect; leave yourself alone”? I doubt you’d say you’re perfect, leave yourself alone. So it really becomes a process of introspection.

Tim Ferriss: And when you’re working with these questions, what’s the container, the schedule for that? So for instance, you have the podcasts. You have your sort of scheduling on the road career of performing. You have your TV work. You’ve got your film work. You’ve got many different projects that you need to schedule for. When do you typically develop material? I mean is it in all the in between slots, or do you actually schedule, say, two hours of walking four times a week?

Bryan Callen: That’s a very good question because I think it’s very important to – because we all get very busy, right, so yesterday, I’m shooting the Goldbergs, this fun show on ABC, and my day has been – I mean long days, 12-hour days. I’m driving and I have a 6:15 call tomorrow morning, and I’ll be there all day. So what that means is that writing is a mindset. Writing is not something you schedule. Writing comedy must be a mindset. What I mean by that is that I took all the fencing – any of the sacred space around, quote-unquote, work time, or writing, I took it away. I don’t believe – some people have to do that. Gabriel Garcia Márquez, the great writer who died recently, who wrote *A Thousand Years of Solitude*, and *Love in a Time of Cholera* and things, he had four hours of a day he would write no matter what.

Hemingway did the same thing. Flannery O’Connor said something wonderful .She said, “I sit at my typewriter every morning at 5:30 in the morning, not to write, but just in case something happens.” It’s an act of faith. She’s got to show up in case. And Nick Cave was just on NPR talking about the same thing. He said, “I find writing is this idea, well, you’re a rock star, it just comes.” No, it’s labor. It’s hard labor. Yes, yes, Somerset Maugham said, “The muse hits me at 8:00 every morning.” In other words, he sits down and if the muse shows, it shows. Either way, I write. So there is a place if you’re a creative person of any kind of person, and you want to produce something out of nothing, I think you do need to, I guess, sequester time.

Tim Ferriss: But you don’t do that.

Bryan Callen: I don't do that because life gets too busy, and when you're an actor, and you've got podcasts, things are way too unpredictable. And when, of course, you have to box, listen, you've got –

Tim Ferriss: When you're losing half of your ideas due to brain damage, it makes it harder.

Bryan Callen: That's right. So what I do is I just say – when I'm driving in traffic, I'm going to start writing. When I'm in the shower, I'm going to start writing.

Tim Ferriss: How are you capturing these ideas?

Bryan Callen: I try not to capture them. That's what I do. I just happen. So you're looking at your computer or whatever as you're talking to me. Just turn your head and look somewhere else. That's literally how I look at writing. I go, "Oh, I'm doing this; I'm going to turn over here and just start thinking." I don't put anything on it, nothing on it. And that's something you can practice and get very good at.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, at some point, though, you have to, I would assume, record this, develop it, start looking at possible ways of delivery and so on. Is there a point at which you write any of this stuff down, or do you just try to hold it in your head and then jump on stage and free style it?

Bryan Callen: I do write it down, but again, I'm performing it a lot as well. And the reason I write it down is it's very similar to writing songs, writing music. So, when you write music – and I talked to a couple people. I talked to Fiona Apple about this. I talked to Harry Connick, Jr. about this. And I've talked to some other musicians. And all of them said they've seen me do standup, and I think both Harry and Fiona said, "You do very similar – you do what I do. Comedy feels very much like music." I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, when you write a song, rhythm, tempo, melody, it's all very, very important. You're always kind of working out like where to place emphasis, where not to place emphasis, how many words are in the song. And comedy is exactly the same thing. When you write a bit, finding how many words go into that joke, finding how many words, I should say, go into the surprise – because comedy is really surprise isn't it?

When I got you going down one lane, then I say something, and you go, "Oh, I didn't see that coming," and you start laughing, that's kind of what it is. There is a rhythm, there is a perfect number of words, and I believe there's a perfect amount of

emphasis and de-emphasis, if that's a word, to that sentence. And that's kind of the process of finding exactly what that whole rhythm is. It's very much like music. It really is.

Tim Ferriss: If you – let's see here. No, this is very interesting. I love watching comedy and listening to comedy. I'm not a well versed connoisseur. I haven't studied comedy theory, if there is such a thing, like music theory, I don't know. But I've at least observed that they're stylistically very many successful comics who have dramatically different types of delivery, right.

So you have – when I watch your performance, I agree. There's a certain musicality to it. Then you might see, let's just say a Steven Wright, or a Mitch Hedberg, which from a delivery standpoint, sometimes seems as dry as sort of a cyborg without any personality, but it's hilarious, or a lot of it I find to be very, very funny. Who are a few comics – do you say comics or comedians, by the way? I guess maybe they're distinct.

Bryan Callen: I say comics.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. Which comics out there living or dead, are very different from your own style of standup that you really admire?

Bryan Callen: Well, you know, I mean the people I admire, I don't know how different, but certainly I think George Carlin – George Carlin was, again, not as interested in being funny. Being funny is something that you do, and there are a lot of tricks to being funny.

It's a little bit like being a musician, where you write pop songs with tricks and hooks; with phrases that are catchy and beats that are catchy. And then you listen to Pink Floyd or you listen to Led Zeppelin, or you listen to whoever they might be, and it's just a different feel, man. There's a reason Zeppelin is still kind of marveled at and still listened to; Pink Floyd, the same thing. You listen to The Wall, and you go, "Man, this music is kind of timeless." Well, I think that Carlin was really busy trying to say something. It's one thing to be funny. It's another thing to be thematic, and to be getting the audience to think a little bit.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, profound in a way.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, I think Prior did that. I think Carlin did that. And again, that's why I would say those people are very different than I am. I'm certainly trying to do that, but it's very different comedy. I think my next hour's going to be a lot more in that direction, but

those guys were not afraid to make you feel a little bit uncomfortable.

And I think it was also a time when people believed they could make a difference with their expression. We live in cynical times. We live in cynical times. I don't think a lot of people feel that they're making a difference at all, with the exception of people like yourself. That's one of the reasons that I talk I'm talking to you and read your books. We have to fight that. But as far as to answer your question, I'm going around and around here, but Sebastian Maniscalco is hilarious.

Tim Ferriss: How do you spell his last name?

Bryan Callen: Sebastian Maniscalco, I'm not sure.

Tim Ferriss: Maniscalco, I could look it up.

Bryan Callen: He's so funny. You can just go under Sebastian comedian, he goes by one name usually. He's amazing. And the Dov Davidoff, of course, who is a dear friend of mine.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, Dov Davidoff is great.

Bryan Callen: Bret Ernst is great. Tom Segura is great. Joe Rogan is somebody I perform with a lot, and a dear friend. And Rogan is just about telling the truth.

Rogan is, again, another comic who is less worried about being funny, though he's very funny, and way more interested in getting into your head. That's why he's got a cult following. It's crazy.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, yeah, the following is incredible. Do you remember the first – and I apologize if my terminology is off, but the first bit or the first – the first comedy that you performed that really got an exceptional response from an audience? Do you remember that?

Bryan Callen: I do. I do.

Tim Ferriss: Can you tell me a bit about it, and why you think it worked, and how it came about?

Bryan Callen: The first thing I wrote was – and I didn't know if it would work, and I don't know. I thought to myself what – I saw this special on penguins, and I said, "Gee, whiz, man, that's a legless flightless

bird in the middle of the South Pole. What in the world did you have to do in your past life to be reborn that shitty a bird?"

I mean wouldn't you way rather be an eagle and soar, or would you rather be those – basically those feather sausages? I mean that sucks. What do you do if a polar bear comes at you, or whatever? You spend all your time running away from leopard seals. And I just wrote this thing about what you had to do and who you had to be. And I run away from a polar bear, and hell, I'm cold all the time and I look like everybody else. Anyway, I was amazed because I was so terrified it wasn't going to be funny, but it worked. It worked. It was amazing.

Tim Ferriss: Were there any particular – you mentioned hooks and tricks, and I don't view those terms in a negative way. But were there any particular hooks or tricks in that bit that helped it to work?

Bryan Callen: I don't know. I never really – I mean I look back on my old standup and I cringe. I mean I cringe. I can't even watch it. I don't think I was ever – I think I was at least sincere. I mean I don't think I was ever looking for hooks or tricks. I was just writing what I thought was funny. I mean that's my – young people ask me advice on standup, and I always say, "Look, man, first of all, I'll see you in ten years; and second of all, write only what you think is funny, and write every day, and try to perform as much as you can. And if you can't, perform in front of the mirror." That's how you become a comic.

Tim Ferriss: Have you performed much in front of the mirror?

Bryan Callen: All the time.

Tim Ferriss: Really? What does that look like?

Bryan Callen: I perfected my Chris Walken as a pigeon in front of a mirror – not [inaudible] things. It's what I do. I'm standing in front of the mirror going, "Oh, coo, oh, coo. I'm a small bird, tiny, [inaudible] big chest, hanging around water fountains all day, bread on my mind." I don't know.

Anyway, [inaudible] doing that. But this is the kind of thing you do as a comic. You're always working it out, man.

Tim Ferriss: You must be a complete – you must appear to be a complete lunatic in the car when you're stuck in traffic, because I would

imagine in my head at least, that you're doing that kind of stuff non-stop.

Bryan Callen:

Well, look, I was working on a bit. My father has become my fan now because he's seen my standup. And he also features pretty prominently in the next hour. And he, to his credit, was great because my mother and my sister, and I think my wife were yelling at me about what to buy at the grocery store. And then they were asking me some terrible question that I didn't care about, about I don't know, do you want to go to Menchie's with the kids? Something, I don't know. And I wasn't paying attention.

And my sister goes, "As usual, Bryan's here, but he's not really here." And in fact, I was trying to work on a bit, and so I was going, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, Menchie's, yeah. Okay, supermarket," like I give a shit about that stuff. I'm trying to work out what an ostrich does. I don't know what I was doing, some – never tell them that that's more important, that me running like an ostrich – in fact, I think I was working out this bit where I'm in a tower with no pants on, and a woman's over my shoulder, and she's like, "Oh, my god, your body feels like warm moving wood." And I don't know what, I was like going through this. I'm mowing her captors down with a machine gun. I got banderos, and my hair is wet, it's in my eyes. I'm writing this ridiculous thing. I think there's a horse rearing in the background.

It's not something I can really – this is literally – I know it's going to be a great bit, but I can't tell them that. My father was so great. My father goes, "He's not here because he's not interested in your grocery list. The guy makes his living off his imagination. He's obviously coming up with funny stuff that the country – that the world is going to laugh at. Leave him alone. [Inaudible] the shopping." And it was just great. [Inaudible] Thank you. I'm getting paid for what I got in trouble for my whole life. My father used to pull his hair out when he'd get my report card because of the fact I was fantasizing about being a professional skier or, slash, tennis player, or anybody I was not, and guess what, it pays the bills now.

Tim Ferriss:

So this is not a perfect segue, but I just have a million questions I want to ask you. You are very well read, and very curious in my experience with you. I mean you've read an incredible number of books, and really have sort of a very sharp spider sense for exploring new ideas and subjects you know nothing about. If you did very poorly in school – and I'm not saying these are mutually exclusive – but how did you develop that curiosity and appetite for

reading because it's not always that you find those two go hand in hand.

Bryan Callen:

Well, I was always curious, and I grew up all over the world. Until I was 14, I lived in seven different countries, right, so Lebanon and Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and Greece, and India, and the Philippines, so I was always – I was exposed to so many different cultures. My father was a huge reader, as was my mother. And they were both pretty educated.

But I think that I always had a great deal of trouble until I was a sophomore in college, with what you would call concentration; the idea that you've got to sit down and furrow your brow and concentrate. I didn't know what that meant. Nobody had explained the art of learning to me. The one thing I was very into, I went to college to wrestle; hurt my back, and then I saw these guys kicking and punching, the Tai Kwon Do guys, but they were fighting full contact, and I went, "I want to do that." So that began my journey into Tai Kwon Do, and I started fighting. And my teacher was teaching me how to jab the bag, sort of a boxing jab. And I said, "I have trouble concentrating. I'm getting Cs," or something. And he said – he was Korean, and he said, "Hit that bag again." And I hit the bag again. He goes, "Did you concentrate on that?" I said, "No." He goes, "Same mindset; reading is the same way. Just let it come into your body. Stop trying to force it in. Just let it come in."

That began the journey of sort of learning in a passive way, I supposed. It turned the process on its ear. I started to, I guess, use the mental model I used for Tai Kwon Do, and I applied it to my academics. But I think it also came from perspective. I think that I – the turning point was always the fact that I realized there were huge deficits in my learning. I wasn't familiar with the Greeks. I wanted to know where I came from. I wanted to know who I owed thanks to, Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. What was the Bible? Why did the Bible have such authority for 1000 years, or even thousands? Why?

What was the contribution of the Hebrews, the Jews, I mean the Old Testament and their laws? What was Roman law? Now these are the things that I always knew that I should know about these things. I knew that they were people who had done all the thinking for me. I knew that it was probably a good idea to immerse myself in the best that had been thought and said because I was just aware of how – I think look, it's exactly like why you should do sports. Sports teaches you how tough you're not. They also teach you how tough you are. You need both. You need what's called perspective.

And maybe that's kind of what I was inundated with before I began that journey.

Tim Ferriss: When did you start pursuing comedy seriously, at what age?

Bryan Callen: Well, you know, as I think about it, I was moved to so many different locations. I didn't live anywhere for more than really two years, think about this, until I was 30. I mean I remember when I bought my first house, I think I was 32, and it was in Venice. And it was the first time I'd ever put anything on a wall. And I was a real nomad. Well, what that meant was, I was always moved and put into a whole different circumstance. Usually I was taken to a new continent. I'd be in a school for two years in Greece or in Lebanon, and my dad would come home and say, "Guess what, we got transferred to Saudi Arabia." And I was like, "I don't know what Saudi Arabia is, but I have a dog and this sucks. And I miss all my friends." "Well, sorry, get on a plane; we're leaving." And I would be thrown into a new set of circumstances. Well, there are two ways you get guys to like you. One is sports. I was a pretty good athlete, not a great athlete, but pretty good. And the other is get them to laugh at you.

And those are the two things I got good at. I didn't want to be the last guy picked on the team, and by the way, you'll have fun with me on your team because I will make you laugh the whole fucking time. And that's really where my training as a standup comic started, and you know, my life isn't much different. I get up on stage in different cities all over the – now in Canada as well, and probably in India pretty soon. I don't know them, but they're all looking at me, and they need me to make them laugh for an hour; nothing new, nothing new here, man. I'm just more honed. It's just a little more polished than it used to be. There it is.

Tim Ferriss: What was your first paid gig for comedy?

Bryan Callen: Oh, boy, I think my first real paid gig was in London. My buddy had started an online bank and flew me to London to do standup in a tent.

And I was – I don't think I've ever performed to that kind of deafening silence. It was horrifying. [Inaudible] check or something, and that was fine. But oh, I mean it was horrifying. People didn't really look at me afterwards. Here was this American trying to do bad jokes, so you know, you've got to have those experiences.

Tim Ferriss: What made it so bad in retrospect?

Bryan Callen: My mike didn't work that well, and my jokes just didn't seem to want to fly. Brits have a subtle sensibility. These were – look, if you go to Britain as an American comic, you'd better be good and experienced. I wasn't either of those two. And it got quiet quick, but I just forged through. I forged through. I was basically on fire; maybe the most uncomfortable I've ever been in my life.

And by the way, the one compliment I got wasn't much. A woman said – she was beautiful. I think I was trying to pick her up and it didn't work. And she looked at me and said, “You know, you're really – I don't mean to sound bad, but you're really – like you're very American. You're very loud and very big. Has anyone ever told you that?” No, they haven't, but obviously this isn't going anywhere, so [inaudible].

Tim Ferriss: What was the first gig that comes to mind where you thought to yourself, “Holy shit, that fucking worked; I can be really good at this”? I mean when you came off kind of glowing and really feeling like it worked, what's the first experience that comes to mind that fits that description?

Bryan Callen: That was a place – I think it was the Westside Theater in New York City, and it was down in the village, and I just – I had this crowd, and I hit one. I hit one. It was the first time where things started to gel. And I'd been working all summer on it. And I did – I'd just been working all summer, and it was a packed crowd. And I got up and I did about 20 minutes, which was an eternity back then for me. And they just kept laughing harder and harder and harder. And when I got offstage, some of them stood up, and my girlfriend at the time was there, and boy, did I – I went, “Oh, my God. Oh, my God. So if I just sit and work all the time alone in a room, this is what happens.” And that was the end of it, man. I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe – see, I still couldn't believe I was able to do standup comedy.

The great surprise of my life, still, is the fact that I make money doing this. And by the way, you forget how you came up with the ideas. You even forget how you structured them. You just know that they become part of you after a while. The heartbreak is letting go of a lot of your great bits. You can't do them anymore because you've already cut them, and you know, it's not like music. You've just got to keep inventing it.

Tim Ferriss: People don't want to hear the greats. They don't want to hear you rehash all of your old material.

Bryan Callen: No, because it's a magic trick. And once they know what's coming, it ain't going to be the same. Music is different. The Rolling Stones have been singing Start Me Up for the past 30 fucking years. I don't have it so easy. I've got to come up with Start Me Up every time I cut a new one hour.

Tim Ferriss: What were the ingredients, do you think, that – I'll try to keep my two-part questions to a minimum, but what were the ingredients that went into that first – it sounds like a home run in New York? And then the second piece is how many times had you rehearsed parts of that performance before that night?

Bryan Callen: You know, probably my whole life. I mean I think the ingredients – it was my subconscious and my conscious, and the years I had been – the thing I'd thrown out there, and I just somehow was able to kind of cast a net, and then sieve through all the shit. And I just kind of – it's just a process of whittling down who you really are, and I guess whittling down what makes you laugh. I don't know, man, I don't know. I don't know the answer. It's a surprise. It was just a huge surprise, a wonderful surprise.

Tim Ferriss: Dig it. No, I dig it. What book or books had the biggest – I'm just thinking to your school experience, and after that – what books have had the largest impact on your life, whether that's your twenties, thirties, forties?

Bryan Callen: You know, look, I mean I went through – I would go through my phases. I remember reading Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead by Ayn Rand. And that's good fodder for a young man. It sets these bold stark characters – you could even call them Christ figures, and you think to yourself, "I want to be that." And of course, I read Nietzsche. Nietzsche, you know, this is *Genealogy of Morals*, etcetera. I mean this is bold stark stuff for a young man, where the truths and truisms are really cut and dry in a lot of ways. And it's just like kind of the equivalent of I guess intellectual red meat. But then I got into Joseph Campbell, and *The Power of Myth*, and *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*, and these kinds of things. And Joseph Campbell was the first person to really open my eyes to maybe that sort of compassionate side of life, or of thought.

I just loved how he was a Biblical scholar. He was an Eastern philosophical scholar, and he would often compare and contrast the

two. And that's what I really resonated with, I guess. So Campbell was the guy who really kind of put it all together for me; and not in a way I could really put my finger on, but certainly in a way where I kind of – he gave this wonderful – it made you just glad to be alive, how vast this world is, and how similar and how different we are. Maybe that's kind of the first guy I remember really blowing my mind. But then you know, there are books like Josh Waitzkin's book, *The Art of Learning*. I loved it. Yeah, I wish there were – some of those books, I wish I had read when I was way younger.

By the way, I loved *The Four-Hour Body*. I love what you did with you did. I love *The Four-Hour Work Week*. I love the philosophy. I like the journey you took, and how you broke it down. Those are the kinds of things I wish I had read when I was much younger. It would have made my schooling a lot easier, that's for damn sure. So, my god, it was the books – so many books, so many authors. I love Somerset Maugham. I went through all those. Listen, I mean *The Symposium*, *Plato's Dialogues*, I mean come on.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, those guys – it's amazing to look at some of the ancients and think about the persistence of their work.

Bryan Callen: Forget it. Seneca and Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, when you read them, when you read these men who are writing this stuff 3500 years ago, whatever it was – 2500 years ago, you are profoundly aware of the fact that there is a responsibility to being a human being, and there are questions you must wrestle with on your own as a human being.

And technology and the creature comforts, and antibiotics, and x-rays, and plenty to eat, those things ultimately probably aren't going to help you. They're going to make you a lot more comfortable, and maybe let you think longer, and God bless, and thank God we have them. But there is a responsibility to being a human being, to being an ethical human being, and to being a whole and complete human being that can be – that nobody can really take – help you with. You've got to kind of – you've got to go down that rabbit hole yourself.

Tim Ferriss: No, definitely, and the – like you said, the material possessions and success are not going to answer those questions for you. There's a really good book that I've been exploring recently, and it's about Seneca, and it's called *Dying Every Day: Seneca at the Court of Nero*." It was just published in the last year.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, that sounds great.

Tim Ferriss: But I've been really enjoying it. Let me ask, if I could shift gears a little bit, a couple of rapid fire questions. The first is what's your drink of choice at a bar? You walk into a bar, what do you order?

Bryan Callen: Usually a Pilsner, a cold Pilsner, preferably something like Peroni or Moretti. I like the rice beers in Japan. That's what I like. But I'm a wine drinker. I like my red wine, and I like my red wine that has some age on it, and that's harder to find at a bar.

Tim Ferriss: What type of red wine do you like?

Bryan Callen: I like the old world wines. I like primarily French wines. There are some great California wines of course, and great Italian wines, but there's nothing like a French Bordeaux or a French Burgundy with some age on it, nothing like it.

Tim Ferriss: Who's your favorite person or favorite people to follow on Twitter?

Bryan Callen: By the way, I also like to drink raw goat milk after a workout. My favorite people to follow on Twitter, I don't have anybody. I don't really follow – I don't follow a lot of people on Twitter at all. That's what people laugh at me about. I think Taking Hayek Seriously is one of them, Freidrich Hayek, who wrote *The Road to Serfdom*, who is the great economist. I follow them, and that's about it – and Tim Ferriss of course.

Tim Ferriss: Well, thank you, sir. Favorite movies or documentaries?

Bryan Callen: Well, I just read – I just watched *Fed Up*, which is a very new documentary, which I recommend to everybody, about the food industry. And I think the food industry, Mars, and Coca Cola, and Nestle and Kraft – sorry – but I think that their behavior and how they target children with their unhealthy foods, with their sugar and sodium, I think they are going to be exposed, and I think that we're going to look at what they're doing in the school lunch programs, etcetera.

I think we're going to compare them very much to how the tobacco industry was behaving back in the day when they were denying that their product caused cancer. There is no question that the enemy in our foods is sugar, and processed foods. And I think that's what's causing Type 2 diabetes in children as young as eight years old. Shame on them. Shame on them. Shame on them for saying that their soft drinks, that Coca Cola is – doesn't contribute

to obesity. I don't think there's anything wrong with one Coke a day necessarily. I don't drink it. And I'm a free market guy. But I don't think they're behaving ethically, and I don't believe they're – the way they've hijacked the food and nutrition board, the way they've stacked the deck with their own scientists, shame on those scientists and shame on the food companies. So that's a great documentary.

Sorry to get on my soapbox, but I think a huge problem – I think we'd solve a lot of our healthcare issues if people in this country learned how to eat properly. The enemy is not fat, as you know, Tim. It's probably sugar.

Tim Ferriss: Agreed, yeah.

Bryan Callen: So *Fed Up* was a great documentary. I'd have to think. I mean there's so many good documentaries, man. I don't know, I'd have to think about that.

Tim Ferriss: No, *Fed Up* is a good recommendation. I agree wholeheartedly with a lot of the co-opted science, which people can read a book called *Bad Science*, which is by a doctor named Ben Goldacre. It's great.

Bryan Callen: Great book, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: If you want to get an idea of how the studies can be tortured to say whatever companies want them to say.

Bryan Callen: And *Bad Pharma*, he also wrote a book called *Bad Pharma* I read, which was also very good.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, very smart guy. And if you're looking for a counterpoint, there's actually a very interesting organization that I'm involved with called NuSi. Nusi.org, which is independently funded for studies specific to nutrition, for some of these unanswered, or at least not conclusively answered questions, which is pretty awesome.

It's been nicknamed the Manhattan Project for Nutrition, which is pretty cool. Let's see. What's the first face that comes to mind when you think punchable?

Bryan Callen: Oh, Jesus. Well, after I saw *Fed Up*, probably anybody who's responsible for getting their unhealthy products, and for getting Congress to say that French fries and pizza count as a vegetable in

our school lunch programs. I'd like to fucking line those guys up and sit down on my punch. I'm talking about a right, and I can hit. I'll show you how to knit sometime. I'd like to sit down on my punch and just break a couple jaws, those assholes, sorry. That's who comes to mind.

And I'm, again, hey, I ain't some – I'm not some left wing guy who believes in a lot of government interference. I believe in the free market. They're not living the free market, those people.

Tim Ferriss: So just to clarify for folks out there, and me probably as well, so sitting down on your punch means really kind of dropping down and torquing your hip into some nice follow through.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, grounding that back foot and that front foot, on the balls of your foot, and just go, just turn that body, and keep that – keep everything loose. Just think of your fist as kind of a stone, and your arms are rubber band, and just sit down, boom, and punch, yes. My left hook is pretty nasty, too, so I don't know what I'd rather do. Maybe just – maybe a left hook, followed with an upper cut, something like that – we'll go into it.

Tim Ferriss: See if I can set that up for us. I would enjoy that as well. I'll film it. What book do you most often give as a gift?

Bryan Callen: By the way, I want to just – let me back up because I got to say one more thing. I read a book called *Fiasco*. You know, the architects of the Iraq War, how is that going for us by the way? Who told us that it would happen very quickly? I mean Dick Cheney was just at the American Enterprise Institute saying that the President must understand that we are in a war, and we have to fight this war for as long as it takes. Hey, Dick, okay, thanks. Thanks so much. You told us that we'd be welcomed as liberators, so did you Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle and Douglas Feith, and Michael [inaudible], and all you neo-cons, thank you guys. You guys said we should go into Iraq, and I kind of listened to you. I mean I guess he had weapons of mass destruction. Apparently this was going to be a very quick thing, and an orderly thing.

Paul Bremer, who didn't – none of these people knew anything about the history of Iraq. And now I'd like to hear – can you guys at least say, “Hey, maybe we were wrong; maybe we screwed up a little bit.” I mean ISIS – I don't know that ISIS would have happened – I mean Iraq doesn't seem to be doing that well, and it's 13 years later or something, or it's 11 years. I'm not sure. Yeah, we went in in 2003. So I'd like to line those guys up as well. If you

could get those guys in a line, I'd like to punch them in the face. I don't want to kill anybody. I just want to hit them and feel them – just feel their jaw break with my two front knuckles. It'd be a lot of fun.

Tim Ferriss: I think what I'll do, since I've got some ideas now, is I'll do a Kickstarter campaign, and I will pay them all speaking fees. I will bring in the heads of all of these sort of sugar laden product corporations, and then the politicians. And what I think – I think I can solve your boxing problem. So I'm going to take – I'm going to alternate sort of fake scientists, politician, corporate head, politician.

All the politicians will be on one knee, so you can straight right, and then low body hook to the head the politicians. Then you can just work your way down the line.

Bryan Callen: Good, because all those architects, all the people that created the intellectual scaffolding and argument for the Iraq War, none of them have done a day in the military. And I would even go so far as to say that they've never done a sport in their life. Dick Cheney, I guarantee has never done a sport, and he sure as hell has never taken a punch to the face or punched anybody in the face. So I'd like to see how he reacts to what real pain is about. Fuck you, Dick Cheney. Anyway, keep going. Keep going.

Tim Ferriss: No, I like it. You're getting fired up. It's good. It's good.

Bryan Callen: I'm a libertarian. I believe in like the free markets. I'm not a – I don't work for the Democratic Party. [Inaudible].

Tim Ferriss: On an unrelated note, what book or books are you most likely to give as a gift?

Bryan Callen: You're going to think I'm plugging you, but I probably have recommended *The Art of Learning* and *The Four-Hour Body*, I'm not kidding, more than any other book. I just think it's fantastic, and for young people I recommend *The Four-Hour Work Week*.

I just love the possibility and the optimism in those books, and I love that you've kind of lived it in what you do. So, I actually start with those books a lot of the time. So, you know, it sounds like I'm shamelessly plugging you, but I am a fan.

Tim Ferriss: No, I appreciate it, man. Thank you. And you know, I have to say also, the optimism, it's really standing on the shoulders of giants. And I've had a lot of positive influences in my life, whether virtual by books, by Seneca and people like that, or through interactions with mentors and teachers. And I just feel like there's such – as you mentioned, an overabundance of cynicism, which leads to sort of an inactive apathy, you know, I can't do anything, I can't make a difference; therefore, I will do nothing. That's really I feel reached a level of epidemic in the US in particular. And I'm not quite sure why that is.

Bryan Callen: I agree with you, Tim, and I don't know the reason either, but I would imagine it's because in many ways, these problems are rather insidious. I think that it hasn't come to a head. I don't think that we really – it's a little bit like when you're in California, and they say we're at a serious drought; conserve water. Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm still taking my shower every day, and I'll probably let the water run when I'm brushing my teeth because you know, we're not really going to run out of water.

The real problems, the real deficits, the things that are going to come to a head a lot of times are not – they're not sexy. They don't have – they're not very colorful. They're not that visible, unless you know where to look, right. So the roots of the problem, when you start talking to people about campaign finance reform, and how money in politics is probably one of the reasons nothing seems to work in this country, or one of the main problems with the way our government is run, where Washington is probably less concerned with your problems; it's more of a battle ground between two different corporations.

I mean in 2010, the biggest issue was swipe fees – swipe fees with ATMs. That's what the war on the floor was – was swipe fees. How much should banks be allowed to charge somebody when they go to an ATM? Well, that's because that was affecting two large corporations' bottom line, not yours and mine. When you start talking to people about campaign finance reform, you start talking to them about those kinds of things, their eyes glaze over because it doesn't have immediate relevance to their life right now. And I think that's what we're dealing with, apathy. As long as people have enough to eat and they feel safe, you're going to have a tough time.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's – no, it's tough because as someone who wants to be able to catalyze sort of massive positive action, it's a fine line to walk, where you want to inspire people and show them the

possibilities. You also want to show them the downsides of taking no action, which is a decision. It's not that you're postponing decisions. If you choose to do nothing, you've made a decision to do nothing.

And it's a challenge for me sometimes to decide whether I can get a better response by focusing on the positive or by focusing on the consequences of doing nothing, which are negative typically. But let's see, dogs or cats? Do you have any pets?

Bryan Callen: I'm a dog guy.

Tim Ferriss: Do you own any dogs?

Bryan Callen: I've always had pit bulls, and I just love them. I just love that bully face, and I love their spirit. My female dog – my pit bull just died, and I've got kids. They want another dog, but I'm kind of like, "Oh, yeah, we won't get a dog for a while." When you have kids, that's enough.

Tim Ferriss: Alright, so that pit bull, if you had to select a dog off the menu in another country, to eat for dinner, what would you choose?

Bryan Callen: That's interesting. Well, probably something kind of – probably a Corgi. I could roast that small enough to season and stuff in my oven. Sorry, I love Corgis. In fact, if I get a dog, it'll probably be a Corgi, but damn, do they look delicious. I mean a Corgi –

Tim Ferriss: Stick a little crab apple in the mouth.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, I mean if a Corgi had a beak, we'd eat the fucker. You know, if they had a muzzle, so now all of a sudden it's cute, I guess. It's funny how that works. Yeah, I would 100 percent eat a Corgi, I think. A Chihuahua would probably taste more like quail, not a whole lot of meat on it. Yeah, but a Corgi. I'm going hunting with Joe Rogan.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, you are?

Bryan Callen: Yeah, and we're going to Alaska, October 1st to the 8th, with Steve Rinella. You've done this before.

Tim Ferriss: Very nice. You're going caribou hunting?

Bryan Callen: We're going to go deer hunting actually.

Tim Ferriss: Deer hunting. I need to get back outdoors for a few weeks of non-electronics time. I really just had such a phenomenal experience with Steve in Alaska when we went to hunt caribou. And I was never a hunter. And I know you're aware of this, but it's really an eye-opening experience to be taken through the ropes with someone who is very responsible, and takes what they do as it relates to nature as seriously as Steve does.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, he knows so much about animal behavior and everything else. It's incredible. I'm not a big hunter. I don't like camping. I miss my Cappuccino, but I'll do it. I just – again, it's the same reason I box. Getting punched in the face just reminds me of my own mortality, how tough I'm not, and it just keeps me a little harder.

And I think hunting once a year in a place like Alaska and freezing my ass off for eight days is good for me.

Tim Ferriss: Have you ever listened to Hard Core History, the podcast?

Bryan Callen: I have not, and I need to get that guy on my podcast. I've had him recommended to me many, many times.

Tim Ferriss: You could start with listening to his series called Wrath of the Cons, but it talks about the hardest people imaginable, and how they can get soft. And it was just – it was such a perfect metaphor for a lot of what I'm trying to reverse in my own life, as it just becomes easier and more seductive to try to take the path of less resistance with a lot of this stuff, and using age as an excuse or whatever it might be. I've been thinking a lot about that. Do you have any morning or evening rituals that you do consistently, just patterns?

Bryan Callen: When I had my dog, one of the things I loved to do is I would just walk my dog, and that's where I would think and write. But I actually, believe it or not, I sound so LA – almost every morning I drink green tea and I do some Yoga. That's just my routine, man. Once you do it, you feel really great. So that's probably my –

Tim Ferriss: Do you do the Yoga in a class, or do you do that by yourself?

Bryan Callen: I do it by myself, usually naked on a wood floor in front of a mirror, and I just marvel at my body, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: You just do cobra pose for hours at a time?

Bryan Callen: Sometimes I just stand there and go, “Wow, thank you, God.” Too much?

Tim Ferriss: No, never too much; not such a thing.

Bryan Callen: So a combination of Bikram and Ashtanga, whatever it is.

Tim Ferriss: And pumping iron.

Bryan Callen: Then it becomes political, my God. Oh, we don’t do Bikram. We do Ashtanga flow. Do you, all right, you win, I guess. [Inaudible] for an hour and a half is too long, so I don’t do classes. I’ll do 20 minutes and I’m done.

Tim Ferriss: Got it, yeah, that makes sense. When you think of the word successful, who’s the first person that comes to mind for you?

Bryan Callen: Well, you know, anyone who is original. I think the name of the game is innovation, and originality. So in my field, you know, as far as actors are concerned, I mean Daniel Day Lewis does things – I don’t know how he does what he does. Christian Bale is the same way. But I think anybody who surprises and shocks me with what they’re able to come up with – usually anybody that comes up with something out of nothing. I love the visionaries. Steve Jobs – the late Steve Jobs was somebody I would consider very successful. He changed a lot – so people like that, people like that. I like journalists, man. I love – what’s his name – Lawrence Wright, who wrote *The Looming Tower* and *Going Clear*. I love Ken Burns, the great documentary maker, who wrote – who created the documentary *Jazz* and *Baseball*, and those people that give us perspective, those people that are able to put it all together, the guy who wrote *Fiasco*, I can’t remember his name.

But these are the people that really – that’s what I consider successful. They are really making a difference. They really are. I mean it takes guts to write the way they do and to come up with a point of view and put it all together, and be that fair – to be that fair, man. Those are the people that I think are incredible.

Tim Ferriss: If I were to talk to your closest friends, colleagues, family, etcetera, and ask them what you’re world class at, what do you think they might say?

Bryan Callen: Oh, you know, probably being very social; probably making people feel good about themselves. I just like people. I think that’s probably what – humor, humor – I think I’ve always made

everybody around me laugh a lot, and I'm proud of that. But I've always been – somebody said something – Dov Davidoff said, “You know, at your wedding, one of the things that I thought was amazing is that you have – one guy doesn't have any money, and another guy has \$100 million, and you've never made any – you've never had criteria for your friendships or for the people that you have around you. It's just genuinely who you really like.”

And I'm proud of that. I'm not a – you don't have to have done anything. You just have to be somebody I think is interesting, generous, kind and funny, and you're my friend, so you know.

Tim Ferriss: Related to that, as you've gotten older, what has become more important or less important to you?

Bryan Callen: Balance has become more important, balance.

Tim Ferriss: What type of balance?

Bryan Callen: I think that's kind of the idea – fulfillment and meaning, and being effective; there is intent in life, but then there is bottom there something called being effective, changing minds, changing minds and having a positive influence. Specifically what I mean by that is being an inspiration. One of the cool things about being 47 is that I find that I have young people come up to me and say, “Hey, I find your podcast inspiring, or I find what you're doing inspiring, or you recommended something, I read it, it changed my life.”

I like being in a position of service. Those are the important things, service and all of those things. When you put other things and people first, I think it gives you balance. I think that's very important.

Tim Ferriss: That's a good answer. I have a book recommendation for you. I'm sure you get a lot of them, but this book is by Primo Levi. Well, it's a combination of two books actually, *If This is a Man*, and *The Truce*, but I think that given that answer, you would absolutely love this book. It's one of my favorite books. It was recommended to me by David Blaine, who has I believe hundreds of copies that he gives out.

Bryan Callen: He's a good friend of mine. I've known David since he was 17.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, no kidding. Alright, well, he's – then you can ask him all about it. Maybe you could tell me even more. Maybe you have more background than I do.

Bryan Callen: Well, David will tell you – and he said this on the podcast. We did a podcast together and David said, “I was the first guy to get him to start reading,” because I said to him – he was younger and we were in theater school, and he was 17. And I said – he was hungry. This kid was hungry. And I said surround yourself with people who will make you grow, and the difference between the people you admire and everybody else are the people that read. And he never forgot that.

Tim Ferriss: That’s amazing.

Bryan Callen: Yeah, it was pretty cool, so I’m proud of that.

Tim Ferriss: Well, he recommended this book to me, which is a masterpiece of a book, or a combination of books.

Bryan Callen: *This is a Man* by Primo Levi, and *Truce*?

Ferris: *The Truce*. They’re very often combined in one book. Yeah, just incredible, meaningful, beautiful prose with a lot of lessons; I mean hundreds of underlines, really, really impressive stuff.

So I have two more questions for you. The second to the last question is if you could give your younger self one piece of advice, or two, what would it be?

Bryan Callen: Oh, boy. Buy property in Venice. Oh, boy. And, oh boy, you know, gosh, I’ve thought about that so much. And I don’t know if it would have had an effect. I guess focus, work harder. But I worked pretty hard, man. I just was interested in a lot of stuff. I mean you know what, I should have wrestled in college. I know that’s lame, but I don’t know, man.

Tim Ferriss: It would have ruined your beautiful actor’s ears.

Bryan Callen: Well, believe me, I was always nervous about getting cauliflower ears. So you know, I wrestled long enough and never got it. Then I did enough Ju-Jitsu, but yeah, maybe, or maybe I would have had an injury.

I don’t know, man. Gosh, golly, I don’t know. I don’t know. I’ve thought about that question a great deal, a great deal. And would I have studied abroad a little longer? Would I have played tennis more? Would I have boxed earlier? I don’t know, man.

Tim Ferriss: If you removed – if you took you out the equation in a sense, and were giving a college commencement speech, right, so these kids are – I don't know, I'm too far past it, whatever – somewhere between 18 and 22, what advice might you give in that commencement?

Bryan Callen: Well, I would say that if you are searching for status, and if you are doing things because there's an audience for it, you're probably barking up the wrong tree.

I would tell them that I live in a town where people spend 20 years scratching and crawling to get to the top of the wall, and usually they don't like the view. And that's because their value system was misplaced to begin with. I think that's what I would tell them. I would say listen to yourself, listen to yourself. Follow your bliss, and Joseph Campbell, to bring it back around, said. And there is great security in insecurity. We are wired and programmed to do what's safe and what's sensible. I don't think that's the way to go. I think the way to go is to do things – I think you do things because they are just things you have to do, or because it's a calling, or because you want to be – you're idealistic enough to think that you can make a difference in the world. I think you should be a dreamer. I think you should try to make the world a better place.

I think you should try to slay dragons. I don't care how big the opponent is. We read about and we admire the people that did things that were basically considered to be impossible. And that's what makes the world a better place to live.

Tim Ferriss: That was a damn fine answer. I can't believe – we've got to get you on some stages. No, that was –

Bryan Callen: [Inaudible] wish I had a fan that was blowing my hair, although I don't have that kind of hair.

Tim Ferriss: No, that was – I think that is an excellent place to start to wrap this up and be respectful of your time. Obviously, you know I'm a huge fan of your work. I really enjoy our friendship, and look forward to many more conversations. Where can people find out more about you, learn what you're up to, check you out?

Bryan Callen: I appreciate it, my friend. I am going to be – I'm @BryanCallen, that's my Twitter, and my Instagram. B R Y A N C A L L E N. And you can go to bryancallen.com to find out where I'm performing.

I'm always performing. I'm going to be in Atlanta in October. This Sunday I'll be at the Irvine Improv. I'm not in – I wish I was in your neck of the woods sooner than later, but I'm not, Tim. But I'll let you know as soon as I am. I will be all over the place, man. Gosh, I've got such a big – sort of a big schedule, and I'm not sure exactly where I'll be. But I know I'll be in Atlanta in October. But bryancallen.com, that's where you can find me, or tweet at me, or email me at bryancallena@gmail.com. I answer all my emails.

Tim Ferriss: Awesome. Well, I will put all this into the show notes, guys, including links to everything that you heard about in the conversation. So for those just go to fourhourworkweek.com, all spelled out, forward slash podcast, and –

Bryan Callen: And by the way, *The Fighter and the Kid* has I think been holding at number one on iTunes in the sports and rec section for eight or nine weeks now. And Tim, you're going to be on that on Monday, so we're excited.

Tim Ferriss: I am, and I'm looking forward to it. I can pull all the skeletons out of the closet and talk about how much my joints have atrophied from too many knee bars when I was a young 'un. It's going to be great.

But to be continued. I'm sure we'll be having more conversations soon, and thanks so much, Bryan.

Bryan Callen: Tim Ferriss, you're one of my favorite people. I appreciate your time.

Tim Ferriss: Alright, buddy, I'll talk to you soon.

Bryan Callen: Alright, bud, see you later.