

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 97: Naval Ravikant

Show notes and links at tim.blog/podcast

Tim Ferriss:

Hello, my frisky little kittens. This is Tim Ferriss and welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show where it is my job to deconstruct world class performers, to tease out the routines, the habits, the influences such as favorite books and so on that have made them good at what they do. And the intention, of course, is to unearth things that you can borrow, that you can replicate in your own life ASAP. The guests range from chess prodigies, to hedge fund managers, to celebs, to fill in the blank.

And this time we have a fill in the blank, which is a world class entrepreneur, builder and investor. His name is Naval Ravikant.

Naval is the CEO and cofounder of AngelList. He is a close friend and has become an even closer friend because I am now an advisor to AngelList. He previously cofounded Epinions, which went public as part of Shopping.com and Vast.com, also. He is a very active angel investor, not surprisingly, and has invested more than 100 companies including more than a handful of so-called unicorn mega, mega successes.

His deals include Twitter, Uber, Yammer, PostMates, Wish, Thumbtack, and Open DNS, which Cisco just bought for \$635 million in cash. There are many more, and you can find many examples on his AngelList page, which is Angel.co/naval. If you want to see mine, it is Angel.co/tim. AngelList is one of the most incredible tools for investing, matching opportunities and investors that I've ever seen.

It's very, very disruptive to the venture capital space. There were I think around ten people who were introduced to Uber way back in the day as investors and given the opportunity on AngelList. This was around 2010. I have led a couple of deals, including Shyp, S-H-Y-P –You can check them out at Shyp.com, – which is around 40x up in its valuation from the first time I put it on AngelList and made it available to people like yourselves who are accredited investors. You can check all of my startup deals at Angel.com/tim.

But let's talk about Naval and why he's on the podcast. Naval is on the podcast because he's a very deep thinker who is very good at

asking questions and testing, in other words questioning, the obvious. That practice and the practice of being hyper rational when other people are emotional has allowed him to be very successful in the world of investing.

But it translates to many other sectors of life and business, and that is why, even if you have no interest in early stage investing, I highly encourage you to listen to this. Much like the Chris Sacca episode, Naval has had a huge impact on my own thinking about the world and startups and investing but not only money; my time, my energy. He's been very much a mentor in that capacity and many others. So I hope that my enthusiasm and enjoyment in this interview translates to the same for you.

He is a treasure trove of many recommendations and you will probably take down a lot of notes. But you can find the links to the books and so on in the show notes. The show notes are at fourhourworkweek.com/podcast, all spelled out. And without further ado, please enjoy Naval Ravikant.

Tim Ferriss: Naval, welcome to the show.

Naval Ravikant: Thanks for having me, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: I have really been looking forward to this because I always enjoy sitting down in this somewhat artificial, formal setting to talk with close friends because it gives me the opportunity to do something that would never work in, say, a dinner or sitting down which is basically have a uni-directional, Charlie Rose experience of lobbing questions at you.

I'm actually pretty stoked to jump into it. The first thing that I wanted to ask is, I suppose, a pretty basic one. When people ask you what do you do, how do you answer that?

Naval Ravikant: Very poorly. Fundamentally, at heart I'm an entrepreneur and any day in which I solve the same problem twice in a row, I'm pretty unhappy. So by definition, I like to do something different every day. I think all humans are sort of meant to do that kind of thing.

The idea that we repeat ourselves, and we specialize and we pigeon hole ourselves is a modern invention created through specialization of labor in the Industrial Revolution. And hopefully, as more and more people move up Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we're going to be able to define ourselves much more loosely. So that's a good way of dodging your question.

Now, let me actually answer it. My day job is I am cofounder and CEO of AngelList, which is the world's largest platform for online fundraising and recruiting for startups. We're bringing venture capital on line. We have lots of great lead investors, essentially mini micro venture capitalists who can do deals on the platform and allows anyone who is sufficiently wealthy and sophisticated to invest behind them.

We also run a large marketplace for introducing talent to startups, where we have over 10,000 companies recruiting now. We have hundreds of thousands of candidates who are looking to join great startups and we're making over 10,000 mutual introductions every single week between candidates and startups.

So that's my day job. But the reality of what I do on a day-to-day basis is completely different.

Tim Ferriss:

I want to talk about two seemingly opposed – maybe they're complementary – characteristics of yours that I've observed. The first I thought I'd introduce just via a story. We have a mutual friend who's a salty, old Polish trainer who I won't mention by name. You actually introduced me to him. He does a lot of incredible Olympic lifting. He is one of the most aggressive, intense human beings I've ever met in my life and of all of the people that he and I know mutually, he's like, "Naval, that guy is intense, that guy is intense!" So why does he have that opinion of you and do you agree with it? What is that?

Naval Ravikant:

It's actually interesting. I think at my core level, I am an extremely intense person, very competitive. I have this huge drive to win. I always want to be right. I usually research the hell out of any topic I get into and learn 80 percent of it very quickly and I take nothing at face value. So I'm always questioning and deciding. When I first met this gentleman who, just like you, he's transformed my life, actually. He's made me healthier and fitter than I've ever been. I consider him incredibly intense. I push back on him. There were things that he said that I thought were smart that I could corroborate, that I took as he had handed them.

And there were things that he had said that contradicted my own experience and reading and so I dismissed them. So I think he might refer to me as being intense because I have my own point of view on everything, or everything that matters. That said, I've probably spent the last half decade of my life, like all of us who are getting a little older, being much more introspective, much more

aware of my own foibles and trying to be a much calmer person and trying to be less stressed, and more happy, and more in the moment.

Part of that means learning how to control the intensity; dial it up and dial it down. That's a contradiction that we all deal with. That we all want to be successful people, but we also want to be happy people. The two of those run in almost diametric opposites to each other. If you look at all the new wisdom, the new wisdom is if you walk into an airport bookstore and you open up *Time Magazine*, it's all about you must be like Elon Musk or Larry Page; it's all about success, success, success. Because we live in this mythology of anyone can achieve the American dream, if you're not successful, if you're not Tim Ferriss, then you're a loser.

Tim Ferriss: Or if you're Tim Ferriss and you're not Elon Musk, you're also a loser, right?

Naval Ravikant: You're also a loser. That's right. There's always someone higher up the stack. So the success driven mentality drives you to unhappiness and if you want to be successful, surround yourself with people who are more successful than you are.

But if you want to be happy, surround yourself with people who are less successful than you are. So this is the contradiction that we deal with all day long because we're also told that the American dream will bring you happiness, and it will not. I think a lot of us learn as we get older that happiness is internal. Happiness is a choice that you make and a skill that you develop, and so how do you do that? And that's the fundamental contradiction.

That's why our mutual friend can consider me incredibly intense. And by the way, I hope you'll have him on the show someday because I think he has incredible wisdom to pass along. So that's where the intensity comes in; the desire to be successful. And at the same time, the non intensity comes in, which is a desire to be happy.

Tim Ferriss: Let's call him Victor. We'll just call him Victor. What I expect would likely happen if I had Victor on this podcast is he would spent 60 minutes berating me and telling everyone how fat I was and uncoordinated. I think it would be very hard to steer him away from the beat Tim with a leather whip routine.

But yeah, he's a fascinating guy so I'll have him on at some point. The intensity, I'd like to ask some follow ups on that. Your brother,

Kamal, is a great friend of mine, as well, and seems very different. He seems almost the yin to your yang. Wrote a great book called *Love Yourself Like Your Life Depends on It*. Where did your intensity come from? Have you always been that way? Why do you think you have that intensity which not to say Kamal lacks, but to a much lesser degree, of course?

Naval Ravikant: That's a good question. I don't know. The genetics evolution are a powerful thing. You could just say at some base variation level, both of us were hit with similar adversities in life and our genes chose to respond very differently to see who would adapt their way out of the situation. So at the core level, we are very different.

We had a tough childhood growing up; make no secret of that and we just responded in different ways. For me, it was all about winning and having a strong desire to win. I started out as a bookworm, and then I had to transition into sort of being a combatant in the field of business, if you will. Now I'm sort of making my transition back into being a bookworm. I think everyone gets shaped very, very early on in life. You're probably baked in terms of your core personality by the time you're 12 or 13. You hit puberty, it's a jarring thing.

You sort of emerge into the world. You become an adult, you construct your ego, you go out there to fight your fights, to do your things, to become who you want to be. And then at some point, you get to where you wanted to be, or close enough and you start realizing it's not about external world, it's not about external accomplishment; I have to work on myself. And I think my brother Kamal has gotten to that point, as well. Then you start working on the inner being.

I'm not sure I answered your question about where it comes from. I think we all get shaped by adversity. Every great thing I've ever done or accomplished according to external metrics or even when I look internally, all the great things that have happened to me in my life that I consider highly positive all started with something highly negative.

Tim Ferriss: What made your childhood difficult? What were aspects of it that made it challenging?

Naval Ravikant: We were immigrants so we came to this country when I was 9 and my brother was 11. We had very little. My mother raised us as a single mom in a studio apartment.

Tim Ferriss: Where did you come from?

Naval Ravikant: From India. She worked a menial job by day and then she went to school at night so we were latchkey kids and sort of left to develop and learn on our own. A lot of growing up was watching the ideal American lifestyle but sort of from the other side of the window pane with my nose pressed against the glass and saying, “Yeah, I want that too, and I want that for myself and my kids.”

So I grew up with a very dark view of the world on the other side of the tracks, and then kind of had to cross over and start trying to fit into this amazing life that is available to most but not all Americans.

Tim Ferriss: Which part of India did your mother bring you from, and then where did you grow up in the U.S.?

Naval Ravikant: We came from Deli, which is the capital of India. Here, we landed in Queens, New York. We grew up in Queens Village and Jamaica, Q Gardens. We moved around a lot. We probably lived in nine or ten different places in the course of nine years.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned combatant. I think you’re a very, very good strategist and combatant when need be. Coming back to the intensity, I’d never thought of it this way but you never hesitate to say what’s on your mind.

So I could see how that would be interpreted by a lot of people who are used to polite, uh-huh, nod-nod conversation. I remember when you and I were both invited to a dinner, and there were a lot of people neither of us had never really met before and we were standing in a group of a couple of people. I had this pretty unusual getup on. I had this turquoise, long sleeved shirt which I never wore. I don’t know if you remember this.

Naval Ravikant: I do not.

Tim Ferriss: I had jeans on, and these brown, unusual looking dress shoes that kind of looked like bowling shoes. You were like, “Wow, you look like a gay banker.” Then this woman that neither of us had ever met started defending me and I was like, oh God, here we go.

Naval Ravikant: The honesty thing is a core foundational value.

Tim Ferriss: In fairness, I totally did.

Naval Ravikant:

I have a couple of core foundational values, and they're not things that I explicitly developed. They're just sort of you can look back after the fact and say oh yeah, I won't compromise on those things. But now I realize how important honesty is. I learned that from a couple of different places. One is when I grew up, I wanted to be a physicist and I idolized Richard Feynman and I read everything by him, technical and nontechnical that I could get my hands on. He said: you must never, ever fool yourself and you are the easiest person to fool.

So the physics grounding is very important because in physics, you have to speak truth. You don't compromise. You don't negotiate with people. You don't try and make them feel better because if your equation is wrong, it just won't work, whatever you're doing. So I think the science background is important in that. A second is growing up in New York, I grew up around some really rough and tumble kids, some of whom were actually in the Russian mob. I once had an encounter where I watched one of them threaten to kill the other.

The would be victim went and hid and then finally, he let the aggressor into his house after the aggressor promised him: no, I'm not going to kill you. Honesty was such a strong virtue between them that even when they were ready to kill each other, they would take each other's word for things. It went above everything. And even though it was honesty in a mob context, I realized how important that is in relationships.

Then as I got older in life, I realized that a lot of happiness is just being present. And whether you get this out of Buddhism or cognitive therapy or drugs or wherever, you realize that to live in the present moment is the highest calling; it's the source of all happiness.

When you're not honest with somebody else, or when you even withhold something in your mind, what you've done is you've created a second thought process. You've created a second thread in your head that then has to stay active, keeping track of what you've said which is what you're really thinking. That takes you out of the moment and it brings you unhappiness over time.

You will not realize it at that moment itself but it will create stress and distraction. So if you really want to be happy, you have to be present. One of the core tenets of being present is to be completely honest at all times.

Tim Ferriss:

There is a great short book that had a huge impact on me on this topic called *Lying*, by Sam Harris which was just phenomenal because it explored the impact not just of lying in the way most people think of it, but generalized deceit or even white lies that are intended to protect people. Just to come back to Feynman, Feynman is a character and a thinker who I've long idolized in many ways. *Surely You Must be Joking, Mr. Feynman* is one of my favorite books. And even for nontechnical people, I think he's someone worth exploring. If you're not the reading type, you could just search for a video. I think it was done on *Nova* ages ago called *The Joy of Finding Things Out*.

It gives you such a taste of Feynman and the way he not only questioned the so-called obvious or best practices, but also explored being a polymath. Even though he was a world class physicist, he was also an amateur safe cracker, pickup artist and musician; really fascinating guy. It seems like you have scratched your own itch, in a lot of respects. Whether it was venture hacks, like you had a pain point and you wanted to help other people understand what can be a very opaque black box, which is venture capital and so on. So you provided these how-to articles and so on that you would have liked to have had. Does AngelList serve a similar function? How did AngelList come about?

Naval Ravikant:

It's exactly that, which is basically self actualizing; creating the product that you want. So the initial problem was entrepreneurs go out and raise money. It's a complete black box; nobody knows what to do.

They do the most important negotiation of their lives, which is the initial term sheet or initial deal with venture capitalist and they have no information. So they need that information; boy, I wish I'd had that information. And that's where venture hacks came from. And then AngelList was well, okay, that's how you negotiate a term sheet. How do I get a term sheet? How do I find investors in the first place and for that we built a product.

Then a few years into AngelList's development, it became very clear that the biggest problem in this environment is not how do I raise capital, it's how do I get help building my business, how do I find great individuals to help me and how do I recruit great talent. So we created both our syndicate's product, where you of course are one of our top leaders who invest in companies, as well as we created our jobs product which helps companies find great engineers.

At the end of the day, we stand for founders; we stand for underdogs. It's funny, you asked me at the beginning how do I describe what I do and I said I'm an entrepreneur. In the back of my mind what AngelList does is it helps founders fund other founders. And on the recruiting side, it helps founders recruit and find other founders. In fact, when I look inside AngelList itself, the company is only 30 people. Almost everyone in the company is a former founder or wants to be a future founder and is getting their training wheels on at AngelList and then is going to go start up a great company.

We've had former engineers from us go start companies like Instacard and Cover, and many more will come out of it. So at the end of the day, it's all about founders, it's all about individuals, it's all about the underdog. And I think long term, on a long enough time scale, maybe it's 50 years from now or 500 years from now but almost everybody on this planet will work for themselves. The information revolution is reversing the industrial revolution. What the industrial age did is it allowed human beings to team up in mechanistic, organized hierarchal ways to create factories and production.

And I think the information revolution is breaking down the communication barriers. It's saying the optimal size of the firm is shrinking from thousands to hundreds to dozens, maybe even to one at some point and eventually, every morning someone will wake up, or every week you wake up and on your phone or whatever the device is of the future, you will get an alert with various jobs and contracts that you could choose from. You'll look at them, you'll pick out which ones you like based on your social connections and how much they're offering you, and how much it can build your profile and your future work, and you'll do that work.

Then you'll be ranked on it, you'll be rated on it. If you want to take the next week off, you'll take the next week off. If you want to do two jobs at a time, you'll do two jobs at a time. But the future is all headed towards individual brands. You can see how reporters on the New York Times now build individual brands on Twitter that far exceed the brand that they would build just under the New York Times. You, yourself, you're an individual brand. There is nothing else other than Tim Ferriss.

Tim Ferriss doesn't work for CNN. Tim Ferriss doesn't work for Apple, doesn't work for New York Times. You're an independent brand and an independent actor. I think the entire world is headed

that way. So for me, I was lucky enough to be a founder early but I figured out how hard it is; what are the parts of it that work, the parts of it that don't. so now what makes me happy is to work on a platform that creates more founders and helps those founders.

Because I think at the end of the day, we're all founders. We're all meant to work for ourselves. We're meant to be individuals. We're not meant to follow. We're not meant to be in hierarchies. We're not meant to go to 9 to 5 jobs where we're told what to do over and over. And the sooner we get off the grid and self actualize and become free, the better of all of humanity is.

Tim Ferriss:

I think people could also look at being a founder as being a creator. And there is, in my mind at least, the misconception that you find yourself. Whereas I think that a more constructive or actionable way of looking at it is creating yourself; day by day, habit by habit, decision by decision.

It's not some needle in a haystack that you have to go into the jungle and take drugs to find, although that's a separate conversation. Let's talk about founders for a second, but in the startup context. One of the more common questions that people ask successful VCs or investors is what do you look for in a founder. So I'm just going to ask you that. What are the things that you look for in founders, or the red flags that disqualify an investment or a founder.

Naval Ravikant:

Number one, intelligence; you've got to be smart, which means you have to know what you're doing, to some level. That's a fuzzy thing but you talk to people and you kind of get a sense of do they know what they're doing or not. Do they have insight, do they have specific knowledge? Have they thought about the problem deeply? It's not about the age. It's not how many years they've spent but just how deep is their understanding of what they're about to do.

So intelligence is key. Energy, because being a founder is brutally difficult. It takes a long time and in the long run, the people who succeed are just the ones who persevere. So if someone runs out of energy or if they're doing this in some hesitating, preliminary way where they're looking for constant positive feedback, or if they're easily thrown off course, then they're not going to make it to the end, especially in the highly competitive startup context.

And finally is integrity. Because if you have someone who is high intelligence and high energy but they're low integrity, what you've

got is a hard working, smart crook. Especially in the startup world, things are very dynamic, they're very fast moving. People are very independent. So if somebody wants to screw you over, they will find a way to do it. Fundamentally, ethics and integrity are what you do despite the money. If being ethical was profitable, everybody would do it. So what you're looking for is a core sense of values that rises above and beyond the pure financial incentives.

So for example, if I'm talking to a founder and they offer to do something that is slightly unfair to another shareholder or employee or founder in exchange for making me happy, that's a red flag. Because if they can do it to them, they can do it to me. And integrity is the hardest one to figure out because it requires longitudinal relationships.

Tim Ferriss: Meaning long term.

Naval Ravikant: Exactly. So I've just become more hyper aware of that piece as time goes on. But those are the three things that I look for. And I would just say a thing that isn't really about success but is more just about personal time is when you invest in somebody or you work with somebody, you start a company with somebody, you're signing up to spend the next decade of your life having them in your life. So you just have to make sure you actually, genuinely like these people. You don't consider it work to have to answer a phone call or take a meeting or spend time with them. If it's exhausting, if they're downers, if they're negative, if they're difficult; no amount of money is worth it.

You and I will both die with money in the bank. And so it's not about money at this point; it's about do I want to spend my scarce time, resources, mental energy, spirit interacting with these people. My favorite founders are actually the ones who I learned from. So every time they call me up because they need help with it, I jump on it because I know that walking around the block with them for an hour, I'm going to walk out much smarter.

Tim Ferriss: Who are some that come to mind just offhand, recognizing that there are many others you could name?

Naval Ravikant: There are tons. Just to give you a very recent example, there are these two basically kids, Cory and Michael, who started this company called One, which now runs a product called After School. They're young. I think Cory was 19 when they started the company; he might have been 17.

Tim Ferriss: How do you spell One?

Naval Ravikant: Just O-N-E. That was the name of the company but they have different products. Michael Callahan is his cofounder. These guys are just brilliant.

They're young, they're kids but the level at which they think about, the depth they put into social products is absolutely mind blowing. Another one is Ryan Breslow. I recently invested in his startup company called Bolt, which does stuff in the financial payment space. This founder has assembled a crack team of engineers out of Square and Twitter and Stripe, and he's done very little so far.

He's a very young guy. And then when I asked to invest in his company or I was getting to know him, he reference checked the heck out of me every step of the way. Very professional, very quick, very thorough but he did more diligence on me than I did on him.

Tim Ferriss: How did he do that without being a pain in the ass to people you know? Because I know people, for instance, they're entrepreneurs I shall not name, who tried to pitch me and they just bombard 30 of my friends to try to get to me and it's a complete turnoff if they're just using kind of brute force. How did he do it the right way?

Naval Ravikant: It wasn't brute force. He asked me for references. He also did his own back channel.

He was very quick. He was very transparent. And then he actually compiled the feedback he had gotten on me and gave it to me, as if he had done a peer review of me and he thought I should have the data. I was so blown away by his professionalism, especially for such a young person. He's probably just one or two years out of school, maybe a little bit more. Certain entrepreneurs, you get the feeling that they really care about what they're putting together. Every early move that they make, they consider it as if they are putting bricks in the foundation of a skyscraper that they're going to build. And you can see that right away.

A founder who comes barreling in, decides very quickly, treats it like a flip, says if I get a good offer I'll sell this thing, or I'll do whatever's pragmatic to make money; those founders are not in it for the long haul. And you learn very quickly that all the returns in this business are made with a huge, huge outcomes, at least for an investor. And so you start becoming hypersensitive to these

founders who actually apply care and are very meticulous about how they go about things

Tim Ferriss: How many individual and fund based investments have you made to date, would you say if you had to guess?

Naval Ravikant: I've lost track. It's probably north of 150.

Tim Ferriss: You have a lot more experience than I do, of course. But I haven't had, I don't think, a single good outcome from any company led by a founder who was like: well, if the wind blows this way, then this; if the wind blows that way, then that They've always had a very clear vision of some type or some vision of true north.

Naval Ravikant: That's right. In this industry, you get paid for being right when everybody else is wrong. So unfortunately, that means a lot of them run full speed and crash into a wall, which is painful but they'll get up and run again at something else. But you get paid for being right when everybody else is wrong. So if you're looking for how to operate based on what everybody else around you thinks, then you probably don't have what it takes.

That said, these people are also very hard to separate from delusional, crazy people. There are those people who are completely mad. They're not paying any attention to the feedback from the environment. They're not dealing with reality; they're living inside their own fantasies. So it's very hard to tell a mad man from a genius in this environment.

Tim Ferriss: You gave me an idea for a reality show. You could go out and gather people from asylums or homeless people in SF who are very vocal and give them a ten minute training session and unleash them on VCs to see what the actual success rate would be. I bet the confidence would take them a long way. There are a lot of venture capitalists in Angel investors flooding the current environment. What are some of the old wives' tales or things that are repeated so often that a lot of people believe they're true that are completely false or dangerous, in your mind

Naval Ravikant: I think the hardest thing in this business is that the great new companies always look really strange. They don't look very much like the previous companies. So you can get very easily tracked into believing that there is a certain way of doing things and then you'll find huge exceptions down the road which will cost you dearly. For example, before Netscape came along back in the mid-'90s, it was believed that there wasn't much money to be made in

internet or internet-type products. Before Microsoft came along, it was believed that the money was in hardware, not in software.

Before Apple and a few other computer companies came along, it was believed the money was in mainframes and enterprise and not in consumer. Before Uber came along, it was believed that the money was in all virtual and software and not in handling real world things like taxi dispatchers and dealing with unions and those kinds of things. So the conventional wisdom is always wrong.

And so as an investor, if you have a failed investment in one space, the worst thing you can do is write off that space and not make an investment again. For example, Sequoia Capital is one of the best investors on the planet. They were investors in Webvan, which was the failed grocery delivery service in the late '90s that blew up very badly.

Tim Ferriss: So they skipped Instacart?

Naval Ravikant: They did Instacart.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, they did Instacart. Okay.

Naval Ravikant: That is what makes Sequoia so great. That they saw their own blowup, they lost a lot of money, they had egg on their face; they didn't care. They actually reevaluate every opportunity on its own merits and they know that a lot of these things are about timing. It might have been the right idea at the wrong time. And they also know that each great business looks weird, and there's no such thing as the perfect deal.

So there are lots and lots of venture capitalists who miss out on the great companies because they're looking for the perfect deal, and there is no such thing. So I think anything that becomes conventional wisdom in this business gets blown up. For example, one of the pieces of conventional wisdom is don't invest in married couples because if they get divorced, the company blows up.

That said, if you followed that advice, you would have missed Cisco and you would have missed a bunch of other amazing companies that were founded by couples.

Tim Ferriss: Evenbrite, too, right?

Naval Ravikant: Eventbrite, as well. Yes, there's a long list. The classic mythology is you should have a two founder company, but there have been plenty of great one founder companies; there are plenty of great three founder companies.

Tim Ferriss: Wasn't Drew of Dropbox, wasn't he a single founder at the beginning?

Naval Ravikant: No.

Tim Ferriss: No, he didn't.

Naval Ravikant: He recruited a cofounder very quickly. But especially in the enterprise space, Oracle and Sales Force have been single founder companies. And even the dual founder companies, you find that over time, one of the founders leaves and the other one dominates. So in the Jobs and Wozniak case in Apple, Jobs dominated. Same thing in Microsoft where Gates took over and Allen sort of went by the wayside. So it's not enough to say it has to be two founders. Any formula you lay out is a set of guidelines that is probably going to be wrong.

This is very difficult but when you meet with a new company, you have to forget everything you know and you have to shut up and listen.

Tim Ferriss: The Instacart example with Sequoia is really impressive to me. Now, I don't know if it was handled by the same partners so who knows – I have no idea – but the nature of cognitive biases and, for instance, anchoring is something I've been thinking a lot about. Where I am not, by disposition or expertise, a very good public markets guy. Like trading stocks; I make bad decisions.

I get emotional, or I peg, for instance, a recent high per share price to a stock and then I've made this mistake where I'm like well, when it gets up to X, then I'll sell. But generally speaking, not a smart idea because you've kind of pegged and anchored this point that has not basis. You can't train the stock like I'm trying to train my puppy who is sitting next to me chewing on a marrow bone. It doesn't work that way.

What books or people outside of these startup world have most improved your ability to invest, and maybe broadly speaking just resource allocate?

Naval Ravikant:

That's a really good question and a very deep question that's going to have lots of answers. But at the end of the day, I think you have to work in your internal state until you are free of as many biases and conditioned responses as you can be, and it will improve every aspect of your life including investing. I am a bookworm so I read an enormous amount. I was raised essentially in a library as a daycare center. So I've just read so much that I don't even know where to start. If you work on your internal state, one of the things you start realizing is that as an investor, emotions dominate. Investors are very emotional, even though we pretend to be very rational.

For example, you'll decide in the first five minutes of a meeting usually whether you want to invest in the company or not. And if a company doesn't take your money in the first round, you get annoyed with them or you feel like they crossed you, then you have to undo that emotional state so when the second round comes around, you can still be a positive force and continue helping the company and maybe have a bite of the apple the second time. And these kinds of skills are extremely hard to build. They're not things you're going to build by reading one book and then you're lie, aha.

So I don't believe in the epiphany theory of self development. Where you read some book, you have an incredible epiphany, you read one phrase and you're like: okay, that's great; this changes my life. And then you scrawl it down on a piece of paper and you keep looking at it or you put it as a backdrop to your computer screen Life doesn't work that way. What you kind of have to do Is you have to build skills. I think happiness is a skill, nutrition is a skill, diet is a skill, investing is a skill, self awareness is a skill. And skills get built up over decades with feedback loops and you just have to constantly keep working on it.

So the books that have helped me a lot, there's a class of books that I would put in the stoicism category. And I know you've been a big advocate these in the past. I sort of discovered them independently but they were very influential. So Seneca and Marcus Aurelius both stand out. *Meditations*, by Marcus Aurelius was absolutely life changing for me because it's the personal diary of the Emperor of Rome. Here's a guy who was probably the most powerful human being on earth at the time that he lived, and he was writing his own diary to himself, not expecting it to be published.

When you open this book, you realize he had all the same issues and all the same mental struggles and he was trying to be a better

person. And so right there you figure out okay, success and power don't improve your internal state; you still have to work on that. So that class of books is very influential. I'd like to pay attention to what I consider the rational Buddhists because a lot of Buddhism is drowned in mysticism and Hinduism and worship this guru or do this ritual.

I don't pay any attention to that. But I pay a lot of attention to what I consider rational Buddhists where they can make the case very intelligently with reasoning along the way as to how you should train your mind to work, or how you should observe your mind. Sam Harris, who you mentioned earlier, is great. Judeo Christian Lamorte, who is a less known guy, an Indian philosopher who lived at the turn of the last century is extremely influential to me. he's an uncompromising, very direct person who basically tells you to look at your own mind at all times.

So I have been hugely influenced by him. Probably the best book of his that I like is one called *The Book of Life*, which is excerpts from his various speeches and books that are stitched together. Oddly enough, Bruce Lee wrote some great philosophy. *Striking Thoughts* is a book that is a good summary of some of his philosophy.

I could go on and on. You have to read hundreds of these things, literally. Blogs I feel are an under appreciated resource. We're now in a day and age of Twitter and Facebook. We're getting sort of bite sized piffy wisdom that's really hard to absorb. Books are very difficult to read as a modern person. We've got two contradictory pieces of training. One is our attention span has gone through the floor because we are hit with so much information all the time that we want to summarize, skip, we want to get to the TLDR – too long, didn't read – cut to the chase. What's the 140 character version? What's the Instagram version?

On the other hand, we're also taught from a young age that books are something you finish. Books are something that are sacred. When you go to school and you're assigned to read a book, you have to finish the book. So over time, we forget how to read books or we get in this contradiction where everyone I know is stuck on some book. Everyone is stuck on some book. I'm sure you're stuck on some book right now.

It's like page 392, you can't go on any further but you know you should finish the book. So what do you do? You give up reading books for awhile. Your Kindle or your iPad or whatever you use –

or even your paper book – is in a stuck state. For me, that was a tragedy because I grew up on books, and then I switched to blogs, and then I switched to Twitter and Facebook and then I realized I wasn't actually learning anything. I was just taking in little dopamine snacks all day long.

I was getting my little 140 character burst of dopamine, and then I'd retweet and I'd see who retweeted my tweet. Then I'd get into an argument on Twitter. It's a fun, wonderful thing but it's a game that I was playing. I wasn't actually learning anything.

Tim Ferriss: Startup L. Jackson?

Naval Ravikant: Yes, Startup L. Jackson, great character on Twitter. I realized I have to go back to reading books because when you're talking about solving old problems, the older the problem the older the solution. So if you're trying to learn how to drive a car or fly a plane, absolutely you should read something written in the modern age because this problem [00:43:00] was created in the modern age, the solution was created in the modern age.

But if you're talking about an old problem like how to generally keep your body healthy, how to stay calm and peaceful of mind, what kinds of value systems are good, how should you raise a family, these kinds of things; the older solutions are probably better and they've withstood the test of time. Any book that's survived for 2,000 years has been filtered through a lot of people. Now, it may have some stuff in it that we now know to be true but the general principles are more likely to be correct.

So if I want to learn the theory of evolution, which I kind of use as my binding principle whenever I'm trying to explain any human action, people read all kinds of blog posts and tweets on evolution and everyone has a loose understanding of how evolution works. But how many have actually read *The Origin of the Species*? You can get it for \$5 on Kindle, and it's a very easy read. It's not a difficult read. You can read the actual source and you can see the source and the brilliance, and you can see how Darwin came up with stuff back then that we're still trying to figure out, or statements he made that we're still trying to prove out.

But there's very little that's incorrect in that book and it is a sourced book. So I wanted to get back into reading these sourced books, and I knew it was a very hard problem because my brain had now been trained to spend time on Facebook and Twitter and these other bite sized pieces. So what I did was I came up with this

hack where I started treating books as throwaway blog posts or as bite sized tweets or Facebook posts, and I felt no obligation to finish any book. So now, any time someone mentions a book to me, I buy it.

At any given time I'm reading somewhere between ten and 20 books. I'm flipping through them. If the book is getting a little boring, I'll skip ahead. Sometimes I'll start reading a book in the middle because some paragraph caught my eye and I'll just continue from there. And I feel no obligation whatsoever to finish the book. If at some point I decide the book is boring, or if it's got pieces of it that are incorrect so now I can't trust the rest of the information in there, I just delete it. And I don't remember them at all.

So treat books now as other people might treat light pieces of information on the web, and all of a sudden books are back into my reading library. And that's great because there's a lot of ancient wisdom in there.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned blogs being potentially a source of good information. Are there two or three blogs that you have particularly liked or do particularly like that you could recommend to people?

Naval Ravikant: Blogs are great because now all of a sudden you have some incredibly smart people who before may have had niche audiences or their full time job is not to be a writer. So they have a voice, now. The reality is books are long because that's the size you need to justify cutting up a tree and printing a physical object and sending it to a book shelf. When in reality, a lot of the wisdom in these books can be encapsulated in a few pages. But you can't charge somebody \$20 retail for a couple pages of info. So I feel like blogs are actually a very efficient source of information.

And there are some absolutely brilliant people out there that you should take advantage of. The problem is, if you read enough information on the internet or in books, it all cancels to zero. You have a lot more facts but you don't have much more wisdom. So you do have to be careful what sources you get information from. One of the criteria I use, if somebody is a deep expert and they're talking about things but then they start making errors in rationality or judgment or clear biases start showing through, then I put that blog or I put that book down because now I can't trust what they're saying.

Tim Ferriss: You put it on a probationary period?

Naval Ravikant: Essentially because you have to filter the information that comes at you. For example, you could read news articles all day long and all that would end up happening is you would end up a hyper stressed, anxious individual and you wouldn't even know why. At some core level, your brain will have been rewired to assume that every bad thing that's happening is happening next door instead of tens of thousands of miles away. So I filter my blogs very carefully. I have a long reading list that I use of a couple hundred blogs.

A recent standout is a blog called *Melting Asphalt*. It's written by a guy named Kevin Simler out of New York. I've never met him but I read his blog and it was mind blowing. He just really digs deep into all of these topics that we take for granted. He figures out an orthogonal viewpoint on it. He makes some nice observations. But very often he'll end with questions or no conclusions. He'll just sort of meander off.

Tim Ferriss: What types of topics does he explore?

Naval Ravikant: He'll talk about how the brain works, how human cognition works. He'll go into topics like why do we dance, basic economics theory leading to bad outcomes. I just highly recommend reading it for anyone who is intellectually and scientifically curious. And what I like about it is that a lot of times he doesn't feel the need to wrap up with a conclusion. It's very clear that he's exploring the space and learning. Like for example, your blog is great for what I consider these quick, one off hacks.

You're great at surprise, the twist. Tim's going to tell you how to peel a hardboiled egg instantly. By the way, I blew up one on my kitchen counter and I had yolk everywhere.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, if it's soft boiled, not a good idea.

Tim Ferriss: Yes, that was my learning there. So everyone has their style but your style is very much you have to have a conclusion. I have not seen a Tim Ferriss blog post that does not lead to an actionable conclusion because you've built your brand around being a fast learner lifestyle hacker. I feel like if I go onto Tim's blog, the promise that I get is I can get 98 percent of the benefit by doing 2 percent of the work, which is very seductive. Whereas on *Melting Asphalt*, what I know is going to happen is I'm going to have this massive exploration of a deeply interesting complex topic with a couple of different hypotheses and no real conclusions.

Tim Ferriss: Which I think is important for people to balance out with the prescriptive sort of Scooby snacks of how-to solutions. I think it's important for people to be able to sit with uncertainty. I think that's why Richard Feynman is so interesting, also. Training yourself to be a good scientist does not require a college degree or a PhD. It requires, like you said, not fooling yourself and having good questions. And sometimes you just have to sit with those questions and evaluate whether they're the right questions or the wrong questions, or if there's a better tweak to that question. So it sounds like the *Melting Asphalt* author is kind of along the same lines of a freakonomics but without necessarily the conclusions.

Naval Ravikant: Yes. In that sense, I actually like it even better than freakonomics. The original freakonomics is fantastic, don't get me wrong. But now they just have to fill a lot more volumes so of course the quality goes down, but freakonomics is still great. Another one, you introduced me to this guy; he was a childhood hero of mine growing up, Scott Adams. He's the creator of Dilbert and he's completely self made.

He had put together Dilbert through a combination of business judgment and hypnotic techniques that he'd learned, and writing techniques and public speaking techniques. And he's very transparent about it. He has a blog, the Dilbert blog or the Scott Adams blog, I forget the exact name. but it has some absolutely brilliant posts. And of course, like with anyone who is trying to figure the world out from scratch and is an orthogonal thinker, he's going to have some things that are completely wrong or controversial so he gets some flack over that. But there is some complete genius in there.

He has a particular blog post called "The Day You Became a Better Writer." And even though I am a very good writer and I've been writing a lot since I was young, I still open up that blog post and I put it in the background any time I'm writing anything important. It's that good. I use it as my basic template for how to write well. And even think about the title: the day you became a better writer.

Tim Ferriss: It's **[inaudible]**.

[Crosstalk]

Naval Ravikant: It's such a powerful title, absolutely.

And so he teaches you in one, small blog post the importance of surprise, the importance of headlines, the importance of being brief and direct and not using adjectives and adverbs and using the active voice and not the passive voice, etc. If you consider yourself to not be a great writer, if you're not at 10 out of 10 or a 9 out of 10 writer already, that one blog post right there will change your writing style forever if you put your ego down and absorb it properly.

Tim Ferriss: Yes. Scott is great. He's also a great teacher. I actually had my first real tennis lesson ever with Scott at his house. He got me up to playing a volley game with him in about 20 minutes. It was really outstanding. I'm going to have him on the podcast very shortly, which I'm excited about. Let me switch gears just a little bit and ask you a couple of rapid fire questions. It doesn't mean your answers have to be rapid fire but I'll just throw out a couple to add some color and connective tissue to what we're talking about. What are some of your biggest successes in the investing world? Just sort of greatest hits of Naval.

Naval Ravikant: I've thrown a lot of darts. Half of it is just showing up, frankly. If you're in a tech business, the best thing you can do for yourself is move to Silicon Valley, just like if you're in acting you probably have to go to Hollywood, and if you're in finance you used to have to go to New York, although now there are more options. I don't necessarily take credit for it in the same way that people might say where they were very thoughtful and did a lot of diligence. Some of it was luck. A lot of it was luck. But I was in the first round investor in Twitter when it was first getting started.

I was a first round investor in Uber when it was getting started. Thumbtack, Wanelo, Flipagram, there are a couple of others. I was early in Postmates, so I was actually probably the first real investor in there, after they got out of the incubator. There are a bunch of them; it goes on and on. It's hard for me to draw the full list but the fun that I ran is on track to return ten or 20 times the capital that it had raised.

My individual portfolio is up by dozens of times.

Tim Ferriss: Congratulations, once again.

Naval Ravikant: Dumb luck, dumb luck.

Tim Ferriss: Let's talk about dumb luck on the flip side. What are some of the biggest misses, like deals you've passed on, your anti portfolio? Is it Sequoia that has that, or Accel, the anti portfolio?

Naval Ravikant: I think Bessemer pioneered it but it's a nice thing to do, which is to keep yourself intellectually honest. Warren Buffet also pioneered it, in a sense, in that he goes on record at the annual meetings and talks about their biggest mistakes from the previous year. And then he'll literally look at the previous annual meeting what he talked about, and he'll go through it and he'll talk about what he said that was wrong. So to some extent, he does these annual meetings just to keep himself intellectually honest. In terms of biggest mistakes, I passed on Twilio very early on, and Jeff Lawson, the founder, is a great founder. He gave me every chance to invest. I passed on Pinterest.

Ben Silverman gave me every chance to invest. I was sitting in bed next to my at the time finance...

Tim Ferriss: I thought you were going to say next to Ben and I was like, wow.

Naval Ravikant: Yeah, exactly. We were that close. No. Sorry, Ben. No insinuation implied; nothing implied. I was sitting in bed next to my fiancée and we had helped Ben a little bit with AngelList, although not a lot; we were just getting started. He was raising money for Pinterest and I saw the numbers go up month to month and I had a chance to invest the first time, second time, third time. He kept offering it to me. I was sitting in bed next to my fiancée and she was obsessively using Pinterest.

She said, "I think you should do this." And I was like, "Oh, I don't get it. It's images, it's like flickery. Who's going to use this? How is this going to make money?" And so I passed on that. But I've got lots of stupid ones like that. I could have been an advisor to YouTube. In the early days, I helped them out but I didn't take any stock even though they were kind enough to offer it. There are lots and lots of misses. Square, I could have done the first round; I just thought it was too expensive. Even Twitter, where I did my piece, I did a much smaller piece than I was allocated to because I thought it was too expensive.

Tim Ferriss: I did the same thing in 2009. I was like, this is never going to work out but whatever. I put some money in. You mentioned Warren Buffet. So Warren Buffet often talks about the two rules of investing. Rule No. 1, don't lose money. Rule No. 2, pay attention to rule No. 1 or something along those lines. When you've made

investments that, in retrospect, you look back on and you're like: I knew it; I shouldn't have done that deal. What are the things that lead to you making those bad investments or overriding your rules or intuition?

Naval Ravikant:

I don't actually dwell on the bad investments much because the startup business is the exact opposite of Warren Buffet's value investment business. He's investing at a much later stage where you have a lot more data and you're putting much bigger amounts in there and you're betting that you're going to make a compounded return of 17, 20, 30 percent a year.

In the startup world, you're betting that 90 percent of these companies will go to zero or just return your money and the remaining 10 percent are going to post huge multiples and markups. So the Twitter investment is probably now 400x. Uber is probably up around 4,000x. So the winners can be staggering and can overwhelm the losses in the portfolio. So you're always focused on the upside. You don't really pay attention that much to the downside. And I would say most of my downside mistakes that when I think about it are mistakes of omission, not mistakes of commission.

That said, mistakes of commission, usually it's because you didn't have time to get comfortable with the deal. You got caught up in the heat of it where someone was pushing you to make a decision very quickly. You didn't have the data, you didn't have the gut feel for it but you just went ahead and did it because of fear of missing out. So I think that's actually the worst reason to invest because of the fear of missing out.

That said, a good company will raise money very, very quickly. So very often you just don't have that much time. The mistake of commission that really gets me is when I waste my time. I haven't really regretted making bad investments, that's part of the game. And sometimes you make an investment, the company doesn't go that far, the founder offers to return the money. And I've learned this from Ron Conway; usually a great response is to say: you know what, keep it, land on your feet, get your next job, start your next gig; I'll invest in that, too.

So it's not really about did you waste money because like I said, your reputation matters and if it works out, you're going to make more than enough. The thing that I regret is signing up for advisory roles because they take up a lot of time. And then you're working for the founder, and they're calling you for help all the time. Then

you realize they offered me what looked like free stock but nothing in life is free and I don't really want to spend that much time with that person. Or even worse, they don't call you and then you just feel guilty, like I'm getting all these advisory shares and I haven't done anything for the company.

So if I had to watch out for a mistake as early stage investors, guard your time carefully. Guard your time more carefully than you guard your money.

Tim Ferriss: Right, the nonrenewable resource versus the renewable.

Naval Ravikant: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: When you think of the word successful, who's the first person or people who come to mind for you?

Naval Ravikant: It's an odd answer because most people think of someone as successful when they win the game. And it's whatever game they're playing. So if you're an athlete, you're going to think of successful as someone who is a top athlete and wins that game. Or if you're in business, then you're going to think Elon Musk or someone of that sort. In my mind, I would have answered that question a little differently a few years ago; I would have said Steve Jobs because he created something, or he was part of the driving force and the spearhead for creating something that has changed the lives for all of humanity, and that's the iPhone.

I think of Mark Andreessen as super successful not because of his recent incarnation as a venture capitalist, which is an interesting one, but because of the incredible work that he did with Netscape. He commercialized the web browser. Satoshi Nakamoto is successful in the sense that he created Bitcoin, which is this incredible technological creation that will have repercussions for decades to come. So in the classic sense, I consider those creators and commercializers successful.

And of course Elon Musk, just because he changed everyone's viewpoint on what is possible with modern technology entrepreneurship. But that said, to me the real winners are the ones who step out of the game entirely, who don't even play the game; who rise above it. Those are the people who have such internal mental and self control and self awareness that they need nothing from anybody else. So there are a couple of these characters that I know in my life, some older gentlemen that I'd like to learn from.

We mentioned our Polish friend earlier. I would consider him successful because he doesn't need anything from anybody. He's at peace, he is at health and whether he makes more money or less money or whether the next person over from him does better or worse than him has no effect on his mental state and bearing. And historically, I would say that the legendary Buddha or **Christian Mortey**, whose stuff that I like reading, they are successful – quote-unquote – in the sense that they step out of the game entirely.

Winning or losing does not matter to them. There's some line that I read somewhere that all of man's troubles arise because he cannot sit in a room quietly by himself for half an hour. If you could literally just sit for 30 minutes and be happy, you are successful. I think that is a very powerful place to be but very few of us get there.

Tim Ferriss: Do you have a current meditative practice?

Naval Ravikant: I have a couple. Like most people, I talk about doing it but don't really do it all that well. I think meditation is like a diet where everyone is supposed to be following a regimen; everyone says they do it but nobody actually does it. The real set of people who meditate on a regular basis I've found are pretty rare. I've identified and tried at least four different forms of meditation.

The one that I've found that works the best for me is something called choiceless awareness or nonjudgmental awareness. Where you essentially don't sit in a corner and don't stay quiet. You walk around. You're going about your daily business but hopefully there's some nature around and you're not talking to somebody else. And what you practice is you just learn to accept that moment that you're in without making judgments. You don't say: oh, there's a homeless guy over there; I better cross the street.

You don't look at two people running by and say he's out of shape, or I'm in better shape than him or that person's better than me, or this one's better, or I should go get a coffee, or whatever. You just don't make any decisions. You don't judge anything. You just accept everything. And if you do that, I find if I can do that even for ten or 15 minutes walking around, I end up in a very peaceful, grateful state. So that one work swell for me.

Tim Ferriss: When those thoughts come up, when you see the guy with the bad hairdo and you're like that guy has no business having that

unmanageable hairdo or whatever ridiculous thought comes to mind, what is the internal response to that?

Naval Ravikant: What I do is for those of you who are programmed, I'm basically trying to run my brain in de-bugger mode. I'm trying to be very, very alert and watch my thoughts. You're not trying to judge anything, including your own thoughts. There's a great definition that I read that says, "Enlightenment is a space between your thoughts." Which means that enlightenment isn't this thing you achieve after 30 years sitting in a corner on a mountaintop. It's something you can achieve moment to moment and you can be a certain percentage enlightened every single day.

So you want to create as much space between your thoughts as possible. And the way you do that is by being aware of what your thoughts are and why you're having them. So if I saw the guy with the bad hairdo had a toupee, I would look at that and at first, I'd be like: ha, ha he has a bad hairdo. And then I'd say: why am I laughing at him? Oh, to make me feel better about myself. And why am I trying to make me feel better about my own hairdo? Oh, because I'm losing my hair and I'm afraid it's going to go away.

And what I find is that 90 percent of thoughts that I have are fear. 90 percent are fear based. The other 10 percent are probably desire based.

Tim Ferriss: That's a very tactful way to put it.

Naval Ravikant: Yeah, and as any Buddhist will tell you, desire is just fear by another name. it's the other side of the coin is fear.

Tim Ferriss: I thought you were talking about something else entirely.

Naval Ravikant: No, not lust.

Tim Ferriss: There's this cartoon, I don't know if you know who Harry Crumb is, He has all of these profane comic strips and was very famous and there's a great documentary about him ,as well. Wait, Harry Crumb, I think that's actually a comedy.

But R. Crumb, maybe I'm mixing it up. In any case, somebody can correct me in the comments. There's this one cartoon of his, I think it's a single cell kind of like the Far Side in its format. It's basically a drawing of people on the street in Manhattan. Every man has a thought bubble above his head with a vagina in it and

every woman has a thought bubble above her head with a penis in it and just everybody walking.

Naval Ravikant:

That's why the Adam and Eve story is there. Original sin is lust. It's the thing that makes you fall out of heaven. Maybe some of your readers have read this book called *Siddhartha*, but it's a beautiful parallel story to the making of the Buddha by Herman Hesse. It's a great book, I highly recommend it. But even in that book, our protagonist is out there seeking enlightenment and gets really close, and the thing that drops him out of it is lust.

He meets a woman that he feels lustful towards and that slowly becomes his undoing into everything. But anyway, to answer your original question, when I'm doing the choiceless awareness form of meditation, which by the way, as far as I can tell it is not taught in any school.

It's something that I discovered mostly by reading enough of Christian Mortey's book and piecing together what he meant. He's not a very clear speaker at times, or he is clear but in a very different kind of way. And then I realize the point of meditation is to clear your mind. And the way to clear your mind is yes, you can sit in the corner and struggle with it, which doesn't really get you the outcome, or you can do transcendental meditation which is where you are using this chanting to create a white noise in your head to bury your thoughts. Or, you can just very keenly and very alertly be aware of your thoughts as they happen. And as you watch them, you realize how many of them are just fear based.

The moment you recognize it as fear, without even trying it sort of goes away. And after awhile, your mind quiets and when your mind quiets, you stop taking everything around you for granted. You start noticing the details of oh, my God, I live in such a beautiful place. It's so great that I have clothes on me. Yeah, I can go into a Starbucks and get a coffee any time I want. How rich am I?

Look at these people. Each one has a perfectly valid and complete life of their own in their own heads that's going on. So it pops us out of the story, the dream that we're always in, the story that we're constantly telling ourselves. And if you stop talking to yourself for even ten minutes, or if you stop obsessing over your own story for even ten minutes, you'll realize that we are really far up Maslow's hierarchy of needs and that life is pretty good.

Tim Ferriss:

Totally agreed. For people who are looking for a little teaser on this, I think a very good one is a lecture by Sam Harris called “Waking Up.” He has a PhD in neuroscience. He’s also been on the podcast. If you just go to fourhourworkweek.com, all spelled out, forward slash Vimeo, that will take you straight to a page that has a sample, a trailer that people can check out. Robert Crumb was the name of the cartoonist, just as a side note for people who are interested. He was very fond of women with thick legs.

He was also fond of drawing weird electrical instruments. In any case, somebody to check out. What is a bad habit that you’re working to overcome right now?

Naval Ravikant:

Very good question. This is something I learned through our Polish trainer friend, Victor; currently Victor. Habits are everything, everyone. I think that we are trained in habits from when we were children, including potty training and when to cry and when not to, how to smile and when not to, and all these things become habits. These are all behaviors that we learn and that we then integrate into ourselves. What ends up happening when we’re older is that we’re a collection of thousands, maybe tens of thousands of habits we’re constantly running subconsciously, and they’re internalized. And then we have a little bit of extra brain power in our neocortex for solving new problems. So you become your habits.

What really brought this to light for me was our trainer gave me a routine to do every single day. Before that, I had never worked out every single day. It’s a light workout; it’s not tough on your body. But I did this workout every single day and I realized the incredible, astonishing transformation that it had upon me both physically and mentally. Because I think to have peace of mind, you have to have peace of body, first. So that taught me the power of habits. After that, I started realizing that it’s all about habits.

So at any given time now, within a six month period, I’m either trying to pick up a good habit or I’m discarding a previously bad habit. And it takes time. For example, if someone says I want to be fit, I want to be healthy but right now I’m out of shape and I’m fat; nothing is going to work for you in three months that’s going to be sustainable. It’s going to be a ten year journey, at least. And in the ten year journey, what you’re going to do is every six months or every three months, depending on how fast you can do it, you’re going to break bad habits and you’re going to replace them or you’re going to pick up good habits.

So I think it is all about habits. There is nothing else.

Tim Ferriss: I was just going to add some color to what you said. For those people who are curious, the morning routine is basically a mobility movement practice. It's not intended to give you a big burn or anything like that. You're basically taking your joints to the end range of movement. And I think what's very unique about it also, and this ties into the Laird Hamilton pool training and so on that was in a previous episode, is that you are controlling your breathing in a very particular way, and holding your breath at certain moments.

I think that has a lot to do with the present state value of that routine. That's just one man's opinion. Furthermore, I'd like to just add, and since you're always so forthcoming in a valuable way with pushing back, I'm going to push back a little bit, or maybe just revise from my mind what you said about the three months versus ten years.

I think people underestimate what can be done in a short period of time, but they underestimate how quickly they can fall back into bad habits. Does that make sense?

Naval Ravikant: Yes. That's absolutely right.

Tim Ferriss: So it's a long term project because it's not a diet; it's a way of eating, for instance, that's required to keep you from not being fat in the future. But you can lose, say, 20 pounds in a month and do it surprisingly easily. But like you said, you have to keep track of those habits. I think measurement is a really great way to concretize – that's probably not a word – make concrete – that was a little Don King – these types of changes. *The Power of Habit*, by Duhigg is actually a very good book on this type of thing, as well.

Naval Ravikant: So basically examples of habits I've picked up in the last 12 months or I'm still working on, and I'm one of these people who wants everything. I don't want to give up anything.

So for example, if I want to stop eating bad food, if I want to lose weight by fixing my diet, I don't say these foods are bad, I'm not going to eat them and then suffer, and then feel like I'm not eating tasty food. Instead, what I do is some combination of changing my taste buds to actually like the foods that are healthier for me and substituting unhealthy tasty foods with healthy tasty foods. So I can sustain it forever. I'm not interested than anything that's unsustainable or even hard to sustain. I want my life to be

effortless. So once I've created a good habit, it has to be the kind of habit that I can sustain with no effort.

The classic example for most people who have successfully lost weight in the last decade is most of them, not all but most of them have been on some variation of a low sugar diet, or a Paleo diet or a slow carb diet where they're just watching the simple carbs. If you stay on one of those diets for a little while, what you realize is you lose your sweet tooth. And when you drink a sugary drink, it's an overwhelming amount of sugar; it just doesn't taste good.

So I think there are ways to fix your habits and do it in a very sustainable, gentle way. Most recently I've developed a lot more Japanese tastes in eating, which has helped me a lot because now the food I find tasty and flavorful is actually not sauce, not curried, not cream, not carb. And I find that kind of food sloppy. I find it hard to even look at.

Tim Ferriss: Not to interrupt but I was going to ask you, and I suspect this is related, what \$100 or less purchase has most positively impacted your life in the last six months. And I think this might tie in.

Naval Ravikant: Yes, it's the teppanyaki grill. It's like a little table top grill. What I learned is that for food, the freshness and quality of the food going straight from the grill to your mouth is way more important than what you do with it. For example, in most recipes in most restaurants, we sauce the heck out of everything, and we cream it and we over prepare it and we over process it because it's sitting under a heat lamp for ten minutes.

And by the time it gets from the cook to your plate to your mouth, 15 minutes have passed and that's an eternity when it comes to food. Whereas the Japanese teppanyaki style of cooking is you have a tabletop grill and you have high quality meats and vegetables. You slice them thin and you put them on top, and they're cooked a minute later. Then it goes straight from the grill to your mouth within five or ten seconds. And literally, all it needs is salt and maybe not even that. You can cook the vegetables in the oils from the meat and it's the best tasting meal that I can imagine.

When I eat out now, I feel like I'm making a sacrifice on taste. So my meals at home taste better and they're very simple to prepare. Really the hack is straight from the grill to your mouth because we're evolved as humans to eat cooking around the fire. That is back to my evolution as a binding theory. We're not used to

somebody going off and cooking the food and then coming to us ten or 15 minutes later with the meat that's gotten cold on a plate.

But now to make it taste good, they're putting all kinds of sauces on top. So that is an example of a hack and that \$50 grill that I bought was the best investment for my health that I've ever made.

Tim Ferriss: Do you know the brand, offhand?

Naval Ravikant: I think it's a Presto tabletop grill. It's not perfect because it's got the nonstick surface on it, and I would rather not deal with whatever chemicals are coming out of there but it's a start. The same way this workout that we were talking about earlier, it's done with a light, 20 pound pair of dumbbells which I bought at Sports Basement for \$20. The beauty is I can do that anywhere I am. I can do that in my hotel room, I can do that in my bedroom.

I can do that first thing when I roll out of bed so there's no overhead of going to the gym. So this new daily workout for me, because it's only 20, 30 minutes right in my living room takes me less time than the old model of getting into a car and going to the gym and working with a trainer just because of all the overhead that was involved in that model.

So I think what you want to find is you want to hack in habits that are actually more pleasurable, that are easier, and they replace your bad habits or your not as good habits. The most recent was I dropped caffeine, for example, which was great. It was fantastic. I'm dropping hard alcohol altogether, and even wine. I don't really drink much anymore. Those seemed, to me, almost unconquerable. For anyone who's gotten used to drinking a lot, it seems like a really difficult habit to break but it is breakable.

Tim Ferriss: How did you crack caffeine, and why did you feel the need to crack caffeine?

Naval Ravikant: I had a health issue a few months back, which is a great wakeup call. In the beginning of this session, I talked about how everything great comes from something bad. Christian Mortey has this definition of suffering that I really liked where he says "suffering is that moment where you see reality exactly as it is, when you can no longer run away from it, when you can no longer deny it." For example, if you have a bad relationship with your wife, you're in denial about the whole thing, you're always covering it up, you're always sort of escaping around it or putting a finger in the dyke and making it work.

And then one morning you wake up and she leaves you, and you're in suffering. You're in pain. The suffering is there because now you can no longer deny that things were going poorly. There's no more denial. You're forced to face reality. And when you face reality, that is when you'll change. So I always look upon suffering as a teacher, and it's hard to do when you're actually going through it. But when you're not, that's how you should prepare yourself for it.

So in this case, I actually had a bacterial infection is what it turned out to be. But it could have been a lot worse. So my internal state was bad. I was unhealthy and not feeling well. So literally in one week I dropped alcohol, caffeine, dairy, red meat, went completely zero carb. Basically I just switched entirely to meat, salad, water. All my bad habits disappeared overnight because my body was giving me a very tight feedback loop: eat the wrong thing, you feel terrible.

That was a gift because when I'm 41, my body turns around and tells me this is how you need to eat to be healthy. If I ate perfectly, then the symptoms were a lot less worse. That was a bacterial issue and antibiotics killed it but it was actually amazing. Because outside of the issues I was having from the health condition, I felt great I felt high energy, I felt clear headed, I felt light of feet and light of mind. I was never before aware of what caffeine does to you. Those of us who drink a lot of coffee slide into it without really realizing what's going on.

Once you stop caffeine, for two weeks I was really tired and sleepy but then I became aware. Caffeine is a real stimulant. What it was do was in the morning, before I had my coffee I would wake up like a zombie. I would be groggy and not quite functional. Then I had my coffee and I would be functional, but what happened is my heart rate would be slightly elevated, and I would be slightly stimulated. It's absolutely a stimulant.

And then that would run for about six or seven hours until my next coffee. Then it would slow down, and then I would crash and I would be low energy for the night. When I was forced to drop caffeine, I realized I was very consistent energy. I didn't get that stimulation boost at the beginning but I also didn't get that crash at the end. And as we all know, the candle that burns twice as bright burns half as long. So I decided that I no longer wanted to do that to myself. I did not want to over clock my body every single day of

its life. Because I'm sure that leads to negative repercussions near the end of your life.

Tim Ferriss:

Let me add a couple of thoughts to a number of things you said. The first is with sugar cravings, just for people who want to cut back on sugar or simple sugars. Two things that are surprisingly effective for combating sugar cravings, particularly if you've just gone onto a lower carb diet or a slow carb diet for instance; Paleo, keto, whatever. 1) Make sure you're getting enough sodium,.

Make sure you're getting enough salt. A lot of people who go onto a lower carb diet, because each gram of carbohydrate can hold about 4 grams of water, they start shedding water. It's a diuretic. And they start craving salt but they don't realize that so they start eating carbs again. So what I'll do is I'll sprinkle some sea salt or whatever into a couple of glasses throughout the day. Obviously, I'm not a doctor, don't play one on the internet but that's one. The second is branched chain amino acids. You can take a few grams of branched chain amino acids and your liver will convert a small amount of that to glucose, and you can get that hit without having to ingest carbs, which is kind of a neat trick, also.

It's a great way to maintain muscle mass and even gain muscle while on a low carb diet, also, if you take it before you work out. The last point I'll make before asking the next question, and I think this was actually also from Christian Mortey, in fact. Is that sometimes it's easiest paradoxically – or ironically, maybe, or counter intuitively is probably a better word – to change a bunch of behaviors at once.

When you're adding behaviors, I think it's often best to do one at a time, and I think there's a lot of science to support this. When you're subtracting behaviors or inputs, like caffeine, sugar, alcohol it sometimes is easiest to subtract them all because they're interdependent. A lot of people are like: well, I smoke and then I drink, and then I eat a pizza. They're all interwoven cues. So I think a great way to, say, remove caffeine is to remove a bunch of those negative inputs at once.

I did that by going to a three day meditation retreat for transcendental meditation. That provided the Friday, Saturday, Sunday to get over that initial hump which was at the Center for Noetic Sciences, I think, up in northern California.

Naval Ravikant:

I think you're spot on correct. Christian Mortey is a very uncompromising character and for a lot of people, he can be tough

to read because he starts from such an extreme point of view that he just doesn't even make sense to them. One of the things he talks about is an internal state of revolution. So you should always be internally ready for a complete change. Whenever we say I'm going to try to do something, or I'm going to form a habit, or I'm going to become something; we're sort of wimping out. We're just saying to ourselves I'm going to buy myself some more time so I can just limp along.

The reality is most of us, when our emotions want us to do something, we just do it. If you want to go approach that pretty girl, or if you want to have that drink, or if you really desire something you just go do it. So when you go about saying I'm going to do this, or I'm going to be that, you're really putting it off. You're giving yourself an out. So at least if you're self aware, what you can say is: okay, I say I want to do this but I don't really. Because if I really wanted to do it, I would just do it.

Or I would commit externally to enough people, all my friends and family, and they would say: hey, I thought you were going to do this, you were going to stop smoking, you were going to stop drinking, what happened? Why are you drinking in front of me? For example, if you want to quit smoking, all you have to do is literally go to everybody you know and say, "I have quit smoking. I did it. I give you my word. I am done smoking." That's it. That's all you need to do. Go ahead. But most of us say that but we're not quite ready for it.

So we know we don't want to commit ourselves that extremely. So because of that, I think it's important to be honest with yourself and say: okay, you know what? I'm not ready to give up smoking. I do like it too much. It's going to be too hard for me to give up. I'm not going to be able to replace it. So let me set a more reasonable goal for myself, which is I'm going to cut down to the following amount per week. I'm going to commit to that externally, and I'm going to work on that for three or six months.

And when I get there, then I'll take the next step as opposed to beating myself up over it. So I think you're right in that when you really want to change you just change. But most of us don't really want to change. We don't want to go through the pain just yet.

So at least recognize it, be aware of it, and then give yourself a smaller change that you can actually carry out.

Tim Ferriss:

Yes. The other thing is if you want to change something, and the public pronouncement is a good example of this, you need incentives, whether it's the carrot or the stick. Because self control is really overrated. If you've had trouble making the change, clearly the incentives haven't worked before or they've been nonexistent. So I'm reading a book right now for helping me train my puppy, which is called *Don't Shoot the Dog*, by Karen Prior. It might be out of print but you can get it used.

The title is very misleading because it's actually about behavioral modification. Karen Prior used to be a dolphin trainer, or a marine mammal trainer and also worked with orcas. So she would use a clicker, this sound, and then translated that over to dogs. She talked about superstitious behavior from dogs. Who, say, every time you bend at the waist and say "sit," you think they're looking at your hand or listening to you but they're actually watching you bend at the waist.

And so they start sitting at weird times. You're like, what the hell like I said going on? It's a superstitious behavior. It's how she's helped her friends or humans do the same thing with, say, superstition about fencing competitions. This one friend always needed his favorite – not Rapier but whatever the hell the sword is, the poker; whatever that thing is called.

And when he forgot it at his apartment, he got to the competition and had to use another one and was in this really superstitious, negative state of mind and lost. So he went through and identified, with her help, sort of the 15 superstitious behaviors he had associated with it and trained those things out of himself, which led to a lot of performance enhancement. It's a great book; people should check it out. Where I was going with that is set punishments or rewards, and a very easy way to do that is with betting pools.

You can also use a tool called stickK, S-T-I-C-K-K.com, or DietBet.com. For those people who want more, search stakes, S-T-A-K-E-S in *The Four Hour Chef* and there's a bunch of stuff online about how to set up those consequences.

Naval Ravikant:

It absolutely works. I started my first company that way. I was working at this tech company called @Home Network and I told everybody around me, my boss, my coworkers, my friends, I said Silicon Valley, all these other people are starting companies. It looks like they can do it; I'm going to go start a company. I'm just here temporarily. I'm an entrepreneur. I want to start a company. I

told everybody. And I wasn't meaning to actually trick myself into it; it wasn't a deliberate, calculated thing.

I was just venting, talking out loud, being overly honest. But I actually didn't. This was 1996. It was a much scarier, more difficult proposition to start a company then. Sure enough, everyone started coming up to me and said, what are you still doing here? I thought you were leaving to start a company. Wow, you're still here. That was awhile ago you said that.

Then I was literally embarrassed into starting my own company.

Tim Ferriss: If you hadn't harnessed the power of shame, you might still be clocking in a some type of corporate drone, for all we know.

Naval Ravikant: Probably, yes. But Scott Adams had a version of this where he would **[inaudible]** consistently biased to himself. There are biases that can work for you. If you know the set of biases that are out there, you can use them against yourself. Scott Adams had this thing where he was working for Pac Bell and he wanted to be a great cartoonist. He would show up to work really early in the morning, like 4 or 5 a.m. and he would go to the bathroom and he would stand in front of the mirror.

He would repeat to himself for 30 minutes like a crazy person, he would say, "I'm going to be a great cartoonist. I am going to be a great cartoonist. I am going to be a great cartoonist." And then he had programmed himself, and he had to be consistent with his own pronouncements to himself or it would destroy his ego. So then he did a lot of drawings; he did a lot of cartooning.

There are lots of ways to hack yourself. Every time you find a weakness about yourself, you can actually turn it to the positive. You can use that to hack your own brain, hack your own mind to get to where you need.

Tim Ferriss: That's super hardcore with the mirror. I'm going to have to talk to him about that. What is the book that you have gifted most to other people, or books?

Naval Ravikant: In the last year it's probably *Sapiens*, by Yuval Noah Hariri; I hope I'm saying his name correctly.

Tim Ferriss: *Sapiens*, like homo sapiens?

Naval Ravikant: Exactly. It's a history of the human species written by a professor of history in Israel. It's absolutely mind blowing. It's a very orthogonal view on humans clinically as we are. He starts out from the point of view –

Tim Ferriss: Sorry to interrupt but can you explain orthogonal? It's very common in Silicon Valley but just for people who may not know what that means.

Naval Ravikant: Orthogonal means it kind of comes out of left field. It doesn't line up with your normal way of thinking. It's actually a geometric term where something can be running at a different axis.

So he basically comes at it from left field and he says let's take a look at human beings, the species. Let's look at them like an anthropologist or a zoologist would look at this animal, and what's different about this animal? He comes to some very, very startling conclusions. He talks about how humans are the first animals that were able to tell each other stories. Those stories talked about things that weren't actually going on around them; a lot he must have self organized.

For example, the Neanderthals were probably stronger than us physically but you could only organize Neanderthals by blood. So you could have 100 of them who were related who could gang up to maybe fight a war, but you could unite 5,000 or 50,000 humans under the banner of being Christian because we all believe the story. He talks about corporations are a story, religions are a story; even the fact that we're talking and I'm someone who you want to interview, that's just a story in our heads. Reality is actually quite different.

So he starts with that thesis that humans are these storytelling monkeys who then get out of control. He basically documents the genocide of every other species on this earth, or genocide or domestication by humans. And then basically shows – he doesn't use the word AI but we're sort of the first artificial intelligence as far as any other creature is concerned that overran the earth and took it over as a resource. He comes to all these really interesting, startling conclusions. He talks about how empires have never been overthrown from within.

Instead, the children of the losers get brainwashed into thinking they're part of the victors. He talks about how every generation has a form of racism where they basically treat other people, some class of people as dirty and polluted and not to intermingle with

our kind. He shows how in our modern society, that's rich versus poor. So we think poor people should live in different neighborhoods. We don't think they should go to the same schools. We don't want our college educated children marrying a non college educated, blue collar worker.

But then the biggest predictor of poverty or wealth is being born poor or being born wealthy so it's kind of the racism of our times. But I don't want to do the book injustice. I just give away a lot of copies and I feel like people should read it. Before that, *The Rational Optimist*, by Matt Ridley, in fact anything by Matt Ridley I thought was really provocative and eye opening. *Poor Charlie's Almanac*, which is Charlie Munger's book, probably the best book on business, quote-unquote, that I've ever read.

I try not to read business books, for the most part, because they're very simple ideas wrapped up in a lot of pages. And definitely Christian Mortey's *The Book of Life*, *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse, *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius. These are all fantastic books.

Tim Ferriss:

Super solid. Just a quick note since I'm in dog mode, on the homo sapiens versus Neanderthals, and you mentioned domestication, one theory that has legitimate scientists subscribe to it, and I believe I originally read this in *Scientific American*, I want to say but people could find this if they Google for it, is that part of the reason homo sapiens were able to dominate and drive out Neanderthals is that they were able to domesticate wolves. Whereas Neanderthals were not, which is a fascinating idea.

You can see that type of domestication taking place right now, and people could just do a Google search, where baboons have this truce with Ethiopian wolves in Africa. And it's so fascinating because when the baboons are foraging for whatever the hell baboons eat, they drive up field mice out of the ground and it makes it easier for the wolves to hunt. So they've established this truce but it doesn't exist with other canines, like feral dogs, for instance. It's super fascinating.

Naval Ravikant:

Actually related to that, another great book that I would recommend is *The Origin of the Species*, Charles Darwin.

I think almost everything about humans and human civilization is explained better by [inaudible] than anything else. If you look at what religions are, is religions are trying to basically explain how humans work on a large scale. There are cooperating systems for humans. They're an ancient one and they kind of establish what are

the set of rules and boundaries, what kind of behavior you can expect. I think the modern religion, if you're a scientist, the closest thing to it is evolution, where you can look at it and say this is probably why most creatures behave the way they behave. So if you're going to read the bible of evolution, you've got to read *The Origin of the Species*.

Now what you'll find is that creatures like you're talking about are incredibly dynamic. They exhibit incredible behaviors; social, cultural, cooperative, the way they talk, the way they sing. For example, species of whales are born that communicate through song. But every song is unique to each pack and they're not born with that song; they learn it from their parents. They learn different songs for different communication.

And you realize how much complexity there is in the natural world, and you realize how little you matter. And knowing how little you matter is actually, I would argue, very important for your own mental health and your own happiness. Usually, when you see someone who's depressed, they're trapped in their own mind and they're taking themselves far too seriously.

Tim Ferriss: Marcus Aurelius *Meditations*, not to beat a dead horse on that one, is great for that. Some of the reminders that Marcus would read for himself in the mornings before going about the day, like today I'm going to encounter ungrateful, rude people and this, this and this and at the end of the all, I will be dust and I will be put in the ground for animals to consume or whatever. Which sounds depressing until you realize how much perspective it gives you before you set out in the day. Related to the books, do you have a favorite documentary or movie?

Naval Ravikant: I generally don't watch movies. They're great and they're great for other people but for me, they're just very low bandwidth.

Tim Ferriss: So pure cartoons? You're more of a cartoon guy?

Naval Ravikant: I like cartoons. I like *Rick and Morty*. It's a great cartoon, a funny one.

Tim Ferriss: *Rick and Morty* is amazing.

Naval Ravikant: Yeah, it's really fun. Good for smart people, too. But I like to read because I can read a lot faster than I can listen. Also, listening or watching or someone's talking to you, the egos enter into it. Whereas the great thing about reading is you can read 100 books

and then you can absorb them all, forget the source material and sound really smart.

Before we get off this topic, related to that, I recently read a book which I think a lot of people have read as a child called *Illusions* by Richard Bach. It's a beautiful book. *Siddhartha* is about a character becoming Buddha-ish and his journey to do that. *Illusions* is about a character becoming Jesus and his journey to do that.

It's a very messy antic. It's kind of got a Midwestern twist to it but it has a lot of really great little mental hacks for living your life. One of them, speaking of movies, was to treat your life as a movie. So if you pick up a film reel, that's a finished movie. That's kind of your life. It's a finished life. Because so much of it is out of your control that for all practical purposes, it's finished. And then you sort of have to watch it one frame at a time to experience it. So the purpose of your life is to live it. But now, if you start living your life as if it's a movie and you're the star of your own movie, because everyone's trapped in their own heads.

The things you care about are so different than the things I care about that for all practical purposes, we're living in two different worlds that intersect only briefly. So we're each living the movie of our lives. Now, if you start treating real life as that, you're walking around and you're like, this is a movie of my life; you take a very positive view towards everything. Because you're like, I'm sitting here on a train and I'm acting all bored. When really in the movie of my life, something interesting would be going on. In the movie of my life, I'd be talking to the person next to me. So why don't I just talk to the person next to me?

Tim Ferriss: I like that.

Naval Ravikant: Yeah. It sort of helps you just keep your life moving along in a positive way because it's your movie. You want it to turn out well. And even when you get pissed off at people, you say oh yeah, that's the villain. Awesome. The villain has entered the scene. This is the foil who now I am going to counterbalance against and I'm going to learn something in the process. Let's see if this is the chapter where I win or I lose, and then maybe I'll win later on down the road. Another way to think about it is that it also gets you to be more moral or more ethical because if it's a movie, that means there are hundreds of thousands or millions of people watching your movie.

So what would the hero of the movie do? Would the hero behave badly or would the hero behave well? Well, hopefully the hero would behave well. There's no such thing as a part of the movie where the hero does something terrible and the audience kind of overlooks it. So if you treat the world as a movie of your life, and you treat yourself as the hero of that movie, it makes the world look like a much more pleasant place to deal with it.

Tim Ferriss: It also engages you in a way that's very present state, right?

One thing that I do that I don't think I've really talked about that sounds kind of weird, but I will often basically behave like someone who has a "what would Jesus do" bracelet on, but I'll do it for people – friends of mine, typically – who have characteristics that I want to adopt. So Matt Mullenweg, for instance, is so calm under fire. It's very hard to frazzle Matt. So sometimes when I find myself getting anxious or wound up about something, I'll just ask myself: okay, if this were – like you said – a movie, and Matt were playing Tim Ferriss but not trying to be the spastic Tim Ferriss, what would he do?

It's really weird when you become the observer in that way, which is part of a lot of meditative practice; it allows you to be more effective. Another thing that I do which is kind of hulk-like is I'll talk about myself when I'm having some poor response or about to have a poor response. I'll be like: oh, look at that. Tim is angry. Why is Tim so angry?

And when I take that step back, and I was talking to Phil [Libben](#) about this kind of third player game versus a first person shooter, for instance. When you take that step away from yourself to observe in a detached way, it allows you to pattern interrupt so you're not reflexive.

Naval Ravikant: We spend most of our waking lives dreaming. We think we're awake but we're walking around talking to ourselves. If we verbalized those thoughts, we'd be locked up. It's not cool to walk around talking to yourself in public. But we talk to ourselves in our heads constantly, and I consider that a state of dreaming. And 90 percent of the time, we're dreaming to ourselves. And all I'm hoping is 5 or 10 or 15 percent of the time, I'll catch myself dreaming, I'll realize that it's just some form of fear.

And then I'll say to myself, I'm awake; wake up. And then I wake up and I observe the present surroundings and everything is fine. By the way, that's what I think Buddha means. Buddha means the

awakened one, or that is one interpretation of it. So maybe that was a fellow who was awake most or all of the time.

But that doesn't mean you have to be asleep all of the time; you just have to be awake a little bit more than you normally are.

Tim Ferriss:

A very fun way to explore this for people who are allergic to the concept of meditation is lucid dreaming. Where you do reality checks and literally learn to distinguish between a dream state and a normal waking state. But it requires doing these constant check-ins. Because things, for instance, in a dream state will shift orientation, like bricks that are laid down on a floor. If you look away and look back at them, they'll almost always shift orientation. So for people who are interested in looking at that, it's really fascinating and can be proven in a lab. You can just look for lucid dreaming 101 and my name.

Talking to yourself, or talking to other people, what words or phrases do you overuse or most overuse?

Naval Ravikant:

Orthogonal. Most of my vocabulary is built from reading, not from talking or listening.

So it makes it easy for me to sound smart. Because when people are writing, they'll use a larger range of words than when they are speaking. So one of the hacks that I use is I try – or I don't even try; I sort of do it effortlessly at this point – is I use a written vocabulary while speaking. So that makes me sound smart, even if I don't know what the heck I'm talking about. So that's a good little hack.

What phrases do I overuse? I don't know. We're all just habit loops so I've got habits of a bunch of phrases. I definitely kind of overdo this looking at everything in an evolutionary context. If I can't find an evolutionary reason, either by medic or genetic, for why someone is behaving the way they are or why they're doing certain things I don't have a framework for it and I discard that hypothesis. Similarly, game theory I think is ultra important.

If you understand game theory well, just the rudiments of it; you don't have to go into any of the advanced Nash equilibrium type stuff but if you just understand prisoner's dilemma and iterated prisoner's dilemma. There's a great book called *The Origins of Virtue* by Matt Ridley that goes through a lot of this. Then you have a very deep understanding of how humans negotiate and behave and transact, and that helps out. We didn't talk about this

but I'm positive you've read this book: Robert Cialdini's *Influence*. Classic, classic book.

Everybody should read it, memorize it, understand that the way that people influence other people is consistency, liking authority, social proofs, scarcity and reciprocity. Once you know that, any time you're trying to persuade anybody of anything, you can use those to your benefit. But you have to be very careful because there is a tendency when we're trying to persuade other people to be dishonest. And when you're dishonest with somebody else, you're going to be dishonest with yourself.

And when you're dishonest with yourself, you're disconnected from reality. You're going to make poor decisions. You're going to drop out of the moment and you're going to be less happy and you're going to be wrong. So you have to maintain your honesty while doing it.

Tim Ferriss: They're tools, and they're also just principles of psychology that can be wielded for good, or they can be wielded for horrible genocides and so on.

Naval Ravikant: Absolutely.

Tim Ferriss: If you look at master propagandists, you could look at some of the nonprofits out there which use these principles but for a greater good, like Charity Water, like Donors Choose. They take advantage of these and leverage them. But you could also look at Goebbels in World War II. So it's not inherently good or bad; it's like a scalpel. It could be used to kill someone or it could be used to perform surgery.

Naval Ravikant: I feel like there are ten or 15 great skills that we should have all been taught in school. But instead, we spend too much time memorizing the capitol of Rwanda or Alabama when we should be learning what do we know about what works about dieting and nutrition? What do we know that works about happiness and peace? What do we know that works about persuasion?

How do you have a healthy relationship with something? What is the meaning of values? What are your options and values? Those kinds of things. They're very fuzzy topics. They're very hard to learn, they're very hard to teach. But at the same time, it's shocking how we just essentially ignore them in our educational process.

Tim Ferriss: Did you go to college?

Naval Ravikant: I did. I went to Dartmouth.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, that's right. I just talked with the Alumni magazine. What did you study there?

Naval Ravikant: Computer science and econ. I did little bits of English, physics, history. I was actually originally going to do English and history and then I realized I didn't want to drive a taxi. I was very ambitious so I switched to computer science and economics. But my real education, frankly, even before Dartmouth came from a magnet high school in New York called Stuyvesant, which is a magnet math and science school that was absolutely brutal and eye opening and educational. But even before that, I would say the real education begins in the library. It begins with books.

If you can learn to like to read, you never need to go to school. Learning to like to read I think everyone can get there. You just have to think about two things. One is don't feel the need to read anything you don't want to read. Read the stuff that's fun to you. Because it's more important to form the habit and the practice and the enjoyment of reading and to associate it Pavlovian style with something positive rather than negative. So even if you're reading junk, just read.

And then secondly, don't feel the obligation to finish any book. Don't treat it like a linear tome or treatise that has to be read in order and the way the author intended beginning to end. Feel free to skip around; it's your book. There are books that I've literally started in the middle. I've read near to the end and then I've put it down. It was a decent book and I learned something but I just didn't feel like having to start it or finish it. That liberation, that freedom just allows me to read.

Tim Ferriss: If you wanted to get someone hooked on the joy of reading, what would the book or books be, like one or two that you would recommend just to suck people in for the pure enjoyment of it?

Naval Ravikant: It's highly genre dependent, so it depends what you like.

Tim Ferriss: Just for you, personally.

Naval Ravikant: For me personally, if I was going to read science fiction or if I liked technology, I would read *Snow Crash*.

- Tim Ferriss: So good.
- Naval Ravikant: It's old but it's brilliant. Neal Stephenson predicts everything from Bitcoin to the internet to virtual reality to nation states, you name it, encryption.
- Tim Ferriss: Such a good book.
- Naval Ravikant: It's a powerful, powerful book. It's sad that it's still never been made into a movie. It would make a brilliant movie. So on the sci-fi level I recommend that. I think graphic novels are underrated because there's some great writing in modern graphic novels. *V for Vendetta*, *The Watchmen*, *Sandman*, these are up there. These are works of art and they're very approachable because there are also beautiful illustrations and expansive storylines that go with it.
- If you like history and science, *Sapiens* is great because it's a very easy read. There's nothing difficult about it. You can just fly through it. In the same way if you're looking for spirituality and internal awareness, *Meditations* and *Siddhartha* are the two places I would start because they're both very light, easy, beautiful reads. *Siddhartha*, even though it's been translated from German, is almost lyrical. It reads almost like poetry. It's a beautiful book.
- Tim Ferriss: I'll add a couple of options for people, just for the joy of reading. If you're like: God, I'm one of those people who doesn't read books, or I don't know the time for books or whatever. It doesn't have to take a lot and from my perspective also, one of the best ways to solve insomnia or get to sleep is to turn off your problem solving brain by reading fiction before bed. So I'll give a couple of recommendations. If you like fantasy, *The Name of the Wind*, I've mentioned this before; so good. You could try another one if that one doesn't grab you, called *The Lies of Locke Lamora*, L-O-C-K-E Lamora, which is part of the *Gentlemen Bastards* series.
- It's basically written as if the author had a little black book that he carried around and wrote down the most hilarious insults he heard people saying in every bar for a year and then wove them into dialogue. It's fucking hysterical. And then if you want something that is also very deeply philosophical but just **roariously** funny, *Zorba the Greek*, which is a classic, is just outstanding.
- Naval Ravikant: I'll throw two others in there. This one's a harder read but really fun, most egotistical author of all time, is *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*, by Salvador Dali. The title alone should grab you and give you a sense. I keep coming back to *Meditations*. It's just

such an easy book. I almost recommend everybody start there because it will change your world view on what you think success means.

Tim Ferriss: *Meditations* is an interesting one. It didn't grab me the first time that I read it.

I feel like that type of material, the philosophical deep stuff, is more like music than a textbook that could be generalized in so much as different types of music calm down different people. Some people like reggae, some people like classical, some people can listen to Green Day or Nirvana because they associate it with a positive time. And for me, *Seneca* was the fix that I needed at first. Then I came back to *Meditations*. So I think it's in part finding the type of teacher that works best for you.

Naval Ravikant: I completely agree, which is why I think the most important way to read is pick up a lot of books, start reading them all. Put down any book instantly that doesn't grab you and you don't have reading and just keep going until you find something that does speak to you. There are so many choices out there.

Tim Ferriss: Yes, which is one of the huge benefits of using, say, a Kindle. I do love paper books but because I like to be able to sort my notes and highlights, that was what really sold me on the Kindle.

I use it almost exclusively. And what I recommend people do is buy a few of these books and read the first ten or 15 pages. If you're not super stoked to continue, and you're like oh, my God, I want to eat dinner later because this is so awesome, then move onto the next one and try it until you hit the jackpot. Don't settle for pretty good.

Naval Ravikant: A lot of the great books actually start out strong. It's a misconception that you have to suffer through it until it gets good. Yes, that may be true for some, especially the ones you're assigned to read in school. But *Snow Crash*, for example, starts out very strong. *Surely You Must be Joking, Mr. Feynman*, it's all bite sized little stories. You can skip around and read these great stories about the adventures of this curious character.

And you can learn about the inner mindset and external state of someone who was absolutely brilliant, world shaking, earth shatteringly brilliant but also unconventional; lived their life the way they want. It's not quite a sequel, but there's a follow up book

to *Surely You Must be Joking, Mr. Feynman* which is also good if you liked the first one.

I love the title alone. It's called, *So What Do You Care What Other People Think?*

Tim Ferriss: That's a great title. Everybody at the very least should try to find some footage of Feynman being interviewed, like *The Joy of Finding Things Out*. That will be the gateway drug to get you to read *Surely You Must be Joking, Mr. Feynman*.

Naval Ravikant: One last thing on that. I think reading is so powerful. If you take away one thing from this podcast, just figure out how to read. I say that because there are many skills and gifts that people have in life. The great thing about reading is you can use that to pick up any new skill. So if you learn how to learn, it's the ultimate meta skill and I believe you can learn how to be healthy, you can learn how to be fit, you can learn how to be happy, you can learn how to have good relationships, you can learn how to be successful. These are all things that can be learned. If you can learn, that is a trump card. It's an ace, it's a joker, it's a wild card. You can trade it for any other skill. And that all begins with reading.

Tim Ferriss: 100 percent agreed. We've been giving a lot of advice, obviously trying to take our own advice is hard oftentimes. If you look back to your undergrad self, you switched to computer science and econ and so on, you're about to graduate. If you had to go back and give that Naval advice, if you're already hooked on reading so that seems to be covered, what advice would you give yourself?

Naval Ravikant: It's funny. I actually did this exercise recently. I sat down and I spent some time thinking about what is the advice I would give my 30-year-old self. The advice was along the lines of chill out, don't stress so much, not so much anxiety, everything will be fine and be more yourself. Don't try and do what you think society wants or needs. Don't try and live up to other people's expectations. Self actualize. Say no to more things.

Protect your time because it's very precious. On your dying day, you will give everything, everything you have for another day. So the discount rate, the marginal value of that extra day just goes up as you get older. The advice was all along those lines. It was basically be yourself, don't listen to other people. Don't worry about what other people need or want or think or expect from you. And then I said, what would my 30-year-old self had said to my

20-year-old self? And it turned out to be pretty much the exact, same thing.

What would my 20-year-old self have said to my 10-year-old self? Pretty much the exact, same thing. So I think my 50-year-old self is going to say chill out, relax, don't stress so much, live in the moment. It will all be all right. Less fear, more love. And love people more. Love is one of those weird things. Everyone wants to be loved; everyone deeply needs to be loved. It's not something you can buy. No amount of money or power will bring you true, unconditional love.

But it turns out you can give love. It's free to give. So you can't necessarily get it, but if you can get in the mindset of I'm just going to give it, eventually in a long enough time scale, you get what you deserve.

The universe kind of sends it back your way.

Tim Ferriss: Not only that, if you don't know how to make yourself happy, try to make someone else happy. That is, as you said, kind of a recursive function. I'm using vocab I shouldn't but it's a virtuous cycle.

Naval Ravikant: Charlie Munger, who is Warren Buffet's partner at Berkshire Hathaway and just a brilliant older gentleman, his speeches are collected in *Poor Charlie's Almanac* and they're worth reading. He was asked at one of the Berkshire Hathaway annual meeting, someone asked him along the lines of how do I find a worthy mate? And he said be worthy of a worthy mate. I think that's absolutely right. You just work on yourself until you no longer need them, and then they appear. There's a Zen saying that says "when the student is ready to master her peers," what that basically means is you have to work on yourself and be ready and then good things will happen to you.

Tim Ferriss: Not only that but when you prepare your mind by, let's just say hypothetically, reading *Surely You Must be Joking Mr. Feynman*, it's almost like when the students' eyes are prepared, the teacher becomes visible, if that makes sense.

Naval Ravikant: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: It's like buying a new car and then you see that new car everywhere. It's not that everybody went out and bought the same car; you just have a new selective attention. You can hone that to

be a useful selective attention. Just a couple more questions. This is fun. We could go on for hours and hours like we usually do but just a couple more. What does the first 60 minutes of your day look like? If you can completely have control of it, what does the first 60 minutes of one of your weekdays look like?

Naval Ravikant: If I have control of it, first I try not to wake up to an alarm clock. I think that's highly damaging. It's not something you're meant to do. It destroys the last bit of your sleep in peace. So it's better to wake up naturally.

Ideally, you get to bed at such a time that your eyes will roughly awaken at the right time. The simplest hack for that is sleep near a window or a skylight or something that will let natural light in. Natural light is the ultimate gentle alarm clock that again, going back to evolution as a binding principle, you're evolved to wake up to the sunrise. So I think that is a nice way to wake up. Although in reality, I don't wake up that early so easier said than done.

Tim Ferriss: When do you usually wake up? If not the crack of dawn, what time are you usually waking up on a good day?

Naval Ravikant: This is embarrassing but I'm a night owl so I get up around 7:30. So it's not that early.

Tim Ferriss: I love how you explained it, that you're a night owl; I wake up late. I was talking to one of the people helping me with dog training. She's like, what time do you wake up? I was really proud because I've been working on this. I was like, I wake up at like 8:30. She's like: whoa. And I took that as a pat on the back. I'm like, I know, I've been working on it. She's like: no, you wake up really late. Anyway. So yo wake up at 7:30.

Naval Ravikant: I sleep underneath a skylight, which is deliberate. I always try and get an apartment or a house that has a skylight and I always try and put my bed underneath it. Because if I didn't do that, my teenage self used to wake up at 11 a.m. So that's a quick way to get rid of that habit. Then I always like to do that light workout that I mentioned during the day. It combines yoga, stretching, breathing, dumbbells. I should be doing 30 to 40 minutes; I actually do 20 minutes. I shouldn't be distracted but in the middle sometimes I'll take a break and go and check email.

I try to put my meditation actually in the workout. If I do the workout properly, no music, no distractions and I'm just being aware of my thoughts and watching my mind, as well. Because my

body is busy. It also gives me something to do. Then I can actually be very meditative. So in an ideal world I would do that, and then I exit that state very peacefully. Then I'm usually on the computer on Slack, on email, talking to my team, working with them.

Hopefully not a phone call. I really dislike phone calls. Then I'll leisurely either have a decaf coffee or tea and then I'll head off to work. That combined workout and meditation is really important, and waking up naturally is very important. Actually, the No. 1 thing my wife and I fought about for a long time after we got married was that she would wake up to alarm clocks. She would set five, six, seven of them as little snoozes. She's a deep sleeper and I'm a very light sleeper.

Every ten minutes she has some alarm going off that she's sleeping through, and I'm going absolutely berserk because I've been woken up in the middle of my sleep and I feel like my heart is racing and I'm all stressed out. So finally, she got a Fit bit which she wears on her wrist and that sort of buzzes her awake. Sometimes it will wake me up, sometimes not but it's not a jarring breakup.

Tim Ferriss: It's not the auditory punch in the face.

Naval Ravikant: Exactly. Alarm clocks are terrible for you. Anyone who is waking up to alarm clocks on a regular basis, it will bring more peace in your life to break that habit than any more difficult habit that you might have to change.

Tim Ferriss: An intermediate step, I haven't talked about this but it sounds so funny. It's had a huge impact on the quality of my mornings. I had the default phone ring tone, which was just a horrible fire alarm type songs. I just switched it to chimes. It's such a simple thing. Go into your ringtones and just change the alarm ring tone to something that sounds like wind chimes. It's a good intermediate step.

Naval Ravikant: Someone out there who's pretty smart is going to at some point create a thing you can put in your bedroom that will essentially create natural sunlight type light slowly and maybe add in some birds that are chirping and so on to wake you up very gently, like a natural sunrise.

Tim Ferriss: There are lights that do that. There are alarms that will brighten up the room with light.

I always sleep with an eye mask. That's a whole, separate conversation but we'll save that for another time.

Naval Ravikant: There are actually some studies that show that if you are sleeping and you hear the crackling of a fireplace or the breathing of a dog, the snoring of a dog, that you will sleep better than if there was no noise whatsoever. At the same time, the barking of a dog, if there's a dog barking in the distance remotely, it will raise your anxiety level higher than the same amount of noise made by a car or a siren. The reason is, again, evolution. We're evolved to fall asleep by fireplaces with our domesticated animals around. We're not evolved to sleep in a dark, quiet room with absolutely no noise. That's actually not natural. You're not meant to sleep alone.

Tim Ferriss: Okay everybody, don't sleep alone.

Naval Ravikant: I think most people are already working on that. They already have a solution to that.

Tim Ferriss: When I was in Japan, I remember there was a story about a sumo wrestler. And a lot of these guys can be prima donnas. He had told his manager, he was one of the stars of the stable and he's like: I just can't sleep and I get bloody noses if I don't have a different woman next to me every night. And so this guy's like: Dammit, my prize race horse... it became a big issue.

Naval Ravikant: Related to that, when I grew up in India, in India there is this concept of the extended family where you basically live with your tribe at all times. When we were young, we were at my grandmother's place, and my aunts and my uncles and my cousins and my grandparents and everybody was there. If it was a warm night, we'd go out in the backyard. We'd put all these comforters and these little cots out, and everybody would sleep in one giant pile of 15 people underneath the stars.

Tim Ferriss: That just sounds awesome.

Naval Ravikant: It was amazing. Two things were very great about it. One is the noise level didn't bother you. Someone's foot was in your face, it didn't bother you. When it's family, and you're young, it all just works and you feel very safe and happy. The other thing is I think it really reinforced how important the tribe is.

Modern society gives us incredible flexibility in that we can get away from our crazy family members, and we're not destined to die where we were born or do what our parents did. So we have

incredible freedom. But then coming with it is this tremendous loneliness that we try and cover up either through drugs or alcohol, or partying, even trying to find a mission like putting people on Mars. But the reality is a lot of that loneliness just comes from being disconnected from growing up with your tribal environment.

So it's important as you get older to figure out how to build your tribe that is always around you. And actually, the more they're in your business, the better. When I go to India and to my grandparents' house, it's impossible for anyone in that house to be depressed. There are three dogs barking, there are seven cousins in your business, there's your aunt asking you, did you eat enough; do you want this? Everyone is always in your business. So depression requires some level of privacy, or at least the suffer **[inaudible]** depression.

[Crosstalk]

Naval Ravikant: There's a chemical **[inaudible]** depression that I am not familiar with that is a real condition.

But there is also kind of just the abject loneliness that all of us can feel that comes from being disconnected from our roots, and our roots are very tribal.

Tim Ferriss: I think also, speaking of someone who's had battles with depression before and for whose family it seems to be somewhat hereditary, there are a lot of males in my family who have depression, there's the question of nature versus nurture, obviously. But it's very easy in a western pharmaceutical focused culture to believe that you have a chemical imbalance; therefore say you're too lethargic to exercise. As opposed to asking the question which I like to ask: could the direction of the causality be the opposite? I'm not exercising; therefore I feel lethargic and depressed. And just testing that.

And like you said, when you have a bunch of people around you and you have other things to do that require you to be interacting with other entities and occupied, it's very hard to be self absorbed in a way that spirals downward.

Naval Ravikant: It's certainly one way you can help not being depressed or lonely is if you constantly have other people's houses to go to and lives you can step into. And of course, you don't get to make that choice because other people don't always invite you into their lives or houses. But what you can do is you can open your house to other

people. You can open your life to other people. You can love other people, even if they don't love you back, it's okay. Real love is a one way thing. What we call love mostly in modern society is attachment. It's not love.

It's I'm loving you, in exchange you love me. I do this for you, you do that for me. That's a transaction. But if you really admire someone for their values, if you really love them for who they are, it doesn't matter how they treat you. You just treat them the way they deserve to be treated. This is all karma. Karma is just people are very consistent with their actions and their behaviors. And so over a long enough time period, you get what you deserve.

Tim Ferriss:

Yes. And for people who feel lonely out there, two recommendations that I've seen help a lot of people, including myself, check out Couchsurfing. Consider becoming a host for Couchsurfing. And take a look at acro yoga. If you're in a place where you can find acro yoga practice, it is one of the most enjoyable, awesome things you'll ever do.

Two more quick questions. If you could have one billboard anywhere with anything on it, what would it say, where would you put it?

Naval Ravikant:

I don't know if I have messages to send to the world but there are messages I like to send to myself at all times. One message that really stuck with me when I figured this out is what is desire. Desire is a contract you make with yourself to be unhappy until you get what you want. I don't think most of us realize that's what it is. I think we go about desiring things all day long and then wondering why we're unhappy.

So I like to stay aware of that because then I can choose my desires very carefully. I try not to have more than one big desire in my life at any given time. And I also recognize that as the axis of my suffering. I realize that that's where I've chosen to be unhappy. So I think that is an important one. Or even a simpler one is like you said, you did a transcendental meditation course.

They give you a mantra. The mantra is supposed to have actually no meaning. Maybe the universal mantra that's been derived through the ages is "ohm," where you kind of just sit there and say "ohm" in your mind to yourself. It's strange. You can say it to yourself all day long in your mind and it will make you happy and more peaceful. You start chanting it out loud and they'll lock you up.

Tim Ferriss: Similar to I will be an amazing cartoonist.

Naval Ravikant: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: I want to interview the guy who sat outside the bathroom and was like, there's no fucking way I'm going in there; I'm going to get murdered.

Naval Ravikant: Exactly, until Scott Adams shuts up. Ohm has no meaning, I think. But to me, it has a meaning and the meaning is just accept.

Just accept. In any situation in life, you only have three options. You always have three options. You can change it, you can accept it, or you can leave it. Those are your three options. What is not a good option is to sit around wishing you would change it but not changing it, wishing you would leave it but not leaving it, and not accepting it. So it's that struggle, that aversion that is responsible for most of our misery. So probably the phrase that I use the most to myself in my head is I just tell myself one word: accept.

So any time I look at myself and I'm judging something, I just say "accept." And it's only very, very few things that I will choose not to accept. And if I don't accept something, it's for one of two reasons. Either I'm aware that this is something that's just so important to me right now that I can't accept it, and now I'm going to put up with a mental battle for it; or more likely I've just lost control of my thoughts. I'm no longer present. I'm dreaming. I'm in the highly emotional state.

Tim Ferriss: I need to do more of that myself. I'm sure that we could go on for a very long time, and I'm sure we will continue to do this another time. But what ask, if any, or request would you make of the people listening to this?

Naval Ravikant: I think I love books, I love to learn, I want to be good at everything that matters to me for my own reasons, not to impose or show off anything to anybody else. So what I would ask you is what is the one book that you've read that had the greatest influence on your life? It could be anything. But with the realization that all knowledge is ultimately personal. We should never be taking our advice and thoughts in pre-bundled beliefs and systems. Both Bruce Lee and Christian Mortey were real believers in this.

Bruce Lee set up the school of ji kun do, which was his style of fighting that he created. He set up the school and then he had a

realization that all real learning is unique to the person who's doing the learning and you cannot be taught; you have to learn for yourself. So he actually tried to dismantle the school. He decided it wasn't the right way to go about it because the act of teaching alone causes you to formulate a system, and that system traps you from thinking outside of the box and really self discovery.

So I don't want to turn anything that I've recommended, nor what people have recommended to me as a prescription: this is how you should live your life. What I would love to have is just a collection of amazing books that have great insight from people who have solved hard problems. And generally, the older the book, the better it is. That's one of my criteria. So don't hesitate to recommend something that might be 500 years old.

Tim Ferriss: Would you like people to put those in the comments on the blog post that's going to accompany this podcast, let you know on Twitter, what's your preference?

Naval Ravikant: I think either mechanism. The comments would probably be ideal so we have them all in one place. But just pick the one book that has most influenced you. It's probably a dog eared book that you've read five, ten, 20 times. It could be fictional, it could be whatever. It could be embarrassing, it could be sexual; it doesn't matter. Obviously, it had an impact. It moved you in some deep way. You've reread it over and over. You probably have parts of it memorized. What is that book?

Tim Ferriss: Awesome. So guys, answer that question, the one book that's had the biggest impact on you that comes to mind and leave that in the comments. Just go to fourhourworkweek.com/podcast, all spelled out. Or you can just go to fourhourworkweek.com and click on podcast and then you will find this podcast, or you can just search Naval Ravikant, Tim Ferriss podcast and this will pop up. Leave it in the comments.

Naval, where can people find you on the interwebs and learn more about you and what you're up to?

Naval Ravikant: If you go to AngelList, which is just Angel.co, I'm on there as Angel.co/naval. I have a blog, it's StartupBoy.com which is highly neglected; I haven't updated it in years but some of my older, random stuff is there. My Twitter account where I tweet every now and then, some startup stuff, some not is [Twitter.com/Naval](https://twitter.com/Naval). But the reality is you don't need to find me. We all need to find

ourselves. If I have something interesting to say, you'll see it somewhere in the interwebs. The internet is a great thing.

Tim Ferriss: I will encourage people to say hi to you on Twitter. It's [Twitter.com/Naval](https://twitter.com/Naval), N-A-V-A-L and it's especially awesome when Naval gets really riled up about something. It's a full on tweet war with someone, very often Startup L. Jackson. It's great to watch. Naval, thanks so much. This has been great fun.

I always love our walks. I love our walk and talks dinners. We'll find a substitute for the wine that would usually be consumed. I really appreciate you taking the time, man. This is good fun.

Naval Ravikant: Thank you. I really appreciate you having me. I'm happy to engage with people on Twitter. It's actually a great mechanism and medium for having conversations. So if anybody wants to talk on Twitter, let's go ahead and do that. I didn't focus that much on startups and technology and all that stuff, which I know is really what I'm supposed to be talking about. But we can always continue that on Twitter, as well.

Tim Ferriss: There's no supposed to. A lot of people associate you with startups but I think what it is important for people to realize, or at least recognize my intention to be is that you're excellent at startup investing; you're known in that world. But the conversations that we have often center on good thinking and asking good questions. I think the good thinking and the good questions is part of what makes you very good at startup investing.

But those two skills are transferrable almost everywhere. So I wanted to explore non startup areas for two reasons. 1) To try to demonstrate that, and 2) because you talk about startups in so many other places and people should definitely explore more of what you have to say. For those people interested, I'm also on [AngelList](https://angel.co). I do all sorts of stuff and you can see all my Angel investments at [Angel.co/Tim](https://angel.co/Tim). Let us know on Twitter if you'd like us to do a round two and explore other stuff. Until next time Naval, thanks brother.

Naval Ravikant: Thanks, Tim. This has been great.