

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 106: Scott Adams

Show notes and links at tim.blog/podcast

Tim Ferriss: Could you tell me what you had for breakfast, please?

Scott Adams: I had my usual coffee and protein bar while staring out the window and wishing I'd eaten more calories.

Tim Ferriss: Hello, my heterogeneous sapiens, homicidal tomcats. That doesn't make any sense. I was going to say homicidal Homo sapiens but heterogeneous, why don't we say heterogeneous, like erogenous sounds... I don't know. This is Tim Ferriss. Welcome to the Tim Ferriss show.

My job every episode is to deconstruct a world class performer and to show you how they do what they do. What are the favorite books, the routines, the habits? How did they achieve the success they've achieved? Whether they are chess prodigies like Josh Waitzkin, or actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger, director like John Favreau, comedians, athletes, hedge fund managers; we've got everybody, Startup impresarios like Peter Thiel, and so on. This time we have, by request, Scott Adams. Scott Adams is a very famous cartoonist.

He's the creator of the Dilbert comic strip and the author of several different books that are nonfiction. He and I had a very wide ranging conversation. We've met before, and we cover things such as his use of affirmations, written affirmations for the stock market, for success with women, for his career as a cartoonist. We talk about hypnosis, why he became interested in hypnosis, common misconceptions about hypnosis, and how he used different techniques or aspects of what he learned to make Dilbert popular.

Even the name itself, he goes into. We talk about a current fascination of his, which or who is Donald Trump and the negotiator in chief that he is campaigning to become. And why the political press misses a lot of the genius that perhaps the business press should catch. We talk about goals versus systems, so how he has approached his life with systems, in many cases, instead of goals. He and oddly, or perhaps not so coincidentally, share a lot in common there.

We talk about his first ever Dilbert check, the six dimensions of humor, so how can you engineer humor in, say, a comic strip or elsewhere? We talk about the most underrated comic strips and comics in his opinion, how he got into the best shape of his life at 58, and much, much more. It's a really fun conversation. He is one hell of a character, a very hilarious guy as you would hope.

And the banter is, I found, a really good time. So I hope that comes across via audio. And without further ado, please enjoy Scott Adams and say hi to him. It is @ScottAdamsSays on Twitter, so give a hello, give a thank you, give him some feedback and there you have it. The without further ado was a little premature but here we go; without further ado, Scott Adams. Please enjoy.

Tim Ferriss: Scott, my good man, welcome to the show.

Scott Adams: Hey, thanks for having me.

Tim Ferriss: I am so excited to have you on because many of the guests who have been on this podcast are fans of yours. I'm a fan of your work and of you personally and there are a few things I'd like to thank you for. The first is helping me to learn different languages, because I bought the *Dilbert Principle* in many different languages; Chinese, Spanish, German, English as a way to learn conversational languages, number one. And then number two is for your tennis lesson, which was the first proper tennis lesson I've ever had.

So right off the bat, I wanted to thank you for being very good at helping me to make progress in both of those areas.

Scott Adams: Oh, there's so much I can teach you, Tim. We're just getting started.

Tim Ferriss: The languages and tennis go a long way. I feel like have tennis racket and a few words will travel.

Scott Adams: By the way, I've got to tell you, the first time I saw one of my books translated into Portuguese; I had this strange sensation that I could speak the language because I knew what the words said. It was the coolest thing.

Tim Ferriss: That is actually really related, because what I'll do with these languages, if I learn, for instance, Japanese first, then I will use the Japanese and, say, a target language of Spanish to learn the

Spanish. In other words, I already know what's in the book on some level, just like memorizing lines in a movie. But I will use the Japanese to help me learn the Spanish so that they're linked together. And that way, I get to review previous languages while learning new languages.

And I was so impressed with how you were able to teach me tennis, or at least get me up and running with the basics in such a very short period of time. And I feel like you're very methodical in many different areas, and you have methods that other people can use. One of the specific behaviors that I'd love to hear you perhaps elaborate on just right off the bat is the idea of verbal or written affirmations.

So Naval, one of our mutual friends, was on this podcast and he was mentioning that at some point, at least based on his recollection, you had gone into your office at the time and gone into the bathroom and said to yourself in the mirror, "I will be a successful cartoonist," or something like that multiple times. I've also heard that you write things down, say, ten, 15 times. Could you perhaps explain a bit of how you use affirmations, if you do?

Scott Adams: You have accidentally given me the greatest beginning anecdote to a long explanation anybody ever did.

Tim Ferriss: All right.

Scott Adams: True story. Just a few days ago I was having dinner with Naval, and I'm just making conversation; hadn't seen him in awhile. And just randomly, because I knew I was coming on your podcast, I said, "Naval, have you ever done the Tim Ferriss podcast?" And he gets this weird expression on his face and he says, "I just came from there." It was the most random thing any two people could have said to each other after not seeing for awhile. But that weird story is a story about coincidence.

There's no magic that happened there; it was just a strange coincidence, and probably wasn't even a coincidence because of the fact that we both know you, and there's something in the air, and maybe you bunch your interviews in a certain way or think about them in a certain way. So I'm sure there's no real coincidence there, there's just something we didn't see underlying it all. So that's the backdrop for affirmations.

Let me say first that what I'm saying is not my belief, that if you say your affirmations something magic will happen, and the

universe will change in some non science way. I've never made that claim, although often people have put that opinion in my mouth. What I have said is that I've used the technique, and I got a certain experience which I'll be happy to share, and then I tell the story. You can make of it what you will. I have several explanations for why there seems to be what I would call the appearance of an effect. Which, by the way, would be amazing in itself.

Tim Ferriss: Of course.

Scott Adams: If you could give yourself a genuine feeling that you had this superpower, even if it wasn't real, as long as it didn't interfere with your job and nobody thought you were crazy, it would be a cool feeling. So even if it's not real in some sense of reality, it's still worth having, frankly. So I'm going to take as long as I want for this, and you can just cut me off. It's a fun story from beginning to end. A lot of people laughed.

Tim Ferriss: This is what this format is for; long forms so please go for it.

Scott Adams: Alright, so I'm in my 20s. I was taking a course in hypnosis to learn how to become a professional hypnotist and get certified. In my class was a woman who was also interested in a lot of things that I thought were pretty out there; some new-agey stuff. But we became friends. And one day she said, "You've got to try this thing called affirmations. I read about it in a book, and I don't remember the name of the book." So I can't tell you here, because she didn't tell me. And she said: it works like this.

All you do is you pick a goal and you write it down 15 times a day in some specific sentence form, like "I, Scott Adams, will become an astronaut," for example. And you do that every day. Then it will seem as if the universe just starts spitting up opportunities. And it will look to you like these are coincidences, and whether they are or not is less relevant than the fact that they seem to pop up.

So I, of course, being my rational elf, at this point I haven't even decided if hypnosis is a real thing. I'm taking the course to find out, in part. So I'm saying: that seems like a terrible waste of time. There's no science behind that, blah, blah, blah. She convinced me, partly because she was a member of Mensa, that she wasn't dumb.

Tim Ferriss: Step one, that's good.

Scott Adams:

And then secondly, it didn't cost me anything. It was a low investment for something to make her shut up. So I said alright, I'm going to do this. So I picked as my goal that I would have an encounter with a woman who is well beyond my buying power, shall we say. This is pre-Dilbert, so post-Dilbert you get to add a few points to your attractiveness scale. It's not fair, but that's just the way it works. So let's say if I could modestly say I was a 6, hoping to be a 6.5, and let's say she was a 9 just so you get a sense of the monumental task I set in front of myself.

Secondly, I didn't know her. She was just somebody who worked in the company in a different department. So I'll shorten the story just to say lucky things happened, and against all odds, my affirmation came true. So I thought to myself, as everybody would in this situation, well, it's really not the affirmation that worked; that would be crazy. Because even though it was a whole bunch of ridiculous coincidences that put us in the same place at the same time, you wouldn't believe the number of them and I won't tell them here because there are just too many.

But in the end, it was almost like we were fated to meet. Now, I don't believe in that but it just felt like that; that's the experience. So I said to myself: well, I guess I've misinterpreted this and really what happened is, I'm not a 6.5 Dammit, I must be on her level. Or maybe I'm a 7.5 and maybe she's a 9 but she's got poor self image so she didn't know it.

So maybe that's all that happened, right? So I said well, I'm going to have to try something else. So I said alright, I'll try an affirmation of I'll get rich in the stock market. Now, that's kind of a crazy thing to ask for, especially if you don't even have a stock brokerage account open and if you don't have any money to invest. I think I was a poor banking person, banker that I was. And so I started doing that affirmation. And after about a week, I literally woke up in the middle of the night, sat straight up in my bed with a thought firmly in my head that I should buy stock in Chrysler.

Now, at the time, I don't remember the year but if you went through the historical records, it was when Chrysler was flirting with completely going out of business. I don't know if they were officially bankrupt but the government had pumped them up and most observers were saying this is the company that's circling the drain. So it didn't seem like a good idea, but I tried to open my Schwab account anyway and pursue it, just to see.

We're still in A-B testing here, to see if this is real. But the paperwork got mixed up and it took weeks to sort it out. I didn't get my account opened. In the meantime, the stock starts rising. I think it went up 120 percent in the time I wasted trying to open my account. So I thought to myself, damn, I was kind of right. I picked a pretty good stock but my timing's off. So I guess the affirmation thing wasn't really working.

So I didn't buy that stock. If you go back, you'll find out it continued to go up because as it turns out, Chrysler did a turnaround. It was one of the great business success stories of all time. I knew nothing about that except the headline news before I came up with this idea. In other words, there was no story I read, no analyst was ahead of it; it just came from nowhere, or so it seemed. But I lost out because I didn't trust it, I guess. I didn't buy and it became kind of the story stock of the year.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Scott Adams: So I tried it one more time.

I said I think I'll try to buy one more stock, and I did the affirmation. One day I pick up the newspaper and I just had this feeling. I open it up and back in the day when a company was going public, they would sometimes put a big notice in the newspaper. It was a company called ASK Computer, A-S-K, or ASK software, I forget. But they were a new tech company back before tech was anything. And I said: hey, I'm gonna invest in this company; I just feel it. I put in some money. I think it went up 10 percent in a week, whatever it was.

I thought, woo-hoo, I'm a genius. I think I invested about \$1,000; might have made \$100, which was big money for a week of doing nothing. When you're not making enough money to save money, making \$100 for nothing seemed like a big deal. So I'm thinking man, I am so smart. I sold my stock, and that frigging stock went to the moon after I sold it. Now I've got these three data points. And the only thing that stopped me from the two doing very well for me is that I didn't stay with them.

So I said well, it would be dumb if this thing actually has something to it, to set another goal that's relatively modest. So there was another thing I did, first; let me insert that before I went back .I also made a bet with somebody that I would take the GMATS, the test you take to get into a good school for your MBA. I had taken them right after I'd finished my four year degree, and

I'd gotten I think the 77th percentile, which is nowhere near enough to get into a school like Berkeley, which would make a difference in my career.

So I made a bet with somebody who was going to take a prep course. They were going to try to raise their score from the 80s into something, perhaps the 90s, in order to get into a good school, again like Berkeley. So I made a bet, and I don't know why I made this bet. It was just stupid, in retrospect. I bet that I would raise my score from 77th percentile to whatever was her new best score.

So I would beat not only her other score, which already beat me by over 10 points, I think; she was in the high 80s, I think. But I thought I would beat her new score and I wasn't going to take a test preparation course. I was just going to take some practice tests on my own at home. So I did that, but I paired it with the affirmation. And then I also visualized, which is part of the process they tell you to do, very specifically what my score would look like on the exact document I knew I would get because I had taken this test before, years earlier.

So I would imagine in that little box where the cumulative score was, I would see the number 94. And so I just kept focusing on 94 because I figured that would be close enough that if I got anywhere in that range, then I'm probably going to get into a good school if I want to.

So we take the test. Everyone of my practice tests, I got about the same as the first time I took it; somewhere in the high 70s percentile. I take the test. It felt exactly the same as all the practice tests. I didn't feel like I was having a good day or anything.

Weeks pass, the test shows up in the mail. I go to the mailbox, I open the mail, and I open that letter and it's the same kind of format that I'd visualized, so I knew exactly what it looked like. And I looked down into the little box where for weeks I had been visualizing the number 94. And I looked at it, and the fucking thing said 94.

Tim Ferriss: This was after the stock market experience?

Scott Adams: I'm getting my timing mixed up but it was somewhere roughly in that period. So I literally sat there in my little mold covered – literally – apartment in San Francisco in the Haight District. I sat in the chair, and I stared forward for hours. All night long, I would say to myself: I don't think I just saw that. And then I would reach

over on my table, and I would pick up the little report, and I would look at it again. And I would make sure I was scouring the document and not reading like a date or a serial number or something.

And it was right, and I'd put it down. And then I would just repeat that process for hours. And at the end of it, I said, I think I'm going to set my sights higher. And it wasn't long after I decided to start the affirmation, I, Scott Adams would become a famous cartoonist. A few years had passed in between and then some other affirmations, but that's essentially the path I took.

So the odds of becoming a famous cartoonist, I think about 2,000 people submit packages to the big syndicates, the people who give you the big contract, your big break. They might pick a half dozen. Of those half dozen, most of them will not make it after a year or two so it's very rare. In fact, Dilbert was probably the biggest breakout, or one of the biggest, in 20 years.

Tim Ferriss: Just to look at the affirmations, I have a number of questions about this and then I want to ask you about God's debris, also because I think maybe there's an interesting tie-in.

Scott Adams: If I could, because I think your listeners want to hear this. I don't want to interrupt you here but...

Tim Ferriss: No, interrupt all you want.

Scott Adams: The two other affirmations that are notable was I said I would become a No. 1 bestselling author before I'd ever written a book. And I'd never taken a class in writing, except a two day course in business writing, and that was it. And the *Dilbert Principle* became the No. 1 bestselling book. The next time I used it, because after that pretty much everything I wanted, I got. With success, you don't need the affirmation so much because everything starts being attracted to you automatically.

But there was a period, and I know you're going to ask about this later, where I lost my voice. I couldn't speak for three and a half years.

Tim Ferriss: The spasmodic dysphonia.

Scott Adams: Yeah, and we'll talk about that later, I think. That was the next time I used affirmations. And the affirmation was: I, Scott Adams,

will speak perfectly. Now, I realize I don't speak perfectly, but when we get to that story you'll see that there's more to it.

Tim Ferriss: If you were to look at just the mechanics of these affirmations, are you sitting down in the morning and writing down 15 lines, kind of like Bart Simpson on the chalkboard, on a piece of paper? How exactly were you doing it? And then how do you personally explain it?

Scott Adams: How do I explain it?

Tim Ferriss: Exactly.

Scott Adams: I'll tell you exactly how I did it but then I'll also tell you that I'm positive the exact method doesn't matter. I think what matters is the degree of focus and the commitment you have to that focus. Because the last affirmation I mentioned was primarily done in my head while driving, but continuously for years; about three years. The way I did it back in those times was I used a pencil or a pen and a piece of paper, and I wrote the same sentence 15 times, once a day, I think.

There would be nothing wrong with doing it twice a day except it's twice as hard. So I don't think there's a reason you should do it twice a day. I don't know if 15 is magic; I'm sure ten would get you there. 20 might be better, but I doubt it. I don't think it matters. And by the way, these are the questions everybody asks me all the time: do you save the piece of paper? No. You don't save the paper; the paper is irrelevant. If you type it, I'm positive you'll get the same result. I don't know if this works. Again, I'm not telling you that affirmations is a thing that actually happens, as opposed to a perception that you have.

But I'm sure the perception at least would be the same if you were typing it, as opposed to writing it. So I think all the details don't matter. Here's why I think it seems to work, and there are several possibilities for that. One is something I learned long ago, and I forget who coined it but have you ever heard the phrase, "reticular activation?"

Tim Ferriss: I have, yes.

Scott Adams: It's basically the idea that it's easy to hear your own name spoken in a crowd.

You'll hear background noise blah, blah, blah, Tim Ferriss, blah, blah, blah. And you're like, how did I hear that one thing in this whole bunch of crowd noise? So basically your brain isn't capable of processing everything in its environment, or even coming close. So the best it can do is set up these little filters. And the way it sets its filters is by what you pay attention to; it's what you spend the most energy on. It's how you focus your memory. That's how you set your filter. So your filter is automatically set for your name, because that's the thing that matters most to you.

But you can use these affirmations, presumably – this is just a hypothesis – to focus your mind and your memory on a very specific thing. And that would allow you to notice things in your environment that might have already been there. It's just that your filter was set to ignore, and then you just tune it through this memory and repetition trick until it widens a little bit to allow some extra stuff in. Now, there is some science to back that.

Dr. Richard Wiseman did some studies on luck. He was trying to find out if people actually have real luck; can they guess the future better than other people? And the answer, as you might guess, and I'm sure the people listening to this podcast are all rationalists and skeptics, and you know that he found nothing. Nobody can guess random events better than other people. But he did another test, which I'll shorten here but the idea was that people who expected to be lucky, that people who labeled themselves lucky and looked at for luck everywhere, were a little bit better at finding it.

In other words, just actually noticing it in the environment. So if your filter is tuned to this thought: hey, I think there's something out there lucky; let me look for it. Where's Waldo, where's Waldo? There' Waldo. You're going to find a little bit more and more often than the guy who says there's nothing to look for; I already know everything's going to go wrong. I'll tell you tomorrow: tomorrow is going to be me going wrong, bad day, Eeyore, rah, rah.

So that guys just not looking for anything. So now, let me give you an anecdote to tie that together. During the time I was telling myself I wanted to be a cartoonist, how do you do that? This was pre internet. I didn't know where to search for it. I didn't know anybody. I came home and I noticed something I'd never seen before. Maybe it had always been there, I don't know. But I noticed a show, a TV show, about how to become a cartoonist. And I wrote to the host of the show and asked him for some advice. He gave it to me.

Short story even shorter, that set me on the road to know how to buy the book that I needed and submit my materials and that sort of thing. Now, you could say that was just a coincidence because maybe that show only aired once. I think it was on public TV so it actually aired lots of times. But there might have been other things I would have noticed. It wasn't just that one thing I could have noticed; I might have noticed other things that would have sent me on a different path but also toward this thing I'd been focusing on.

Now, the other possibility, every rational person in the audience is screaming at their speaker right now: you idiot, this is selective memory. What's really happening is there are lots of times you were focusing on things and doing affirmations and you just freaking forgot those times.

Tim Ferriss: Right, it's a survivorship bias.

Scott Adams: I say absolutely, that's completely possible. But I just told you my story, and I can tell you that I don't have a memory in all of those years of trying it when it didn't work. I do have plenty of memories of when it hadn't worked yet. Like I said, the voice problem took years. And I suppose if I were doing one in particular right now, that I could say it hadn't happened yet. So there's that. But there's also just the fact that it may be a self identification thing.

What I mean by that is I have a view that we're mostly moist robots. The environment is programming us and we've got a little DNA that's like our operating system. But basically, you start with that and it can't vary a lot. Your DNA is a little bit of a window of how much your nature can change. But that's like a computer. And then the environment programs it within its parameters. So you've got that going on. So you've got a person who's getting programmed by their environment, but they don't know that. They think they're making decisions and using their free will.

So it could be that all that's happening is that a person who's willing to write down their goal 15 times a day has at their disposal, without necessarily knowing it, a subconscious that is totally on their side. In other words, there's something in the subconscious that is overriding the conscious and saying: you know, Scott, we're going to do this thing. You haven't figured it out, yet.

But I'm doing the affirmations, doing the affirmations. So what I'm suggesting is, it's not the affirmations that are making something happen. This thing is going to happen because my subconscious already decided that I have these objectives, I have these goals and I'm going to chew through a freaking wall to make these happen. And I have some capabilities so I can chew. I'm a good chewer. So maybe all that's happening is that a person like me, who has a subconscious that's guiding him towards this very specific outcome, is also the same person who's willing to write it down 15 times.

So in other words, the causation is exactly backwards from how it looks. I'm already that person who's going to make this happen, and I'm also, by coincidence, a person who's so intent on it that I'll try anything and one of those things just happens to be writing stuff down 15 times.

Tim Ferriss: It's like looking at parents who credit being good parents with buying books A, B, and C. And you're like maybe it's just that the people who are predisposed to being good parents are the same people who are likely to buy a bunch of books and study how to become good parents.

Scott Adams: Yeah. And maybe, just maybe, I've got three siblings who were raised in identical situations and we all turned out completely different. You just say that to anybody and watch them get the doe in the headlights look, like okay, you just changed everything I know about life; I will now erase that.

Tim Ferriss: But you bring up a couple of really important topics and I think helpful lenses through which to view behaviors. So the first is this potential combination of optimism and being an opportunist, which I think perhaps the affirmations triggers. So for instance, people might say the people who go to Silicon Valley are more successful because they're driven. They go to Silicon Valley; they build tech companies and so on. I would argue there's probably more to that story.

And one plausible explanation is people in Silicon Valley believe certain impossibles are possible, whereas they wouldn't be in a peer group elsewhere that would support that. So they're encouraged to try these things that would seem doomed to fail in many other parts of the world. And if you're able to achieve that in isolation by using these affirmations, then you have this sort of naïve optimism that then provides you with this, like you said, selective attention and optimism where you'll write to the host of

the TV show. It's kind of like the sixth sense and noticing the red doorknob.

Or you buy a new car and then you go out and you see the new car everywhere. It's not that everyone went out and bought the same car to be like you; it's that you're now noticing it. How did you decide to write *God's Debris*? What is the story behind that? Because when I pinged my audience to ask what they would like to know from you, many people are familiar with Dilbert; I would suspect a lot of people are probably not familiar with *God's Debris*.

But the premise and everything about the book is really fascinating. Can you describe how that came about?

Scott Adams:

For the listeners not familiar with *God's Debris*, that's a non humor, non Dilbert book I wrote in 2001, I think. It's essentially a conversation between a delivery man and the smartest person in the world that he meets by accident, he thinks. The challenge of the book was to write in the voice of someone who is allegedly the smartest person in the world; someone who literally knows everything.

Now, the problem is since I don't know everything, how do you figure that out? So my writer solution was a version of Occam's razor, sort of a bastardized version in which I simply had the alleged smartest person in the world say the things that seemed like the simplest explanations.

And it turns out, when you read the simplest explanation, even if it's not what you were already set to believe or already did believe, it's very compelling anyway. It's just one of those ways your brain is wired that simplicity looks compelling, i.e. Ronald Regan, i.e. Donald Trump; simplicity is always compelling. But the larger part, the content of the book – and this won't mean as much to the people who haven't read it but it will mean a whole bunch to the people who have – you're probably wondering how the hell does anybody think of those different ideas and have them fit together in the same book?

That's one of the questions I get asked the most And the answer is you don't do it intentionally. That stuff does not happen because you had a plan. That book is the result of literally my lifetime up to that point; it was 40-ish years, I forget.

All the strange thoughts I'd had, and one specific moment in my shower, at which I realized: holy hell, these are all the same idea and they have a theme which I can now weave them together into one grand idea. Which, if I put it in the voice of someone not myself, and put it in the form of fiction, it will give the reader the same feeling I had when the sense came to me in the shower, where I got a full body tingle. I felt like maybe everything I knew was wrong. Not really, but I'm talking about a sensation, just a feeling.

And I thought, is there any way to package that? Is there a way to write that down so somebody could get that feeling I had in the shower when I took things from left field, right field, and married orange with the number 12 and explained to you why it's all really the same thing? Could I make somebody have that experience? That's what I tried to do with the book. I used throughout it a lot of techniques that I learned in hypnosis classes to strengthen the impact.

And in the forward, I give the reader plenty of clues that this is a thought experiment; it's not a typical novel. It's not a story like they're used to.

Tim Ferriss: What were some of the techniques from hypnosis that you implemented?

Scott Adams: If I told you, would that be a spoiler?

Tim Ferriss: If it gives away the plotline... or maybe the broader question is how have you incorporated it? Because I'm an uninformed when it comes to hypnosis. I don't think anything about it. So I'd be just very curious how you've implemented hypnosis into your life, I suppose is the broader question.

Scott Adams: So first of all, the way I use hypnosis is too broadly for the public. Most people are thinking of a stage hypnotist and something they saw in a movie where somebody was programmed to kill the president or something. I'm not talking about any of that stuff, or anything that involves a trance. I'm talking about the science of persuasion, stuff that's science tested and things that are pretty well known and understood.

So I'll give you one example just to illustrate it. My challenge, when I have a book that most of it is two people talking, is that you will get bored. So I need to continually put you in the place of one of the characters. You can't be in the place of the smartest person

in the world. Because by definition, you just can't get there. But you can be in the place of the person who's listening to it and not buying it. There's no way you can buy it in its unfinished form. It's sort of like, what's the game that you doodle and people try to guess your doodles? Pictionary.

Tim Ferriss: Pictionary, yes.

Scott Adams: You need a certain amount of clues before anybody's going to get it; nobody gets it on the first line. So that was the experience I was going for. I completely lost my train of thought thinking about Pictionary.

Tim Ferriss: We were talking about persuasion and hypnosis.

Scott Adams: Right. The method I used was whenever the world's smartest person said something that I knew everyone reading it would think: oh, God, there's ten obvious reasons why that's stupid; I would just have the person say, "I think there's ten obvious reasons why that's stupid." I'm paraphrasing myself but in other words, I make my character say the thing you just thought.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Scott Adams: That's a little different than traditional fiction where I'm making the character lead you all the way. So this is a technique in hypnosis. You would call it pacing and leading. In persuasion, you'd have other names for it. But the idea is I'm you, so I would match you in some way. If you were doing a standard induction, the way you would match somebody would be matching their breathing, matching their level of maybe anxiety, to the way they talk.

You might try to pick the same language type they use. If somebody uses angry words and war words, you'd start out using them; that's pacing. So you're matching them so they feel comfortable with you, they bond with you, they link to you. Your brains kind of become psychologically linked. If one person pulls, the other one feels the tug. Just the way any relationship is, right? Just the normal way two people act when they're together.

So all you're doing is setting up a thing where you're pacing, and then that sets them up for the leading. Because the leading in this case is something so outrageously unexpected that without the leading, I could never take them to the new place.

Tim Ferriss: It's a lot like judo, actually, in so much as when you're connected to someone, first you have to tether with the hand grips. And then once you've done that, you try to lead your opponent into a pattern that you are leading, like a dance, so that you can control where they step with either foot. And then at that point, you can control unbalancing.

So you can then do with them whatever you want, once they've kind of entrained their stepping pattern to yours, which sounds pretty similar.

Scott Adams: God, do you know how much that makes me want to go wrestle somebody right now?

Tim Ferriss: The foot sweeps in judo are just beautiful, so elegant.

Scott Adams: You know, I've never heard of that explanation of judo, which instantly makes me interested in it and I had no interest in it whatsoever before, so nicely done.

Tim Ferriss: My pleasure, my pleasure. Judo is, especially if people search foot sweeps, judo foot sweeps on YouTube for instance; it's just one of the most beautiful demonstrations of paired physics where one person is using an opponent's energy against them. But it can certainly, I think, have a lot of parallels in conversation and just human interaction. How were you introduced to hypnosis? You took this class that you'd mentioned.

But what spared your interest? And for those people who are not familiar with hypnosis and have only seen the stage performers and so on, how do you sniff out someone who's truly a master at hypnosis? And maybe that's too broad; maybe there are a bunch of different types. And how do you sniff out kind of the charlatans that you shouldn't really pay much attention to?

Scott Adams: Did you read my blog on Trump?

Tim Ferriss: No, I haven't. I'm not leading, in this case.

Scott Adams: So that was the most accidentally perfect question anybody ever asked so nicely done.

Tim Ferriss: Thanks.

Scott Adams: So let me start at the beginning. My mother delivered, gave birth to my little sister while under hypnosis, and did not use any

painkillers. She did not feel pain, and she was awake the whole time.

Tim Ferriss: That's incredible.

Scott Adams: I left a dramatic pause after that but I forgot we're doing a podcast and everybody went to check their equipment.

Sorry about that. But that had a huge impact on me. So it turns out our family doctor was a trained hypnotist, and he handled the birth and he just offered her that option. Let me be quick to point out that there's sort of a rule of one in five in hypnosis. And that is that one in five people are able to go into a state that is that extreme. In other words, somebody who can simply block pain, or somebody who could see something that wasn't really in the room. Now, keep in mind that in all these cases, these people are completely aware and awake and they can stop the sensation any way they want, any time they want.

But if you're giving birth, you're not going to be going out of your way to stop the sensation of stopping pain, right? So nobody's controlling you. It's more like a coach working with an elite player. The coach is not doing it. The coach is saying: hey, crossover dribble, go under your leg left, jog right. So that had a huge impact on me.

So it got me interested in that and other things. And so when I was in my 20s, and I realized that a guy who works as a bank teller and drives a car which one girlfriend affectionately – she had a terrible name for it but I can't say it on the air.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, sure you can. Of course you can say it.

Scott Adams: I realize there's a reason; not because it's a profanity. I just can't say it.

Tim Ferriss: Just to trade, I had a hand me down van from my mom and the back seats were stolen so all my coworkers started calling it the Molester Mobile. That was the nickname for my car.

Scott Adams: Okay, you win on the car. Anyway, I thought I need an edge, career-wise, dating-wise and if there's anything to this, at the very least I'm terribly curious about what it is and what it isn't. and you figure, you're mother's not going to lie to you about childbirth. That's something that became like a central story of your youth. It

was kind of a big deal. It doesn't seem like the thing she would have made up.

So her credibility was high, and I thought: well, let me check this thing out. But again, 20 percent of people can have that kind of experience, and the family doctor obviously, you become trained in quickly identifying who those people are so he knew. But all the rest of the people can get substantial benefits. So unfortunately, I'm in the 80 percent that can't get those extreme benefits but the stuff I can get is immense, and it includes the ability to craft a book the way I did that includes a lot of technique I used for making Dilbert popular.

For example, the reason Dilbert has no last name, the reason you don't know what town he lives in, you don't know the name of his company. And here's a first for a comic strip, I think, the second main character is the boss in terms of time on screen. And he doesn't have any name at all.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Scott Adams: That all comes out of hypnosis training.

And what I do is I allow the reader to imbue the characters with as much of what they love as they possibly can, without giving them a hard stop. In other words, if I said this is Dilbert Goldberg, all of the anti Semites would say, I don't really relate to that Goldberg guy. Any name you give him, somebody's going to be a hater. So you're taking people out of the equation as soon as you name him. Maybe it's a name they've heard of. There's a reason why it's Dilbert and not Bob, you know?

Tim Ferriss: It's a preexisting association.

Tim Ferriss: So all of that is just classic, well understood hypnosis training. But again, I'm not hypnotizing the audience; I'm simply giving them a better product. So keep in mind that when I talk about hypnosis, I include things like negotiating, obviously, selling, marketing but also design, the product design.

Tim Ferriss: Sorry to pause you but I'd just love to ask, because I think like most people, when I think hypnosis I think trance for the purpose of overcoming pain, being as stiff as a board between two chairs, etc. How would you define hypnosis, then, in this case? Because I'm listening to what you're describing and I'm like wow, okay, you have elements like the narrative structure, storytelling,

persuasion, negotiation; it covers a lot of basis. So how do you define hypnosis?

Scott Adams:

I think everybody ends up with their own definition of it if they have any experience with it. Because I don't think there's any one definition everybody's going to agree with. For me, it is a connection with either one person, or if you're doing it to a group, if you're trying to persuade a group you're connecting to the group. You're getting this sort of pacing and leading thing going on, you're building trust. And then you're using usually words as sort of the programming language, if you will. Linguistics are the user interface for this moist robot that we are.

So if you want to program your head, you pick words. If any of you saw – it went viral recently. There was an article in the Onion, which was this funny article about a company that allegedly used their complete despair and hopelessness as the thing that bound them together. But it was the most masterfully written thing; I wish I could tell you the writer's name. but the choice of words puts you in a completely different mental state. It's just the most brilliant word choice in a piece of writing you'll see.

And I try to do that, too. So when I'm writing, and I don't know if you use the same method, I write in layers. So there's a first draft, second draft. But somewhere towards the end, the final layer, I look at every word I use and I say: is there a word that will work on an emotional level, or a different level, or just a more perfect level? Something that will make you remember it, something that will keep you awake that means exactly the same thing?

So here's an example. If I said to the audience, and I do this in front of crowds so you at home can play along and shout to the answer, but I already know the answer. I'm going to give you two words that mean about the same. You tell me out loud, and Tim, you can play along. Just say the one of the two words – they both mean about the same – that's the funnier one. Which one is funnier, pull or yank?

Tim Ferriss:

Yank.

Scott Adams:

Yeah. And everybody at home just said the same thing. So language does have that much specific control over the way you think. And so science and hypnosis was kind of a precursor to a lot of the studies that have borne out a lot of what hypnotists found by trial and error; that you can manipulate the brain by what people concentrate on, what words you put in there, what you make them

focus on, what you tie to their habits; there's just lots of ways you can program the box.

Tim Ferriss: Language is mind control, right? You can very easily make people think any number of things or feel any number of things by using this sort of symbology that we've created known as language. I've just been so fascinated by that for so long. Do you find, then, is writing an indirect way of developing the skill sets that would make you a fast learner in hypnosis? Or does it not really pour over that cleanly?

Scott Adams: I would say that learning to be a writer, you're only going to maybe brush accidentally on the level that I'm even talking about.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Scott Adams: Like everybody knows "hey," that's a good word. But you need to go to the next level. If you're saying to yourself, I am putting together a logical argument, and this word is the perfect word for my argument because it means the best thing, because remember in my example, yank and pull aren't really the same thing, are they?

Tim Ferriss: No, they're not.

Scott Adams: Because you've got a different sense, and that's why one was funnier. But it also had a Y in it, and it had a K in it so there are two levels of funniness built into the word. So I will consciously make a choice to get rid of a more accurate word to put in a word that has more of a programming control. You want people to have an experience, because that's what they're going to remember. They're not going to remember what word choice you used.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Scott Adams: This dovetails exactly into my loud defense of Donald Trump's methods, which I've been writing about all week on the internet.

Tim Ferriss: I've seen some of the fireworks so please say more.

Scott Adams: Let me draw a line for you. I'll say in advance, this is conspiracy theory talk. So you don't have to say it; none of the listeners have to tell me that. So it's just for fun. There is a connection between Donald Trump and me.

There is an individual between us. That individual happens to be the father of hypnosis, Milton Erickson.

Tim Ferriss: Milton Erickson.

Scott Adams: Milton Erickson, a name known only to people who study hypnosis, usually, or psychology. So he was a linguist – well, I'm not sure if he was a linguist but he put a lot of this stuff together, mostly by instinct, I think, at the beginning. And his school is the school of hypnosis that I ended up going to. It was a different school with a few differences, but basically I grew out of that.

Also out of the Erickson school are a couple of people; John Grinder, I think – I hope I didn't get the name wrong – who developed NLP, neuro linguistic programming, which is a way to use largely words as a programming language, although they don't market it that way. NLP is marketed with a lot of stuff that I don't buy into. But there's a core of it that comes from hypnosis which matches pretty exactly with what the scientific studies and current psychology would expect.

So there's a part of it that's real strong and powerful, but it's probably the minority of it. Most of it is people being stiff as boards between two chairs, that sort of stuff. Now, the most famous practitioner of NLP, the person who got his inspiration from it, is Tony Robbins. Tony Robbins has been a business associate with Donald Trump. They worked together on some kind of program about success. You can see their videos of them talking one after another. If you Google them, you'll see them standing together on Google images, etc.

Now, I have no reason to believe that they ever had a conversation on the methods of persuasion. I think Trump is first of all a natural, because he's been doing it for a long time. But if you look at his recent work, that has Erickson's fingerprints all over it.

Let me give you an example, and I wrote about this so if you want to see the details, it's at Dilbert.com in my blog. But take the debate where he came in as the under prepared buffoon who was going to blow himself up. And Megyn Kelly of Fox News decided that yes, that's exactly what was going to happen, and she started right out with the "did you say all these bad things about women" quote. Now, every other politician would have been smeared off the stage by that because it wouldn't matter what he said back. It wouldn't matter what the response was because the question itself, like NLP...

Tim Ferriss: It's so incriminating.

Scott Adams: Yes. The question is the content. The logic of the answer, maybe somebody said, “oh, that was taken out of context,” or whatever, which is what people usually say. And it usually is; that’s actually usually true. But the public isn’t going to hear that. They’re just going to hear the feeling that they felt when Megyn Kelly said that person’s name, bad to women.

That’s really like the beginning and the end of the thinking for, let’s say, at least 20 percent of the public; about the same 20 percent that can easily be hypnotized, coincidentally. But what did Trump do? As soon as that question came up, he semi-interrupted her and he said, “Only Rosie O’Donnell.” That, my friend, is hypnosis. He took an anchor that everybody could visualize, and his core audience already had a negative impression. Their negative impression of Rosie O’Donnell almost certainly was bigger, stronger, and visual and more important than whatever Megyn Kelly just said, which should have been a full house.

She showed him four kings and he deeded her hand, and he did it without even trying. And he did it with a method which is well understood. It’s a negotiating technique. You throw down an anchor, you divert everybody. And so instead of becoming this sexist, which he could have been on day one, he became the straight talker.

And he admitted in the very next sentence that he’d also said bad things about other women.

Tim Ferriss: He has some really interesting ...

Scott Adams: But wait.

Tim Ferriss: Go ahead, go ahead.

Scott Adams: There’s a better part. It gets better.

Tim Ferriss: I’m ready.

Scott Adams: Now, I know you follow the headlines so you know what happened next. Roger Hales of Fox News weighed in to say we need to make peace with Donald Trump because this is getting out of hand. And Donald Trump made peace with him. How do you interpret that? I’ll tell you how I interpret it. I interpret it as Donald Trump just bought Fox News without paying a freaking penny. Because if

they want him to appear on his show, that's up to him. And he just proved he doesn't need them.

So he's going to get all the press he wants without Fox News. If they want to get on the program and support the guy who's probably going to be the nominee, that's what I've predicted because of his hypnosis skills in particular, having nothing to do with his policies, by the way; I'll get to that. I'm not a fan of the policies, but I don't think he is, either. They're opening, negotiating gambits as he does.

So he effectively changed the debate, became the straight talker, took control of Fox News all in one day. And all of that is straight out of the hypnotist's playbook, although he would call it persuasion. He might call it negotiating. He literally wrote the book, *The Art of the Deal*. Let me show this to you again so you see the pattern. So if you saw his immigration plan, it's like the most ridiculous thing in the world.

It's like, build a giant fence. Make Mexico pay for it. As if they want to do that. Round up 11 million Mexicans who have been in the country for awhile and send them back. Change the Constitution to get rid of their birthright. Alright, I'm saying it with my mocking voice.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Scott Adams: But then I'm going to reverse it around and tell you that if you evaluate him as a politician, which is what the political writers are all doing in correctly right now, that's the most ridiculous bag of shit anybody ever proposed to the country because it has no chance of happening in that form. It's just not going to happen.

But he's not a politician. He's a businessman and he's a hypnotist, and he just gave you an anchor. And his anchor is look at what I'm going to do. Everybody get excited. Let's talk about changing the Constitution. Let's talk about the cost and the heartbreak and the misery that it would cause to these 11 million people I'm proposing we kick out of the country. Let's talk about how expensive that fence is. And then, when he gets to negotiate with Congress, guess what he gives off? He gives it away. Because the only thing he wanted was the fence. The only thing he wanted was the fence.

But can you say in your plan, I'm going to give everybody a free pass after we build the fence? No, because that makes immigration explode for the ten years it takes you to build the fence. So you

have to get there the way he got there, and that's the way a businessman would do it. You come in with this ridiculous first offer, you make all the idiots in the media who think he's a politician, even though he screams that he's not, I mean he wrote a book on this stuff.

I think it was the No. 1 bestseller. He could not be more clear or more honest about what he's doing as he does it. But it's still invisible because you're looking at him as a politician. And saying if his goal is to do this thing, it's a stupid goal. He's not going to kick out 11 million people; nobody's going to go for that. That's not the game, it will never be the game. I almost guarantee you that if he gets approval to build the fence, he'll probably get some Mexican funding, not completely but it will be enough to say: look, nobody else was even going to ask for half.

I got you half of this paid for. If he does that, people will wet their pants. And then he's going to say – I guarantee it – he's going to say, and now this imagines he gets nominated and becomes president so I guess I can't guarantee anything. But if it got to this situation, the likely outcome would be that he would say: look, that 11 million people, yeah, I guess it would be hard to round them out. Why don't we say that if you stay out of jail for X number of years, you pay your taxes, you register, you do some useful things, we'll make an exception in your case just for practicality, because that's what a business person does.

And by the way, I got my fence built. Now, my brand, brand America, is exclusive for the first time. And that's why you hired me. You hired me to be a brand manager. You didn't hire me to tell the truth on my first offer. You offered me to negotiate. He's literally running for the office of negotiator in chief, and practicing his craft. And he's doing it with such brilliance that I don't think I've ever seen anybody do it this well except, oh, I can think of one other person. Let's see. There was Bill Clinton, who also is good friends with Tony Robbins.

Tim Ferriss: I love the web. It's like six degrees of Kevin Bacon.

Scott Adams: And by the way, and I'll say this at the end because I went on for awhile, I'm not suggesting there's a grand conspiracy there. It's a fact that all those things are connected.

That doesn't mean the influence is running through them in some one way direction like I described. If you use that as a possible one of your filters to explain what's going on with the Trump

campaign. I just read in the news a writer saying essentially nobody understands why he's rising in the polls. And I'm saying, exactly, and you won't understand, either.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, and I think it's also hard sometimes for people, particularly in the day-to-day news cycle, just the churn of constant noise with hours that need to be filled on TV and pages that need to be filled in newspapers, that you need attention. It's kind of like the Glen Gary, Glen Ross, Alec Baldwin always be closing speech with the attention, interest, desire, action. You have to have the attention first, and Donald Trump is very good at doing that. The other technique that I had never seen, and he uses it all the time but it doesn't seem o lose its efficacy.

It's one of these sort of guilty until proven innocent approaches, or it's a retort. Which is, he'll say, "Check your facts; next question," with any journalist. And it throws them off balance just enough because they're like: oh, shit, did my researchers miss the one citation that refuted everything that I'm actually laying on this particular person? And so whether it's Matt Lauer or anyone else, he'll be like, "Matt, check your facts. Next question." And they're as good as dead. It's brilliant in a way, and that's not to say I would want Donald Trump running the country. But I do admire the ringmanship.

Scott Adams: Let me weigh in on that for a moment. Look how many ways that could have been done incorrectly. Suppose he simply said, "Matt, your facts are wrong."

Tim Ferriss: That's right.

Scott Adams: It totally doesn't work.

Tim Ferriss: Totally different, yeah. Totally different.

Scott Adams: Check your facts is what I call the high ground maneuver, which I also write about. It's the same thing Jobs did when he explained away Antennagate just by saying, "All smart phones have problems. We're trying to make our customers happy." He made a national story go away in less than 30 seconds with those two sentences. He took the high ground. And everybody said, "Oh wait a minute, we've been talking about you." "Well yeah, I guess that's just kind of normal when you think about smartphones, and I'm sure glad I have a smartphone so I guess that's just normal."

So what Trump does, if you said your facts are wrong, then he set the world, Matt Lauer against Donald Trump and anybody who liked Matt Lauer better than Donald Trump, yeah, they're going to side with him. But instead, he said "Check your facts." He said, "I'm a person with more information," which actually seems pretty consistent because it's his world. Like we were talking about his facts. It's not Matt Lauer's facts. Matt Lauer's a guy who studied up ten minutes before the interview. So you say that to me and I just laugh and say, "Okay, I don't know what the truth is here, Donald, but probably you're right." It's just brilliant.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's really, really clever. I want to shift gears just for a second because I love this type of deconstruction, and I'd love to chat a little bit about goals versus systems. And just to hear you perhaps talk about how you think about your life in those terms or not.

Scott Adams: Yes. You want me to just jump right in and define those two things?

Tim Ferriss: Yes, please. That would be very helpful.

Scott Adams: Alright. This was written in my book, *How to Fail in Almost Everything and Still Win Big*. And the idea is if you have a goal oriented approach to the world, that that's an approach that made perfect sense 200 years ago if you were a farmer and you had a simple operation, and you thought if you cleared another ten acres before winter, you could grow more corn, you were almost certainly right.

So clearing those ten acres before winter was a perfectly good goal and it made perfect sense to pursue it. But now fast forward. It's modern times. There's probably more technology, more complexity in your pocket right now, in your smartphone, than the farmer had in his entire operation. Today if you're focused on one thing for more than a minute and a half, there's a good chance that that thing is no longer worth having. There are people going to school for degrees that won't mean anything even four years from now when they get out of school.

So you've got people who are making plans with a clear focus in a world that no longer supports a clear path to anything. So what's the alternative in a world where if you can't predict the future, and on top of that, even if you could predict it and you picked a goal, and you marched right at it, when you got there there's a really good chance that you would have said: you know, I didn't notice

there were five other goals that were way better than this one, because they emerged while you were focusing on your goal.

So if you're not keeping your eye on the whole of it, and if you're not playing the odds and you're picking a moon shot as your way to go through life, you're going to feel like you're failing not only if you miss the moon, but you're going to feel like a failure all the way to the moon because you haven't gotten to the moon yet, and you're not quite sure if you're going to get there. So what's better than that?

And by the way, I still recommend goals heartily for simple situations. So if you enter a bowling tournament, your goal is to win the bowling tournament. It's a simple situation. And usually when it's a human made construct, they are simplified and therefore a goal makes sense. Here's what may not make sense. Let's say you said my goal is to get my boss's job. That's a pretty common goal. That's stupid because your boss's job is just one of the many things that could be better than what you're doing now.

And the chances are, there's something way better than that; your boss's boss's job, for example. What are you doing about that? How about some job at another company? How about a lateral move that gets you in a better place to go higher later? So as soon as you focus, you've given yourself something to fail at and you've closed yourself out from the other opportunities. So what I write about instead is what I call a systems way of looking at the world. In which you are continually looking at ways to improve your odds in some favorable area, some favorable focus without being too specific.

So your area might be business, or art, or whatever it is. The hallmark of a good system is that even as things are failing, you're still improving your odds and your personal worth. So if, for example, I start up a company and it doesn't work, I would say oh, I had a goal, and I started that little startup and it failed, and now the failure.

But if I started a company that was in a field that I already work, let's say making all the contacts that I made through the startup, the networking, the things I learned made me more valuable in the things maybe my day job or the next job I do, then I came out ahead. So that's the system. Let me give you kind of a non business example of that. I had a friend in high school who wanted to have a girlfriend, and I wanted to have a girlfriend but he had kind of a systems approach and I had a goal approach.

My goal approach was I'd pick out the prettiest looking girl in my class and I'd say this girl must be my girlfriend; I will do everything I can to make this happen. I'd do my research and I'd figure out who her friends were, and where I could hang out. It might take me months and at the end of it, it usually ended this way. She'd say one of two things. Either she had a boyfriend, so I've wasted three months.

Or she'd say, I don't like you. Then I've wasted three months. But every once in awhile, and this didn't happen often but once in awhile she'd say, I have a boyfriend and I don't like you. So that was my experience with goals.

Tim Ferriss: Even if I didn't have a boyfriend, right?

Scott Adams: My best story of rejection in seventh grade was asking the prettiest girl to dance, the first time I ever asked somebody to slow dance and she said, "It's too hot; I'd rather not." And I said, "Perhaps if you took off your down winter jacket." And she said, "Um, and I'm also too tired." Alright. So that was my dating experience in high school. That was a goal oriented approach. So my friend Manuel, he had different approach. He had a systems approach.

He would simply go wherever there were plenty of girls, and he would ask them in descending order of looks, "Will you be my girlfriend?" or some version of that. Of course, almost everybody said no. You're probably thinking, oh, you're telling me the old story about keep trying, get back on the horse. I'm not telling you that story at all. I'm telling you he was learning a skill while I was wasting my time. That guy knows how to approach strangers. He knows what works, what doesn't. He's got a thicker skin.

He also had a lot of girlfriends so he was learning a lot that way, as well. So he was failing in a way that put him ahead no matter what happened. I was failing in a way that didn't put me ahead; it just made me feel like a loser and probably put me behind for the next time I wanted to feel confident in front of someone else. I could give you more examples from, say, fitness and diet because I know some people had asked about that.

Tim Ferriss: They would love to hear this, definitely.

Scott Adams: A goal oriented approach in, let's say, diet would be I want to lose ten pounds and I'm going to do it with my willpower.

I'm going to keep those cookies out of my mouth. I'm going to put the fork down. I'm going to push away from the table. Arrgh, I'm just going to try harder.

Tim Ferriss: The white knuckle.

Scott Adams: Everybody who's been alive for more than ten minutes knows that that can work in the short run but it just doesn't work in the long run. You need something else. You need a system. So here's the system that I've been using that has me in the best shape of my life at 58, and uses no willpower whatsoever. I eat whatever I want, whenever I want to. It's just that my system is education. I go out of my way if I see an article that says new thing discovered about the link between this food and what. Most of that I can ignore.

But every once in awhile you see something that says if you eat more protein and less of those simple carbs, good things will happen. And you say okay, I already knew that one, and how deep does this knowledge thing go, and how much difference does it make?

Let me give you an example. Say you and I go to the salad bar, and it's a terrible salad bar. All there is is a white potato, plain russet potato and some plain pasta. We're both trying to watch our weight. What do you get? Do you get the potato or the pasta? I ask this question in live crowds, and it's about evenly split, half the people but mostly people don't know. There are only a few people in the whole room who even know the answer.

And the answer is actually really clear. It turns out that the white potato, as opposed to the sweet potatoes that are not bad, the white potato who has a terrible glycemic index. The pasta probably should but there's something about the way it processes that isn't fully understood that it just doesn't. So pasta isn't the best food in the world if you are looking to watch your weight.

But if you had the choice of only those two, I pick the pasta, you pick the potato. You're struggling with your willpower, I'm eating like crazy and having a good time because I've learned which foods I can eat like crazy and not stimulate cravings.

So if I eat the simple carbs for lunch, I know I'm just going to be hungrier later. I've learned that sometimes sleep pretends to be the same feeling as hunger. So if I haven't slept, I say oh, I'm not really hungry; stop eating. I need to either take a nap or I could eat some peanuts because I've read – and I've experienced this, so I

know it's true – that if you eat fat things, they have a lot of calories and that part's not great maybe if you're trying to watch your weight, but they have such a good impact on reducing your cravings, because fat's good at doing that, that you'll make up for it in the long run.

And by the way, it's full of protein and goodness and it's not bad to eat peanuts. So the other thing I do as a process to avoid using willpower is that it would be impossible for me, I think, to stop eating both the quantity that I want to eat, because sometimes you've just got to shovel a lot into your face. You've just got to eat a lot.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Scott Adams: And sometimes you want to eat the thing you want to eat.

So sometimes it's about the flavor and the taste, and sometimes it's you just need a lot of food. So I allow myself to have a lot of food anytime I want. I don't put any control on that. I just make sure that it's the kind of food you can eat forever and you'll not regret it. It could be salads and yogurts, and fruits and vegetables, mostly raw stuff. And if I think I'm overdoing it a little bit, I'll throw in some peanuts or some roasted creamed almonds of something.

Tim Ferriss: And you are a vegetarian, is that right? Or you have been?

Scott Adams: Mostly. I tried to introduce fish to my diet but I'm having a hard time with it because I can't get past the icky factor. That's just personal. I'd like to. I just can't get past it. So in my case, I use zero willpower. And one by one I have picked off things that were problem cravings, such as Diet Coke. I was drinking somewhere between ten and 20 a day, I think, for years; 30 years probably.

Now, if I said to myself today's the day I'm going to go on a healthy eating diet, and Diet Coke was just one of the 45 things I was depriving myself of, it would be pretty tough. But instead, I say to myself: I'm going to eat everything I want all day long; I'm going to drink whatever I want, as long as that's on the good list. There's just one thing I can't do today, just one thing. It still takes a little willpower but I noticed that after about a month or so, two months really, to be clean, the craving goes away.

And today, a couple of years later, I look at a Diet Coke and it's actually hard to wrap my head around the thought that I would want to put that in my body. It just looks like a bunch of chemicals.

So cravings can be completely managed if you isolate them and pick them out of the herd and don't put too much of a willpower burden on yourself at the same time. Now, the downside, of course, is that this takes several years instead of everybody wants to lose ten pounds in a month, and I don't have any solution for you if that's what you want to do.

Having said all of this, I'll also say that everybody's different and my good friend and startup partner, Quinn Harker, he will run a marathon and go ride his bike and go for a swim after that. Ironman, and for him the challenge and the pain and the willpower is actually part of the attraction. So that's part of what it brings to him so it's no surprise that his weight is perfect. Because keep in mind, whatever you hear from me doesn't apply to everybody.

So the other part of this system is experimenting continually, and I know you're into this, experimenting and trying to isolate one thing and saying okay, I did this for a week; did that make any difference in anything?

Tim Ferriss:

Absolutely, the tracking. I just want to underscore a few things. The first is that you have become better at identifying alternate causes for, say, hunger. You didn't sleep enough, etc.

For instance, many people who cut refined carbohydrates or starchy carbohydrates from their diet will feel like they want carbs, whereas in fact they're just dehydrated because when you cut carbohydrates, you retain less water. So very simple fix for a lot of people is to put some sea salt or sprinkle a little salt into their drinking water, just into a few cups a day, which then eradicates these types of carb cravings. Brandishing amino acids can do the same thing, sometimes.

But just to touch upon the goals versus systems, I find for myself that I approach it in a very similar way and I'd love to ask you about your MBA program in a second but I decided I would not go to an MBA program. But I had fantasized about going to Stanford GSB – Graduate School of Business – for many, many years. And I always thought that was where I should have gone undergrad, etc.

At the end of it, I decided to take what that would have cost over two years and invest in startup investments. This was in 2007, right after the Four Hour Workweek had come out. And decided that I would invest based on the assumption that I would lose it all, but that I would try to optimize for skill acquisition.

Scott Adams: There you go, there you go. Okay, perfect.

Tim Ferriss: And so when I make decisions these days, whether it's a TV show, or the Four Hour Chef, and trying new distribution with Amazon, even if everything goes sideways, I try to stack the deck and that's usually the who, what, where, why, and when rundown, like a journalist. I'll be like, who am I doing this? Let me optimize the people I'm interacting with so that I can acquire as many skills or abilities as possible. When and where, if I can be in novel environments, let me try to optimize for that, etc. So that I'll have this goal, and it's usually a big, audacious goal sometimes.

Even if that fails, like the Four Hour Chef was boycotted by almost every retailer on the planet because it came out of Amazon publishing. And I was prepared for that, and that then allowed me to do experiments with Bit Torrent, and so on. So I came out of it not entirely happy with missing the goal, of course; I'm very competitive. But there were skills that then carried over to future projects. So I also view my decisions in a very similar way. Not to say it's the only way, but I find having both to be very helpful for me.

Scott Adams: I would kind of summarize that by saying that the product is always yourself.

Tim Ferriss: Right, right.

Scott Adams: As soon as you lose sight of that, then you're working a 14 hour day, you're sacrificing your health. You probably did all those things, too but the path is to do less of that and take care of your health and maximize your instrument.

Tim Ferriss: What was the first time you were paid for Dilbert, like received payment for Dilbert?

Scott Adams: It was after being syndicated and then waiting several months for the accounting to work through the system. That was probably in 1989.

Tim Ferriss: I'm having trouble doing the math, here. Roughly how old were you at the time?

Scott Adams: Are we going to do math in public?

Tim Ferriss: I'm trying not to. So you were like late 30s, I think? Is that right?

Scott Adams: Early 30s.

Tim Ferriss: Were you at Pac Bell at the time, or had you already left?

Scott Adams: I was at Pac Bell and stayed there after Dilbert was in newspapers for about eight years. Well, no, I stayed there for several years after Dilbert but eight years in total.

Tim Ferriss: Was that purely to get the income from cartooning to a point where you could survive on that?

Or were there other reasons that you stayed at that job for eight years?

Scott Adams: I'd hate to say skill acquisition but that's really a big part of the answer. I was working in the technology lab in those years when the internet was new. Literally, the first person I knew who heard the word internet, outside of my work friends. So we were learning things that I knew had huge impact on my future, and I didn't want to lose that foot in it. That actually became critical for the success of Dilbert later because Dilbert became the first syndicated comic on the internet back when that seemed like a silly idea.

But when I say skills acquisition, I'm counting the fact that I was getting most of my fodder for the cartoon from my actual experiences and what coworkers were suggesting. So I had that going. But yes, I waited until I knew I could do it financially but I continued waiting long after that because of the skill acquisition and also because the pain of working completely goes away when you don't need to do it.

Tim Ferriss: Right. It's like dealing with small children. As long as you're not forcing them to do something, the likelihood of it happening goes way up.

Scott Adams: But think of just this simple example where in the real work world, I'll say I'm going to try doing X. Oh, my God, if X doesn't work my career, my promotions, my everything. But after I didn't need to be there, I could just say, what's better, X or Y? X. Your mind is free.

Tim Ferriss: It's I think something that is commonly misinterpreted with, say, some of the writing that I've done is people are like: oh, I should just quit everything and throw a hail Mary and sort of jump off the cliff and learn how to fly on the way down. And I'm like: no, no. If you can keep your current gig, do this on the weekends.

Do this early in the morning. Moonlight, and then you can decide where on the spectrum where you want to be. Whether you want to have both jobs, whether you want to do one 20 percent of the time but there's no need to put all your eggs in one basket right at the outset. What was Dogbert's original name?

Scott Adams: So before Dogbert was published, he was a doodle that I would draw on my whiteboard in my cubicle in Pacific Bell, and before that at Crocker National Bank. I had a contest to name the characters, and the name Dilbert was named by a friend of mine, Mike Goodwin, who didn't know he had seen it in a World War II cartoon that had the same name, Dilbert. I found out about that after I got published. I went to use the name but it's lucky I did, and I guess the original creator didn't have a problem with it because he never contacted me.

But because I had this character, Dilbert, and he was the type of guy who would be a loner, I wanted to give him a dog just so there was somebody to interact with. And I wanted the name of the dog to have some correspondence with Dilbert. And so Dogbert's original name was Dildog.

Tim Ferriss: Did he ever make it into a strip with the name Dildog, or no?

Scott Adams: No, I wisely decided that was not a good commercial decision, at least not for newspapers because they're all aggressively rated G.

Tim Ferriss: What aspects of Dilbert changed, besides that, in the gestational period or when you were testing out new characters on the whiteboard, and so on?

Scott Adams: In the beginning, their characters are not really formed. So you've got an idea who they are, and maybe you're thinking of somebody else when you write it. But over time, they become some part of me.

They each represent a different voice in my head. Dilbert's kind of the voice of reason, and the one who loves a challenge. He likes fixing things more than he likes talking to people and social interactions and stuff. Dogbert is the evil part of my brain, the little voice in my head that is saying just the worst things when I'm in an otherwise polite conversation. It's the voice that's trying to keep me from not laughing or forcing me to tell a bad joke suddenly so I have a reason to laugh at it myself, but really covering up that I'm thinking something horrible.

So yeah, he's the worst part of me, my megalomania and my lack of regard for other humans, which obviously is an exaggeration; I have plenty of regard for other humans but not always their intelligence. So Dogbert takes that role.

Tim Ferriss: You've had a massively successful career; obviously Dilbert has done spectacularly well. I've heard that one of the innovative things you did, of many, was including your email address in your panels. Do you think that had a huge impact, and what other types of decisions do you think helped Dilbert become the success that it became?

Scott Adams: There were several key things that happened, and this will dovetail back to a conversation about luck. When we first contemplated putting Dilbert on the internet, that in itself looked like a huge, risky thing because my God, you can't give away your content that we're selling to other people right in front of their noses as we're selling it to them. It sounded crazy then. Today, it just is normal business. But then, it seemed like a big, risky thing.

Likewise, when I decided to see if I could get better user input using the things I'd learned in my Berkeley MBA classes, I did what no cartoonist had ever done before. And this sounds stupid and trivial when you say it from today's perspective but I opened a channel directly to my customers. So normally what happens is the cartoonist writes something, it goes to an editor who sends it to an editor of the newspaper, who sends it to production. Newspaper delivery boy gives it to the user who reads it.

I have no idea what happened after that. I don't know if they laughed, cursed, hated me. So I thought well, I'll do Business 101. This is what I should be doing; it's a business, it's not art, per se. And so I ran my email address in the margins of the strip. Thousands of people started writing to me. I was getting thousands of email a day. A lot of them said the following: I don't know anybody else who has email so I'm writing to you.

It was literally the dawn of the internet. To give you an idea of how early it was in the dawn of the internet, my address was my full name, Scott Adams, at AOL.com. Nobody had that. There are six people named Scott Adams in my town.

Tim Ferriss: So it's like the primordial soup of the internet days.

Scott Adams: Right. So thousands of people wrote in but what they said was interesting. So consistently they said when Dilbert is doing his office type things, which he actually wasn't doing much in the beginning; mostly he would stay at home, interacting with Dogbert and going on dates. But only once in awhile he would go to the office. But it turns out, people like that the most, by far.

And so I pivoted. I changed Dilbert into a workplace strip. That was certainly the biggest change, the biggest thing that made a difference. The other was putting it on the internet early when being early to anything made a big difference, and it was the right product to be on the internet.

But it also solved our biggest marketing problem with newspapers because our salesperson would go into a newspaper and say hey, here's a new thing. And they'd say, we don't get it, we don't care, in the old days. But once I had literally thousands of email messages saying this is the greatest thing, why don't you put it in my newspaper? And then they'd name the actual newspaper. I printed them all out, I collected them by what newspaper they'd mentioned, sent them of physically, like printouts, to the salespeople and then they walked into the office of the editor and put the printout on their desk, and the editor said okay.

For a newspaper, if five people ask for something that they've never heard of, and it's something that they easily, for \$20.00 a month can put it in the newspaper or whatever it is, they're going to do that.

Tim Ferriss: That's true with politicians, also, just as a side note for people. Honestly, you get ten people to call a lawmaker's office, especially if they're not somebody who's in the news every day, it gets a lot of attention.

That's really smart.

Scott Adams: And let me say that about me, as well. I'm a voracious reader of all my feedback on social media as well as email and everything else. I've changed substantial things in the way I approach Dilbert or other jobs based on one or two emails.

Tim Ferriss: What other types of feedback did this produce?

Scott Adams: Oh, don't ask me. Well, I'll tell you the biggest change – there were actually more emails than a few, but it's the one that jumps to mind. When Catbert was originally introduced, he was just a cat.

He wasn't meant to be a regular character. But thousands of people – no, I'm not going to say thousands; I'll say probably hundreds of people emailed and said, we love Catbert. And what's interesting is he didn't have that name.

Scott Adams: So many people said Catbert but you had not given him that name?

Scott Adams: Right.

So Catbert now comes out of nothing. I certainly had no plans to have a Garfield competitor, and now I'm stuck. I'm like oh, they all want it but what am I going to do with it? Now I had moved Dilbert into the office by that time. And I'm like, how do I get a cat in the office? It's already too much that I've got a dog there. And then I realized that the cat's personality fits perfectly with human resources so I made him the director of human resources.

Because you know, like a human resources person, a cat doesn't really care if you live or die; he just likes playing with you before it happens. And recently I started working with a company called Think HR, who does subscriptions of HR advice, I guess; my simple description. And I'm working with them as Catbert as a potential way to get their message out there. This is a good example of the systems versus the goal.

I certainly didn't start out to have a cat cartoon. I started out to do a bunch of things. I introduced a lot of characters. I watched to figure out which ones worked. And I just put water on the stuff that worked.

Tim Ferriss: What are some of the tools that most help you, tools or routines, that most help you cartoon these days, or write, for that matter, either?

Scott Adams: I use my Wacom Cintiq for the drawing. What that is is a special monitor. In my case, it's a really big one. I think it's 27 inches across. I can draw on it directly with the stylus, much like you would draw on paper, although you have to learn techniques and use Photoshop and a lot of different stuff. So it's just Photoshop and a Cintiq, Wacom. After that, I just usually peruse the news, drink coffee, eat my protein bar in the morning and something jumps in my head. And if it doesn't, maybe I'll read a few email messages that I think will have messages or suggestions.

Sometimes I'll check the suggestions coming in from various places. I've got an email address just for that that runs in the strip

every day. So some combination of that gives me some kind of an idea. Or I jump off what was the last thing I wrote the day before because sometimes they lend themselves to a serial treatment.

But I don't have much of a process beyond being in the right frame of mind physically and mentally, like getting rid of all of the other distractions which is in part of why I do it in the morning, not just because my energy and my mind are better but because distractions are far less. For me, creativity is a process of removing barriers. It's not so much a process of pulling something in that was outside me.

Tim Ferriss: Right, it's sort of decreasing the noise to signal ratio so that what was already there is easier to illicit or put down? Is that how you think of it?

Scott Adams: Actually, the analogy I use is it has more to do with flow rate. That is to say if I'm busy, I'm thinking about lots of things, I might have one good idea in an hour. But if I clear my mind, I can't stop them coming. They're like boom, boom, boom. Now, that's the part, unfortunately, everybody wants to know: what's the secret to being a creative person and having a new idea every day? And unfortunately, there's just some of this that either is a bad childhood experience, or DNA. You can do a lot to make yourself better at whatever you have but the flow rate of ideas that I have I think probably is unnatural.

Tim Ferriss: I think that's true but I also think it's a skill that can be cultivated. James Altucher, who is a friend of mine, has recommended to his readers for some time to develop the habit of just writing down ten ideas, I think usually in the morning, each day.

And I've spoken to a number of people who have adopted this habit and it's become exponentially easier over time, to the extent that now they can't contain it to ten. It is a curious question. The question of creativity comes up a lot. But like you, I have to prevent to many extraneous inputs if I want to have any type of unique output. So I'd love to ask you about your morning. If you have full control of your day, what does your ideal first 60 to 90 minutes look like in your day? What time do you wake up, what type of protein bar do you eat, etc.?

Scott Adams: Depending on when I went to sleep, either 5 or 6 but let's say 5. I get up and I walk directly downstairs and get my coffee. So push one button and wait for it. Have my one protein bar, which is always the same.

The coffee's always the same, the protein's always the same, and the time's always the same, give or take that hour. Because I'm removing decisions.

Tim Ferriss: What type of protein bar do you eat?

Scott Adams: I eat a Builder's 20 gram protein bar, chocolate peanut butter and I'm so smart that I actually picked it up and had the label in front of me because I expected that question.

Tim Ferriss: You know me well.

Scott Adams: At that point I usually get on and I guess I check Twitter first, and check my web page to see if anything blew up that I don't know about. Did I say anything yesterday that caused the world to melt down, because I'll need to know about that. Failing that, I usually open Business Insider because I just like reading it. Usually, while I'm waiting for my coffee I've looked at my Facebook feed and played around. Basically I'm just trying to wake up, get my mind working.

There's a process where once you clear your mind, you have to flood it. And you may use different words for this, but I know you do it. So you empty it and then you flood it with new input that's not the old input. So I'm looking at the news, I'm looking at stuff I haven't seen. I'm not looking at yesterday's problem for the fifth time; I'm looking at a new problem, I'm thinking of a new idea. So I'm flooding in all the new stuff. But then you've got to find out where in that flood is the little piece that's worth working with. That's where I use the body model. I kind of cycle through all this stuff.

Tim Ferriss: The body model, you said?

Scott Adams: Yeah. The model is your brain can't find good contact, not directly in an intellectual sense; obviously the brain's involved. But what I mean is that as I'm thinking of these ideas and they're flowing through my head, I'm monitoring my body; I'm not monitoring my mind. And when my body changes, I have something that other people are going to care about, too.

Tim Ferriss: That's cool. I like that. So that means posture? Or what type of indicators are there?

Scott Adams: I'll tell you, if I'm thinking of, let's say, a particular setup for a joke, I'll think of the joke and then quite often, I'll audibly go [chuckle] and it wasn't planned. It just went [chuckle] and it's sort of a half laugh that you do when you're by yourself and you think of something funny but you don't want to do a full laugh, that sort of thing. There are other times when, for example, I told you the story about being in the shower and thinking of the entire plot for *God's Debris* in one moment. My entire body lit up.

When I had the idea for the blog that I wrote recently that just sort of lit up the internet, I felt it as a full body experience long before I wrote it. So that's largely true. Now, with Dilbert, if you do this long enough, a lot of the things that used to be technique just get baked into your personality after awhile.

So there's stuff you do as second nature that you're kind of moving art into the domain of craft.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Scott Adams: So for example, I know, because I've learned over time, that there are six elements of dimension of humor; six dimensions of humor. And if I use at least two of them, I've got a joke. If I use three of them, it's probably going to be a really good joke. But that's not enough. There's something about it, that X factor, that thing you can't put your finger on that just makes your body move. It just moves your body. And if you can't get that, no craft in the world can survive; you can't resuscitate it.

Tim Ferriss: Have you written about the six elements of humor before?

Scott Adams: I did. I've written about it a number of times. I think if anybody Googles my name, Scott Adams and six dimensions of humor, you'll see a few references to it.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. What would be two examples of the six, just for fun?

Scott Adams: Oh, I know you're good at this because you know what you just did that was just so smart?

Tim Ferriss: What's that?

Scott Adams: If you had asked me for the six, I would have changed the subject because I know I'm not going to remember. But you asked me for two because you know I can come up with two. Alright. So I'm

going to go for six because you've now made it safe for me to do that.

Tim Ferriss: Wonderful.

Scott Adams: So there's cute, there's bizarre, there's recognizable, there's naughty... how many was that?

Tim Ferriss: You're already way ahead of the game. You've got four. You've got cute, bizarre, recognizable and naughty.

Scott Adams: You'll have to Google the rest. Let me give you an example. Cute is usually kids and dogs. And bizarre is just anything that's out of place. So if you know your cartoon history, you will know that the Far Side used primarily the dimension of putting something out of place. So you'd have an animal talking.

So as soon as the animal's talking, he's got one dimension. So he's basically starting a race, and he's already ahead of you if you're the cartoonist who's sitting there saying: I think I'll do a comic about anything; the world is my canvas. But he's started ahead of you already. So he's got the bizarre, and then he'll have the animal say something often in the framing or the type of mood that a human would say. So that's the recognizable part.

So if you could put yourself in the picture and say: oh, God, I recognize that situation but it's an animal talking; clearly there's more to it than that. Again, you have to have at least that: two dimensions. Take a look at the best comic strip of all time that I think nearly everyone in the world would say, Calvin and Hobbes. There's a talking tiger that is both bizarre and cute. So he took the Far Side one dimension further as a starting point.

The moment you start reading Calvin and Hobbes, you already have cute because his drawing is amazing. He's got a double cute. He's got a child and an animal, and it's a cool animal. So he starts that before he even writes a joke. So then if he has the kid doing something naughty – also, anything bad happening to anybody is of course one of the dimensions. So cruelty, did I mention cruelty? Am I up to five?

Tim Ferriss: You're up to five. That's No. 5.

Scott Adams: Shoot. By the end of this interview, I will have come up with that sixth one and I'm going to scream it in the middle of whatever unrelated question you ask.

Tim Ferriss: Or you could just leave people with baited breath to tap Google into their keyboards. That's another way to get them to go to your site, I'm sure. But we've got cruelty. What are some of the most – or it could be just one – underrated or under appreciated cartoonist in your mind?

People that perhaps listeners haven't checked out that they should check out.

Scott Adams: I would say a comic called F Minus, F being like you're a failure F. You can Google that. It's syndicated. That's the one that makes me laugh the most, of the ones you haven't heard of.

Tim Ferriss: Cool.

Scott Adams: Of the ones you may have heard of that also make me laugh the most, Pearls Before Swine. That would be no accident because he literally studied the 206 rule and I had conversations with him when he was coming up. You can see that he's one of the few cartoonists who's approached it the way I have, which is as a business, not just an art. So he's the most methodical operator out there now in terms of doing what is the smartest thing to do for your art.

Tim Ferriss: Cool. F Minus and Pearls Before Swine. I will check out both of those. I actually have not checked out either.

I want to be respectful of your time but I would love to ask a couple of rapid fire questions. The answers don't have to be rapid but I'd love to just ask a couple of short questions before we come up on time, if that's okay with you.

Scott Adams: Sure. And I know you want to ask me about the voice thing, possibly.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. We could do that first. Could you describe what happened to you and what you learned from that experience? There's a fair amount out there for people who want to dig into the specifics of the condition and so on, but maybe you could just give people an overview of what happened because it sounds terrifying.

Scott Adams: Right. So I'm not going to give a big, scary medical thing on your show; it would be terrible and people can Google it. If you Google spasmodic dysphonia, you would learn that I and tens of thousands of other people had this problem where you lose your voice.

Meaning that it clips your vocal cord spas at times when you don't want them to so you can't get out words that make sense.

It was so unknown that it took me a long time to figure out what it was, and I had to figure out using Google and hunting down a doctor, and doctor to doctor. My path went through Japan down to USC and finally Dr. Gerald Berke, who had invented a surgery that was not well publicized that worked for me. Since then, I've been active trying to tell people who have spasmodic dysphonia which, by the way, I'm going to do an audio impression of it because there are people listening to this – guaranteed – who have it and don't know they have it because they've never heard anyone else who spoke that way and they're trying to figure out what it is.

So I'm going to do an impression, and I'm going to send three dozen people to their doctor with a solution. Alright? Here's my impression. If I were to order a Diet Coke, since my vocal cords would clench especially on some problem syllables, it would come out like a clipped cell phone.

So instead of a Diet Coke, or can I have a Diet Coke, it would come out as: I - dye -coke, like that. So it sounds like you're just dropping syllables. So everybody at home who said, holy shit, I know somebody like that, the name for it is spasmodic dysphonia. But I've got something much cooler. Do you want to hear it?

Tim Ferriss: I do.

Scott Adams: It's on this. We might be able to solve this problem today.

Tim Ferriss: Let's do it.

Scott Adams: This is literally true. I might actually be able to, with your help, solve the entire problem for 50,000 people in this country. Maybe; it's a long shot, right?

Tim Ferriss: Let's give it a go.

Scott Adams: But I'm going to take it. Alright. The surgery fixed me, and what that involved was cutting some nerves in my neck that disconnected my brain from my vocal cords for three and a half months. They spliced in a new network that takes three and a half months to re-grow, and once it re-grows, then I could talk but very weakly and it took years to get my voice back to where it is.

What's interesting about that is nobody knows why that works because the problem has been well identified to be a little brain hiccup. So you don't fix your brain by rewiring the nerves in your neck. Now, hold that thought. Nobody knows why the surgery works. Now, the only other thing that works for this that I've personally verified, because I've talked to the individuals who have done this, and I actually went through this training myself, was a doctor who some thought was a nut because science was not quite supporting his method.

But he would go in and he would say everybody hum in the key of F for weeks, and try to never talk at your natural, deeper tone; instead just hum. Now, I think it might have worked for 10 or 20 percent of the people. But keep in mind, this is an incurable problem, that 10 to 20 percent of people walked out with perfect voices. I spoke to one of them, actually several of them. I spoke to live, so I verified, and one of them crossed over my week so I know it's a real person, not a shell or something.

Now, what do these two things, the surgery which nobody knows why it works, and the humming in the key of F, which nobody knows why it works; what do they have in common? In both of those cases, it's the only time the subject takes an extended period without reinjuring the muscles in the vocal cords. So there is a non zero chance, and I actually saw my surgeon a couple of months ago at an event.

And I said, is it possible that the only reason that your surgery works is that you prevented me from reinjuring the muscles of my vocal cords for long enough for them to heal for the first time ever? Because when you have this problem, you end up straining it every single day because you're trying really hard to talk and it's just not working. So imagine if you have a sprained ankle and you ran a marathon every day.

Tim Ferriss: It would never heal.

Scott Adams: Right. So the humming in the key of F uses different equipment, or maybe it just has less pressure on the same equipment; I don't know.

And by the way, I'm talking at what I can best approximate as the key of F. I'm tone deaf so I'm not sure I'm getting there. My normal speaking voice is actually much lower, and I do that to preserve my speaking mechanism. That's one of the things you learn. So put those two things together. The only two things, these

two things that are the only things that work to solve spasmodic dysphonia is people didn't talk, not even a little bit, using their normal voice for an extended period; three and a half months in one case, maybe as few as a week or two weeks in the other case.

But if you have this or you know somebody who does, and you're listening to this, somebody out there, I want you to see if you're in a special situation where this makes sense for you; just don't talk for two weeks. If you've got maybe a spouse who can answer the phone or the type of job you can do an email, just as an experiment. And then email me, you'll see my email address or you can find me on Twitter or anything.

You see my addresses in the strip every day. And tell me if it worked. Because if I can get three people in the world that this works for, Tim, we just fixed the problem.

Tim Ferriss: It could be a really big breakthrough. I love this idea. For those people who might be considering this, who think they might be a candidate, you could also look at, for instance, silent meditation retreats. There are ten to 14 day silent meditation retreats through groups like Spirit Rock and others so you could actually create a context wherein that is reinforced. It's not just willpower but you're in an environment where it's not permitted. So that could be also something to look into. But no, this is very exciting. I like this idea.

Scott Adams: I should say that whispering is still perfectly allowed because that doesn't use your vocal cords. So you can communicate with anybody you want to in a quiet room during this quiet period.

Tim Ferriss: This is very interesting. I'm glad we touched on that.

Scott Adams: And again, I have to emphasize, it's totally a long shot but there's somebody who will listen to this who is going to try it and we'll find out.

Tim Ferriss: But the long shots are worth it. You mentioned 10 to 20 percent with the humming in the key of F. If that were a drug for a major condition and the people for whom it didn't work had no side effects, that would stand a good chance of getting commercialized. That's a viable tool. If you have a one in five chance of being cured.

Scott Adams: But listen to this. It gets more interesting because this is more validation for why this might work. This doctor could get no

credibility because when he would report his cures, which he was shouting at the top of his voice; he was making videos, showing the actual people talking before and after. It was as convincing as it could possibly be. And when he would take it to the medical community, they would say: oh, it looks like all that happened here is that these people were misdiagnosed in the first place.

So you didn't cure spasmodic dysphonia; these are people who just had strained voice boxes or strained vocal cords and you let them rest them for awhile and now they're better. I say maybe that's everybody.

Tim Ferriss: Right, for sure. Definitely. It's not entirely a perfect parallel but a lot of people who consider themselves hard gainers, meaning they have difficulty gaining muscle mass – it's particularly true with men – are simply training too often. They are not physiologically capable of recovering from the stress that they're imposing on themselves. They never super compensate and experience this hypertrophy. So it's just a matter of removing stimuli as opposed to adding something; the subtraction versus addition which is very anti Western medicine in a lot of respects in the conventional sense. Let me ask you this.

Besides your own books, what book or books have you given most as a gift?

Scott Adams: I've never given a book as a gift.

Tim Ferriss: You haven't? Wow, okay. This is interesting. Do you give gifts? Maybe this sounds like a weird question but if you do, I'd be curious to know what you often give as gifts.

Scott Adams: I retired from the gift giving business awhile ago, which takes a long time to train everybody. I replaced that in favor of being a nice person on a general basis. Maybe I want to buy you something today; there doesn't need to be a reason. So no, I don't do gifts in particular but I'd say if you're looking for a book that I think everybody should read, it would be a book called *Influence*, by I don't know how to pronounce his name.

Tim Ferriss: Robert Cialdini.

Scott Adams: Yeah, that's the part I was choking on. I didn't know how to pronounce the first part.

But it's C-I-A-L-D-I-N-I. 100 percent of effective people seem to have read that book. In fact, it's one of those things that when I meet somebody and they're operating at a pretty high level, if you mention that book, they've all read it.

Tim Ferriss: That's true. It's very consistent.

Scott Adams: But if you talk to the general public, it's still not well known. And then I would add to that, I haven't read these books but I took the Dale Carnegie course and if the books say anything that is as useful as the course, that's probably a good thing. I hear good things about them.

Tim Ferriss: I'm a big fan of a lot of his work, in particular not the *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, but *How to Stop Worrying and Stop Living*, which I think is a fantastically well written book on anxiety. There's a bit of material on the physiology and so on that's outdated but the vast majority is fantastically well done.

Scott Adams: That needs an update because I have a theory that there's something called the digital disease.

Meaning that if you take the average person and put him in the average simple environment of the past, they were not overwhelmed by its complexity. But I believe that today, the average person is overwhelmed by the complexity of life because it got more complicated. And that I barely know an adult who isn't on some kind of drug, either prescribed or otherwise, to deal with anxiety. And I'm pretty sure that wasn't the case when I was a kid. Maybe we have more options now, I guess. I think there's a real, legitimate mental illness plague.

Tim Ferriss: I agree. I totally agree. And I think I saw you mention something along these lines on Twitter but we're in a distraction economy. And it's not only limited to a black box in our living room but we have obviously the phones, the tablets, the laptops, now we have wearables.

Scott Adams: Let me emphasize that point because I realize I sounded like old man get off of my lawn, stop this new technology stuff.

But I think most people who have heard of me know that I'm very pro future and technology so I'm not saying we should back up. But keep in mind, the names of these biggest companies in your world like Google, Apple, their business model is distraction. Your smarter phone, all of that depends on them taking you off your task

and making you look at an advertisement or buy their new song, or buy their new thing, or look at a new app or something.

So they're literally in the business of making you distracted and doing the job that the smartest people in the world using the best science and AB testing can provide. While in the normal world, it was a fair fight. Like hey, I'm going to ignore your billboard on the highway because I can; it wasn't that hard. Ha ha. Those guys with the billboards, they weren't using a ton of science. But now it's me against all the scientists and Google.

Tim Ferriss: Yes, it's a total stacked deck not in your favor.

Scott Adams: Before you called, this is a true story so as part of your process, your assistant sent me a form that needed to be filled out. In order to do the process of finding it in my email, printing it out, or in this case realizing that I had to print out something to look at to realize I didn't need to print something out, it's only two minutes, right?

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Scott Adams: Totally worth the time, not complaining about the process; completely necessary. But in that two minutes, I only had one hope to be able to complete that two minute task within the hour so that I'd have it in on time for this. And the only hope was chanting it continually to keep the other thoughts out of my head. So for five minutes I simply chanted: print the form, print the form, print the form. I would pick up my phone, just by reflex and start to hit Twitter while I'm chanting.

And I would say – I actually have to yell at myself. I yell at my hand: No! No! No! And I yell it all the way back to the table. And then I go: print the form, print the form. After I printed it, then I learned I really need to do something online instead. So I had to find that again. So I'm now like: find the email, find the email. So without that, I don't have a hope.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I need to do that more often, I think. It's like holding up a shield to deflect all of the incoming distraction. You mentioned billboards. If you could have one billboard anywhere with anything on it, what would it say and where would you put it?

Scott Adams: It would say be useful and it would be everywhere.

Tim Ferriss: I like it.

Scott Adams: I realized one day I could boil down my entire philosophy of how to live into those two words: just be useful.

Tim Ferriss: Be useful.

Scott Adams: That comes from my farming upbringing. My mother grew up on a farm and I grew up next to the farm she grew up on so I worked on it with my grandparents and stuff. And there, there's no wasted energy.

Tim Ferriss: Right, can't afford it.

Scott Adams: Waste is death. So you didn't lean, you always pitched in. You didn't wait for somebody to ask. You'd just be useful. So having now made the money that I needed to make, I'm far more focused on the being useful to the rest of the world part of the equation for the second half of my life, and far more enjoyable. If somebody says how do I be happy, the biggest question in the world; I say be useful. It works every time. It doesn't sometimes work, it works every time. Be useful. Because guess what?

People like you, they want to be with you. You're useful. People want to hire you; you're useful. Everything comes together if you just do that one thing. And that dovetails back to the product is you. The project is semi relevant whether it succeeds; what really matters is did you become a more valuable and therefore more useful at the end of it.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely. You mentioned happy. I think a lot of people strive to be happy. A lot of people also strive to be successful, and that means different things to different people. When you think of the word successful, who's the first person who comes to mind for you?

Scott Adams: Donald Trump and only because he's in the news. So I think the test was completely polluted. When I think of successful, if I think of it for two seconds, Bill Gates and there's nobody in second place.

Tim Ferriss: Why is that?

Scott Adams: First of all, he amassed a huge amount of money but did so in a way that made the world forever better.

And I'm sure that now that you see how the second half of his life is going, I think that he always needed something that didn't just

make money. I think that putting the computer on every desk or whatever was a real thing. I believe he amassed that money largely so that he could do the second part of his life. And now you take the smartest, most rational human the world has ever produced and find out, well, surprise; everything you thought about him wasn't exactly what you thought.

And years ago when he said his plan was to give it away, and nobody really took that seriously, guess what? He's doing that, too. And the way he's doing it is he's picking the thing that governments can't do and poor people can't do. He's taking not only the place that has the greatest leverage, because he can go in with his brains and money and his scientific ways and the energy that he can attract to himself, and pick off these things.

His contribution to Africa, by the time he takes the dirt nap or transfers his life force to software, which I think is far more likely in this case, they may have renamed the nation after him. It might be the continent of Bill Gates when he's done. And I'm not sure if everybody sees this coming. He's working on stuff like fixing water. You know, like how would everybody like to have water? Wouldn't that be good? He's going after the biggest targets with some guns that have all the ammunition that you would need to go after those targets and nobody else can do it.

Tim Ferriss:

He's a very impressive guy. I heard a first person anecdote from a friend of mine who somehow ended up going on a bird watching tour with Bill Gates. It was a small group of people, and Bill Gates spent maybe an hour the night before reading a bird watching guide.

And according to my friend, had perfect factual recall of that book on the tour the next day to the point where he could talk to this professional bird guide in a tropical environment on a peer level. Just mind boggling. Talk about CPU power.

I'll just ask you one or two more questions. What advice would you give to your 30-year-old self?

Scott Adams:

30-year-old self. That was a time of great transition. I would say probably patience, because I've been playing the system game and not the goal game since I got out of college, and literally have a diary in which I wrote my master plan. If you take ten years following a process and it's not giving you results, that's hard to remain patient.

So in retrospect, that was the only thing I needed to maybe alleviate some of my pain. But on the other hand, impatience probably drove me harder so maybe I wouldn't tell myself that, either.

Tim Ferriss: If your 30-year-old self said how exactly do you propose I be patient, how would you respond to that?

Scott Adams: My 30-year-old self wouldn't have access to medical marijuana so I have a limited canvas with which to paint. I've always made it a top priority since I was a teenager and had tons of stress related medical problems to make that job one, to learn how to not have stress. I would consider myself a world champion at avoiding stress at this point in dozens of different ways. And a lot of it is just how you look at the world, but most of it is really the process of diversification. I'm not going to worry about losing one friend if I have a hundred, but if I have two friends I'm really going to be worried.

I'm not going to worry about losing my job because my one boss is going to fire me because I have thousands of bosses at newspapers everywhere, and lots of them can like me one day and it doesn't make any difference to my life. So one of the ways to not worry about stress is to eliminate it. I don't worry about my stock picks because I have a diversified portfolio. So diversification works in almost every area of your life to reduce your stress.

Tim Ferriss: I love this. Scott, we need to hang out more. We need to play more tennis. We should get Naval in the room to just up the intensity quotient, also. Not that we need it but always fun to chat with you. Where can people learn more about you, find you online, say hello? Where would you like people to check you out?

Scott Adams: I would like people to go to Dilbert.com and check out my blog if they like my on humor thoughts. Pretty soon my startup, which is now called CalendarTree.com, will have a little pivot and have a new name, and we'll make lots of noise about that. You'll want to watch for that.

Tim Ferriss: What is your Twitter handle, if people want to ping you on Twitter?

Scott Adams: Scott Adams Says.

Tim Ferriss: If you could make, just in closing, one ask or recommendation to the people listening to this, what would that be, besides checking your stuff out?

Scott Adams: Think of your life as a system. Think of yourself as the most important system. Be useful and make yourself more valuable as you go.

Tim Ferriss: I love it. So everybody listening for links, I'll also include specific links to a couple of popular posts on Scott's blog; just visit the show notes. Everything we mentioned will be in there at fourhourworkweek.com/podcast, all spelled out.

Scott, keep creating, man. I love your stuff and hope to see you again soon.

Scott Adams: Thank you, Tim. I love this. Let's do it again.