

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 125: Derek Sivers

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Tim Ferriss: Derek, welcome to the show.

Derek Sivers: Thank you.

Tim Ferriss: I'm so excited to have you on. This has been in the works for many months, and I'm gonna read a bio, and a short intro for you for folks in a second, but we're gonna come back to the subject of fasting, because I'm eight days into a 10-day fast, and I was astonished to hear, when we were chatting the other day, that you have done something very similar, if not the same. So, before we get to that, though, for everybody listening, Derek Sivers, one of my favorite humans, so excited to have him on the phone, and here is a sketch of his background.

Originally a professional musician and circus clown, Derek Sivers – you should say hi to him @sivers, on the Twitter. That's S, I V, E, R, S. Created CDBaby in 1998, became the largest seller of independent music online, with \$100 million in sales for 150,000 musicians. In 2008, Derek sold CDBaby for \$22 million, giving the proceeds to a charitable trust for music education.

He is, and has been, a frequent speaker on the TED conference circuit, with over 5 million views of his talks, and, since 2011, he's published 24 books, including *Anything You Want*, which shot to No. 1 on all of its Amazon categories. It is also one of the few business books, which I think, categorically, are generally terrible, that I've not only read multiple times, but listened to multiple times. The last of which was in Sweden, about a month ago, before deciding to take my startup vacation, effectively my retirement from startup investing. So, Derek, thank you for putting out such good work, first of all, before we even jump into it.

Derek Sivers: Thanks, good to finally, officially talk to you, I guess. Because we always talk off the record. Which is funny, because people always ask me about hey, do you know what Tim's investing in? And, I just, I think, you know, every time you and I talk, we just, we talk about women.

That's so funny. So, here we are, having an official conversation,

finally.

Tim Ferriss: No, we are. And, I should also, underscore for people, No. one, I'm eight days into fasting, so if I sound like an idiot, I'm gonna blame it on that. But, second is that I consider you a reality check for me, and we first met – I wanna say it was at a Music and Tech, or Tech and Music event, in 2007 perhaps, 2008, and I was familiar with some of your work, you had read the *4-Hour Work Week*, and the prompt for me, sometimes, to call you is, No. one, if I just need a sanity check. Where, for instance, if people around me seem to be asking the question, how should you best grow your company, and then there's an A, B, C list. I don't necessarily go to you to get a D and an E. I go to you, because you will say, why do you want to grow your company in the first place?

Derek Sivers: Exactly. You ask the wrong questions, a lot of you.

Tim Ferriss: And, secondly, because you're very good at simplifying, and breaking things down. I recall – and, I might be getting the location wrong. But, I seem to place this in Times Square, sitting on the bleachers, talking about – I think it was SQL, and databases, and I was extremely uncomfortable, felt out of my depth when talking to engineers and stuff like that. And, you were like, it's not that hard. And, on a single piece of paper, sketched out databases, and SQL, and how it worked. And, I just admire the – not only capability, which is not that common, but the willingness to simplify something, where I think we live in a world where many people complicate to profit, right?

Derek Sivers: Correct.

Tim Ferriss: If what you do is simple, then you feel like you're dispensable, if that makes sense.

Derek Sivers: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: But, I wanna stop talking and ask you, because I'm not sure I ever heard the full story. Originally a professional musician and circus clown. What? What is the circus clown story?

Derek Sivers: Okay, there's actually a good lesson inside the story. Is that I was 18 years old, and all I wanted in my whole life, was to be a professional musician. I mean, ideally, a rock star, yeah. But, if I'm just making my living doing music, that was the goal. So, I'm 18 years old, I'm living in Boston, I'm going to Berklee College of Music. And I'm in this band where the bass player, one day in

rehearsal says, hey man, my agent just offered me this gig, it's like \$75 to play at a pig show in Vermont. He rolls his eyes, and he's like, I'm not gonna do it, do you want the gig?

I'm like, fuck yeah, a paying gig? Oh my God! Yes! So, I took the gig, to go up to Burlington, Vermont.

And, I think it was like a \$58 round trip bus ticket to Vermont. And, I get to this pig show, I strap my acoustic guitar on, and I walked around a pig show playing music. And, I did that for about three hours, and took the bus home, and the next day, the booking agent called me up, and said, hey, yeah, so you did a really good job at the pig show. We got good reports there. Wondering if you can come play at an art opening in Massachusetts, I'll pay you \$75 again. Yeah, sure. So, same thing again, I took a \$60 bus out to Western Massachusetts, got \$75 for playing at an art opening, And, the agent was there, and he was really impressed. He said, hey, I've got this circus, the musician just quit, so we really need someone new.

And, I really like what you're doing, so there's about three gigs a week, I can pay you \$75 a gig, they're usually Friday, Saturday, Sunday, do you want the gig? I was like, hell, yeah, I'm a professional musician now, this is amazing!

So, I said yes to everything, which is gonna come up later, with the hell yes or no thing, that I think it's really smart to switch strategies. But, when you're earlier in your career, I think the best strategy is, you just say yes to everything. Every piddly little gig. You just never know what are the lottery tickets, so this one ended up being a real lottery ticket for me. Because as soon as I joined the circus – I'm 18, I have no stage experience, and after a few gigs, they said, hey, the previous musician used to go out and open the show, with this big theme song, and get everybody up and dancing. Could you do that?

And, I said, yeah, sure. And, a couple gigs after that, they said, the previous musician used to close the show with that same theme song, could you do that? I said, yeah, sure. And then it was, the previous musician used to go out between every act, to like, get the audience to applaud and thank them, and introduce the next act. Do you think you could do that? And, I said, yeah, sure, and I was really bad at it, but I got better. I became the ringleader MC, of this whole circus.

And I was 18 years old. So, if you were to go to the circus, it

would've looked like my show. And, eventually got paid more than \$75 a show. Eventually, I got paid \$300 a show, and it became my full-time living, and I even bought a house with the money I made playing with the circus. And then, that led to so many other things. So many opportunities, and ten years of stage experience, came from that one, piddly little pig show. And I said yes to that one little thing. And so, yeah, the only reason I stopped doing the circus is when CDBaby started taking over my life, and I started – I had to start turning down circus gigs. But, yeah, that was my life for ten years.

Tim Ferriss: What did you learn that made you better? What were the lessons learned that made the biggest difference in your performance as this MC?

Derek Sivers: Good question. It was –

Tim Ferriss: Or, the biggest mistakes that you made early on, that you corrected. Either one's fine.

Derek Sivers: Okay. Alright, it's kind of the same answer, in that at first, I was too self-conscious, because I thought it was about me. Like, I was going up onstage, thinking that the audience was somehow judging me, Derek Sivers, like, as if I mattered, you know? So, I would get self-conscious of what they thought of me. And, eventually, it took maybe ten or 20 gigs, with the – the circus was run by a husband and wife team, and Carlton was the wife, that – she was the one kind of out on the gigs, and really kind of leading the circus. The husband was more of the booking agent. And, she's the one that single-handedly gave me my confidence that I have today.

Sometimes, when people ask me, why am I so confident, it's because of Carlton. That's a longer story we can get into.

But, anyway, Carlton is the one that – she kept pushing me from backstage, like, come on, you're up there acting like David Letterman, don't do this kind of, uh-huh, I'm so cool, alright everybody, here's the next act. Like, I think I was trying to be cool, because I thought that people were judging me, right? And, she said, these people came here for a show. Go give them what they came here for! And so, one time, I decided to go out there, and be just over the top ridiculous.

I went out there, and I said, ladies and gentlemen, what you're

about to see is one of the most amazing – we have an elephant that is going to be coming from backstage – I did this whole thing, and the fast talking voice, and a real pizzazz to it, and the audience loved it, and I came backstage, and she said, there you go! That’s what people come to the circus for! So, now that I’ve been on stage thousands of times, this really sunk in. You go onstage to give the audience what they came there for.

Or, even things like this, this interview we’re doing. This isn’t necessarily for you or me, we could just hang up the phone and talk, we don’t need to – but, we’re doing this for the listeners. We’re going to give them something that’s useful to them. This isn’t about me, this isn’t about you. This is about them.

Tim Ferriss: Uh-huh.

Derek Sivers: So, that was the biggest lesson learned. Luckily, I learned it early on, when I was 18, 19, and yeah.

Tim Ferriss: So, I know we could come back to it, but I don’t want to forget, since I have low glucose brain, which I think I just made Japanese accidentally, but how did she give you your confidence? Or, if you prefer to answer in a different way, because I get this question a lot from fans on Twitter, how did you get so confident? And, there are things I can point to, from athletic training with specific wrestling coaches and so on, but if – what did that woman do to help make you more confident?

Or, if you were trying to coach somebody, who’s gonna get up and give their first TED Talk, what would you say to them? And, I don’t know if the answers are similar.

Derek Sivers: Completely different answers, so we’ll just do the confidence one. I can give TED Talk advice later, if you want. Is that, in my case, you gotta understand, Carlton was hot. I was 18, she was 33, and even the first I ever saw her – I told you she was the booking agent’s wife. So, when I took that bus out to western Massachusetts, the first time, I’m sitting in the Worcester-Mass bus station, it’s nasty, it’s the dregs of the earth, with fluids dripping – and it’s gross, and I’m sitting there, waiting for somebody to pick me up.

And then, like, the door opens to the bus station, and it’s like that scene in the movie, with the backlit woman, and the fan blowing her hair and... dreamweaver! It’s that moment, this gorgeous woman walks in the bus station, and I’m like, who is that? And,

she walks towards me, and she says, Derek? I was like, ah! So, that was Carlton. It's important to know that Carlton is hot.

She still is. And, I was 18, and I was dating girls in Boston, and of course, everybody just broke my heart, and this one girl from Texas just dumped me, and I was sad, and at that point, Carlton and I had been traveling on the circus for a year or so, so she knew me very well. And, when I told her about the girl from Texas that dumped me, she said, Derek, you don't understand. I've met a lot of guys in my life, a lot of guys. She said, you are one of the smartest, brightest, most considerate – you've got a future, you've got your shit together. If some woman doesn't see that, that's her problem.

Okay, so, the first hundred times she said this, I thought she was just being nice, you know? I was like, oh, thank you, but I'm still sad.

And, I think it took about a year, where she just kept telling me this and kept telling me this. And, after about a year, it kinda sunk in. Like, I had noticed that I had just kind of internalized this, Like, yeah. Sorry, I know you can't see me right now, but I just changed my posture, I'm like, yeah. I'm pretty fucking awesome. I'm cool. I internalized that, so I just carried that with me ever since. There's this beautiful Kurt Vonnegut quote, that's just a throwaway line in the middle of one of his books, that says, you are whatever you pretend to be.

Tim Ferriss: That's such a good line.

Derek Sivers: And, I just took that to heart. I thought, you know – I'd also been reading Tony Robbins' stuff by then. In fact, oh, God, she was the one – Carlton's the one that told me to read Tony Robbins' *Awaken the Giant Within*, when I was 18, and that changed my life. So, yeah, she's one of the big three influences in my life.

Tim Ferriss: That's probably exactly the same age as the time when I read that book, as a side note.

Derek Sivers: Good time to read it.

It was formative years. So, yeah, you are whatever you pretend to be. I think I just realized somewhere in there that you could just choose to be confident. She helped kinda start it for me, but I kept it up myself, even when everything's going terribly, and I have no reason to be confident, I just decide to be.

Tim Ferriss: It seems like most of my friends who are what most people would consider successful, in various respects, can trace their confidence back to either, or, both, and a specific woman, or a specific coach, or mentor of some type. It almost always comes down to one or both of those.

Derek Sivers: Ooh, Tim, you know, I never told you about Kima Williams.

Tim Ferriss: That's a great name, and I wanna learn more. No, I don't know anything about it/

Derek Sivers: This is so up your alley; I can't believe I never told you about this. Thanks for prodding me, prompting me about this, because you're right. It was a gorgeous woman, Carlton, and it was a music teacher, Kima Williams. That – see, but he changed my life a year or two before I met her. So, imagine this. I'm 17 years old now, I'm living in suburban Chicago, and I decide to go to the Berklee School of Music, because I want to be a famous musician. And, just two or three months before I'm supposed to go, I see an ad in the local Chicago Tribune for music typesetting. And, I'm wondering how much sheet music I'm going to have to be writing.

So, I call up this classified ad in the paper, and I say, can I ask you some questions about music typesetting? And, he said, sure, why do you wanna know? And, I said, well, because I'm about to go off to Berklee School of Music in a couple of months. And he said, oh, really? He said, I used to teach at Berklee College of Music. I said, you did? Do you think you can give me some tips? He said, yeah, here's my address. Come to my studio at 9:00AM Thursday morning, see you then.

So, and he lived way downtown Chicago, in an area I've never been to. And, I'm gonna do a little foreshadowing of the story.

Tim Ferriss: Perfect.

Derek Sivers: Right now, because when I got married, years later, to the woman I met when I was sitting in Times Square with you, he was one of only three people I invited to the wedding. It was Carlton, from the circus, Kima Williams, my first music teacher, and my first girlfriend, Camille. Those were my only three guests to my wedding. And, Kima Williams told the story to my family. He said, I tell people all the time. I get all these kids that wanna be famous, and I say, yep, show up at my studio at 9:00AM, and he said, nobody ever does.

Nobody has their shit together to show up when I tell them to. And, he said, so, I'd honestly forgotten that there was this kid who had called from a classified ad.

Tim Ferriss: That was his way of saying no. Not no, it was just his hurdle. He was like, yeah, sure, alright kid, here's this seven-foot hurdle, let's see how you do.

Derek Sivers: Exactly. So, he says, my doorbell rings on Thursday morning, at 8:59AM. And, I open the door, and there's some longhaired teenager standing there. So, now, flipping back to first person point of view, is, Kima Williams is this large, black man from Hawaii, that was a musician that attended Berklee School of Music, and they stayed there to teach for a while. And so, what he taught me, in four lessons, got me to graduate Berklee College of Music in half the time it would take, and here was his thing. He said, the reason I wanted you to study with me for a bit, he said, I know you only have eight weeks before you go to school.

He said, I think you can graduate Berklee School of Music in two years instead of four. He said, the standard pace is for chumps.

Tim Ferriss: I should get a t-shirt made.

Derek Sivers: I know! This is total Tim Ferriss stuff, right? That's why I can't believe we haven't talked about this stuff before. He's the one, at the age of, like, 17, 18, got me into this mentality. He said, the standard pace is for chumps. That's – the school has to organize its curricula around the lowest common denominator, so that almost no one is left out. So they have to slow down so everybody can catch up. But, he said, you're smarter than that. Or anybody can be smarter than that, if they want to be, so you can go as fast as you want. And, here's how.

And so, he sat me down at the piano, he said, okay, what do you know about music theory? I said, well, I don't know, let's find out. And, he just asked me a few of these questions, like how does a major scale go, da, da, da, da, da, right? And, okay, show me a tri-tone, do you know what the tri-tone is? Okay, play me a tri-tone in the C major scale. I'm like, okay, B and F. He said, okay, now, how can you take that, and what other chord can you make from B and F? He said, okay, that's called the substitute chord. What is the resolution? And, he would just, like, boom, boom, boom, at this kind of pace, he was doing all this music theory stuff with me.

It was so intense, and I had all this adrenaline, like a video game, I was like, this is amazing! Okay, keep going! And he's like, okay, do that and this, and this! And, that was like a two-hour lesson, that went at that kind of pace, and then, he dumped a bunch of homework on me. He said, okay, go home tonight, and take this big book of jazz standards. Find me all the 2/5 substitutions, or 2/5 closures. Substitute chords for that, come back next Thursday, and we'll do this again. So, we did that for four Thursdays in a row. And, sure enough, what he taught me in four two-hour sessions was, basically, two years of Berklee College of Music. He compressed it into four lessons.

Tim Ferriss: Wow.

Derek Sivers: So, that when I showed up to my first day of Berklee, I tested out of the first few years of classes, just thanks to him. And then, he even taught me a strategy, just he offhand mentioned. He said, you know, I think they might still have a rule in place, he said, those other courses that you have to take to graduate?

He said, I think you could just buy the books for those, and then contact the department head to just take the final exam to get credit. So, I did that too. So, when I got there, all those required classes, like Bach counterpoint classes, I wasn't so interested in it. So, I bought the book, did all the homework, approached the department head, said, can I take the final exam for this? And, he said, looked at me weird, and said, okay. Took the final exam and got credit, without ever having to attend the class. And, yeah, that's how I graduated Berklee College of Music in two years.

Tim Ferriss: That's incredible. What a gift. Did he ever, I mean, aside from just showing up, which is, of course, half the battle, if not more than half the battle. Did he ever explain to you why he adopted you in that way? Were you the first person, first student he'd done that for, or is this something he'd done before?

Derek Sivers: I think he, yeah, he's definitely done this before, and since. So, last time we spoke, yeah, he's still teaching at Columbia College, in downtown Chicago.

So, I think he's done this for many people. He's just an amazing guy that is a really great teacher, a really strict teacher. He holds everybody to a really high standard. That sort of, if he said show up to my studio at 9:00AM, if I would've rang the doorbell at 9:10, he would've said, hmm, you're not serious. And, he probably would've turned me away, you know? So, he does that with his

students, and he's done that for many people before and since, I think,

Tim Ferriss: What would he say to you, if you recall, if you did something incorrectly? How did he provide feedback?

Derek Sivers: Hmm, well, I think for certain things, he'd just give me that raised eyebrow look. Like, oh, really? You think that that – but, you know what? Here's kind of the answer to your question, is he would question things. Kinda like you were talking about.

Calling me when wondering if people are asking the right questions. So, when I first, that very first phone call, when I said, I'm gonna go to Berklee School of Music in eight weeks, and he said, really? Why do you wanna go to Berklee? And, I said, because I wanna be a famous, successful singer/songwriter/performer. He said, hmm. He said, well, four years, and \$100,000 in tuition, it's a lot of money to learn to write a verse and a chorus. That kind of thing, just like, oh, really? Is that really the reason you're doing this? Just constantly questioning.

Tim Ferriss: That's so incredibly – especially at that age. What an incredible molding that he provided.

Derek Sivers: Ever since then, you know, you and I have, often, the same approach to life, looking for the shortcuts, or just looking at the way that most people do things, and saying, you know, you don't have to do it that way, that's very inefficient, you could just do this.

So, he just gave me that approach to life, and it's great.

Tim Ferriss: And, on a related note, could you talk about – we've talked about this a bit, but I never tire of it. Relaxing for the same result, because I think this is such a huge observation, that it's incredibly important for Type-A personalities, or at least for me, because I have a tendency to almost want to burn the candle at both ends, to prove to myself that I'm putting forth the maximum effort, I'm leaving as little as possible to chance.

Derek Sivers: You? No!

Tim Ferriss: With certain things. But, tell everybody about the bike. About the bicycle experience.

Derek Sivers: Yeah, this was kinda profound. Now, granted, I didn't learn this

until later, but yeah, I'd been very, very, very Type-A, my whole life. Even before I met Kima Williams, the age of 14.

My friends called me the robot, because they would never see me sleep or eat, or relax, or hang out. I just was so focused on being the best musician that I could be, that I would just practice every waking minute. If I'd begrudgingly go to a party, I'd bring my guitar, and I'd be sitting in the corner practicing my scales and arpeggios, while everyone was hanging out and getting high. So, yeah, I've always been very Type-A, and so a friend of mine got me into cycling when I was living in LA, and I lived right on the beach in Santa Monica, where there's this great bike path in the sand, that goes for, I think it's 25 miles in the sand. No, hold on. Something like that.

The exact number doesn't matter. But, what I would do is, I'd go onto the bike path, and I would get like, head down and push it, as hard as I could, I would go all the way down to one end of the bike path, and back, and then head back home, and I'd set my little timer when doing this.

Tim Ferriss: Huffing and puffing, red-faced,

Derek Sivers: Yeah, just red-faced huffing, all the way, pushing it as hard as I could, just every thrust of the leg, and of course, that made me quite fun if someone was in my way on the bike path.

Tim Ferriss: Sure. That guy's got places to go.

Derek Sivers: So, but I noticed it was always 43 minutes. If you know Santa Monica, California, you know the weather is always about exactly the same, all year round. So, it was always – unless it was a surprisingly windy day, it was always about 43 minutes, is what it took me to go as fast as I could, on that bike path. But, I noticed that, over time, I was starting to feel less psyched. About going out on the bike path. Because just mentally, when I would think of it, it would feel like pain and hard work.

Tim Ferriss: It sounds like pain and hard work.

Derek Sivers: Yeah, it was, but I guess, at first, it was okay, and after a while, it just felt like, I don't know, riding the bike, why don't I just hang out. So, then, I'd say, you know, that's not cool for me, to start to associate negative stuff with going on the bike ride, why don't I just chill?

For once. I'm gonna go on the same bike ride, but just, I'm not gonna be a complete snail, but I'll go at, like, half of my normal pace. So, yeah, I got on my bike, and it was just pleasant. I just went on the same bike ride, and I noticed that I was standing up, and I was looking around more. And, I looked into the ocean, and I saw there were these dolphins jumping in the ocean, and I went down to Marina Del Rey, to my turnaround point, and I noticed in Marina Del Rey, that there was a penguin that was flying above me. I looked up, I was like, hey a penguin, and he shit in my mouth. I was like, blah!

Tim Ferriss: Was it a penguin or a pelican?

Derek Sivers: Oh, yeah, a pelican.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I was like, a flying penguin in Marina Del Rey, what did you take before your ride? So, a pelican shit in your mouth.

That's incredible accuracy, did it from, like, how far away was it?

Derek Sivers: A good 20 feet up.

Tim Ferriss: Wow.

Derek Sivers: Yeah, I don't know if he was accurate, or I was. So, the point is, I had such a nice time, it was just purely pleasant. There was no red face, there was no huffing, I was just cycling, it was nice. And, when I got back to my usual stopping place, I looked at my watch, and it said 45 minutes. I was like, no way, how the hell could that have been 45 minutes, as opposed to my usual 43? There's no way, but it was right, 45 minutes. And, that was a profound lesson that I think changed the way I've approached my life ever since. It's because I realized that, what percentage of that huffing and puffing, then?

We could do the math, whatever, 93 point something percent of my huffing and puffing, and all that red face and all that stress was only for an extra two minutes. It was basically for nothing. I mean, we're not talking about me competing in something, where the huffing and puffing might've been worth it. But, for life, I think of all of this maximization, and getting the maximum dollar out of everything, and the maximum out of every second, and the maximum out of every minute, and I think I just take this approach now, of going, like, or, you could just take that lesson.

Take most of that lesson, and apply it, be effective, and be happy,

but you don't need to stress about any of this stuff. And so, honestly, that's been my approach ever since. I do things, but I stop before anything gets stressful.

Tim Ferriss: Is there any particular way that you remind yourself of that, given a lifetime of hard charging? If – I would find, I do find that I sometimes lose track of that type of truth, which I think is a truth, in every aspect, at least in the endeavors that I partake in, at least.

Are there any particular ways that you remind yourself of that, or keep it present for you?

Derek Sivers: I think it's just noticing the pain. Luckily, I live in a world where there's more psychic pain than physical pain, right? So, you have to notice the psychic pain that you're feeling, whether it's doing things you don't wanna be doing, and feeling the pain and frustration of that. Just, you notice this internal argh. That's my cue, I treat that like physical pain. Like, what am I doing? I need to stop doing that thing that hurts. What is that? And, it usually means that I'm just pushing too hard, or doing things that I don't really want to be doing.

Because I was asking the wrong questions, and following the wrong path, the wrong outcome.

Tim Ferriss: Now, rewinding the clock a little bit. 1998. How did CDBaby come to be?

Derek Sivers: It was just – I was really just selling my own CD, on my band's website. I was just, I had a band called Hit Me, and I had a CD, that was being played on radio stations across the country, and I think it was on 350 college radio stations across America. But, the only way to buy it was to mail a check or money order to my address. This was before the average person could get any e-commerce online, because there was no PayPal.

I guess I could've put it up on eBay or something, but that was the only way you could sell your CD online, as an independent musician. There was just nobody that would sell it for you. There were a couple big online record stores at the time. There was MusicBlvd.com, and CDNow.com, I think Amazon bought them both. But, the only way to get into their system was to go through the major labels.

Basically, get a major label record deal, and then, be in the major label distribution system, and then you would appear on

CDNow.com. Right? So, I thought, this is just a horrible, convoluted thing. It should just be dead simple, to just put your stuff online, have a buy now button, and ship it to the person that buys it. It shouldn't need to be that complicated. So, I did the research, and I did the work, and I went and got myself a credit card merchant account, which is like \$1,000 in setup fees. They actually had to send an inspector out to my location, to make sure I was a valid business.

I think I even had to incorporate to make them happy. Did all of this red tape, all this paperwork, \$1,000 in setup fees, but after three months, I had a credit card merchant account, and then, I had to figure out how to make a buy now button on my website, and that was also hard. Had to buy a book on CGI-BIN Perl scripts, and copy the example from the book on how to make a buy now button, but after three months of hard work, I did it.

My band's website had a buy now button. That was like, wow, look at that. And so, my friends in the New York City music scene, my fellow musicians, said, whoa, dude, do you think you could sell my CD through that thing? I said, you mean, on my band's website? They said, yeah, if you don't mind. I said, yeah, sure, why not? So, it was like a favor to my friend, Marco. Actually, here's a little tidbit of information.

Marco, who I just knew as a musician, Marco Artesardi, I just knew him as a cool musician in New York City, he was technically the guy who gave me the idea for CDBaby. Later, I found out that he's the son of the Prime Minister of Finland. And, it was like, all in the news, and I had no idea, but Marco, thank you. He's the one that asked me if I could sell his CD through my band's website. So, I did, and then I started getting calls, like, hey man, my friend Marco said you could sell my CD through your website.

I said, yeah, no problem, a friend of Marco's is a friend of mine, and it grew by request. Which kinda led me to this – when people ask me, how do I grow my business? I've got this business idea, basically, I'm trying to push it into the world, how do I push my idea into the world? I have no idea, I have no advice for those people, because I've only ever worked on the pull method, where people ask me to do things for them, and I say yes.

So, CDBaby just happened because all of my musician friends were asking me to sell their CD on my band's website. And, then, I just – eventually, there were so many that I just took them off of my band's site, and put them onto their own site, and that was

CDBaby.com.

Tim Ferriss: Of your projects that have done well, what percentage have come from scratching your own itch, a la CDBaby? Are any of the projects that have gained traction projects that you've thought of sending to a market that didn't include you?

Derek Sivers: Actually, after that first one – I mean, yes, I built a thing to sell my own CD, but all of them were scratching other people's itches. I don't wanna picture that. So, like, for example, shortly after that – I already had a UPC barcode thing, the way it used to work, to get a barcode on your album, you had to pay \$400 to the Universal Code Council, in order to get a six-digit prefix, which then let you assign the next five digits. Which meant 100,000 products underneath your barcode, product ID, or something like that.

So, a lot of musicians in the independent music world wanted to have a UPC barcode for their album, that would let them sell it in physical stores. And, a lot of physical stores wouldn't let you sell something, unless it had a UPC barcode.

But they didn't want to all pay the \$400 to get a company account. But, I already had a company account. And so, I just let a lot of musicians know, if you need a barcode, let me know, I can get one for you. So, enough people started taking me up on this that I started to charge \$20 for it. Because it would take me some time to assign them an idea and then generate the EPS or TIF graphic file to be included in their album artwork, and eventually I automated it. Point is, 100,000 barcodes were assigned, at \$20 each.

That was what I charged for the service, it was like \$2 million made, for the \$400 setup fee, for getting a Universal Code Council account. So, you could say I was scratching my itch, but really, it was more – I think of it as the co-op business model.

Tim Ferriss: It was responding to demand, rather than trying to create demand, is that?

Derek Sivers: Yes, I've only ever responded to demand, I've never tried to create demand, I don't know how.

I've only basically ever answered the calls for help, right, and it's usually using this, what I call the co-op business model, which is, I've already got something, other people could use it, I'm happy to share it. I'll just charge a little something to help pay for my time and resources, so that we can all share this resource that I've

already got.

Tim Ferriss:

I love – this is a great example of spotting something small, perhaps looking at a situation that many, many other people have been presented with, and spotting something interesting, in this case, an opportunity. And, I wanna highlight one other example, which is an email that you wrote, and I'm gonna just read a little bit, here. So, this is from some of your writing. When you make a business, you're making a little world where you control the laws. It doesn't matter how things are done everywhere else, in your little world, you can make it like it should be.

And, I know you're better at reading this stuff, but I'm just gonna, just because I have it right in front of me. When I first built CDBaby, every order had an automated email, that let the customer know when the order was actually shipped, and of course, this is Tim speaking now, everyone's seen these. They tend to be very Plain Jane, very generic, very boring. At first, it was just the normal – this is back to your writing – your order shipped today, please let us know if it doesn't arrive, thank you for your business.

A few months later, I felt it was very incongruent with my vision to help people smile. I knew I could do better, so I took 20 minutes, and wrote this goofy little thing. So, this is the email that would go out to folks. Your CD has been gently taken from our CDBaby shelves, with sterilized, contamination-free gloves, and placed onto a satin pillow. A team of 50 employees inspected your CD, and polished it, to make sure it was in the best possible condition before mailing. Our packing specialist from Japan lit a candle, and a hush fell over the crowd, as he put your CD in the finest, gold-lined box that money can buy.

We all had a wonderful celebration afterwards, and the whole party marched down the street to the post office, where the entire town of Portland waved goodbye to your CD –

On its way to you, in our private CDBaby jet, on this day, Wednesday, June 6. I hope you had a wonderful time shopping at CDBaby, we sure did. Your pictures on our wall as Customer of the Year. We're all exhausted, but can't wait for you to come back to CDBaby.com!! Two exclamation points. So, that 20 minutes, what happened, after you put that together?

Derek Sivers:

Well people would get it, and reply back. Like, who ever replies back to an automated shipping email, right? Like, who ever replies back to Amazon, saying, wow, guys, thank you so much. But, the

face that this quirky little email had so much personality, for one, it let them know, there's real people here. And, so, customers would often reply back, saying, you guys are hilarious! That was the weirdest thing ever! Awesome! But, more importantly, people started sharing it.

They would forward it to all of their friends, like, you guys have to see this. And, people who had blogs would post it on their blogs.

Even just you know, little Blogspot, or Wordpress, or any of those blogs. So, now, if you take any of those sentences, from that email, and you put it into quotation marks and search for it on Google, you'll find literally thousands of blogs have pasted my confirmation email onto their blogs. And, I think about this when young entrepreneurs ask me, how can I get traction for my idea? How can I get word of mouth and buzz happening?

I think you can read business books, and try to do these very serious, furrowed-brow, analytical approaches to this. Or, sometimes, it's just these cute little funny things, that you do, that set you apart from the rest, that make you remarkable, that make people remark on you, about you. So, yeah, I think thousands of people heard about CDBaby, because of that one little silly email.

Tim Ferriss: And, I think comparable might be Zappos, for instance.

And, their customer service. And, what was the anecdote that got spread around? The anecdote was, you could call up Zappos for anything. Even if it was unrelated to the product You could call them up and say, yes, I'm looking at the website, but I'd actually really like a pizza delivered to my house, and they would figure out a way to do that. On the serious, analytical side, you say, oh my God, that's such a waste of human and capital resources, and can you imagine if everybody called to order pizza? Which, of course –

Derek Sivers: It doesn't scale!

Tim Ferriss: Is never gonna happen, ever, and they got probably millions of dollars of free publicity, just by making that okay. And, how long did that take? Not long at all.

Derek Sivers: Plus, like, I don't mean to sound New Age-y, or whatever, but it's the right thing to do for the world, right? Just put aside the numbers for a bit, it's the right thing to do. It's cool, it makes people happier. It makes the people working there happier, which

makes them more into the whole feeling of what they're doing. There's so much to a business than just the money. So, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: So, tell me about – I remember reading about this, but I think we might have talked about it at one point, which was, when people would call CDBaby, trying to offer you financing. How did those go?

Derek Sivers: Well, so remember, I started CDBaby at the end of '97, beginning of '98, so it was the first dot com boom. And there was just so much money flying around, and everybody was trying to push money at anyone that had a dot com in their domain name, and had anything going on. So, of course, me, with an actual, profitable, running, business, which was, really, the only game in town, by the way. Like, back when I started it, if you were a musician that wanted to sell your music online, there was a guy named Derek in New York that could do it for you, and that was it.

There were no other businesses that would do it. Some showed up like, a year or two later, but at first I had no competition at all, I was it. So, tons of money was shoved my direction.

And, I entertained the first few calls. They said, we want to invest in your company, and I said, well, why? They said, so you can grow it faster. I said, but, I don't wanna grow it faster. They said, well, don't you wanna scale, or get more resources? I said, no, I have all the resources I need, I'm good. I was profitable, since the first month in business. Because my startup costs were \$495, is what it cost me to start the business, and get it running. It took me six days to build the site, and get it up and running.

And, it was profitable in the second month of business, when I sold over \$400 in CDs, that first month in business, I was profitable ever since. And, I just didn't need the money, and so, yet, people kept offering and they would wave these big dreams in my face, thinking it was going to distract or entice me, but it just didn't, and I remember – I doubt you remember, but MP3.com was a big deal.

In, like, 1999 through 2002 or so, they were like the big daddy of independent music streaming online, and downloads. And so, they were all – yeah, I think they had an IPO, they were public, and MP3.com was interested in buying CDBaby, and they asked what my price would be, and I said, just not interested in selling. And, they said, come on, everybody's got their price. And I said, no, I'm not interested, I'm having fun.

They said, come on, even billions of dollars? I said, come on, what are you, Carl Sagan? No! I don't wanna sell, there's just nothing in it for me, I'm enjoying what I'm doing, I don't need the money. So, after that point, after the first year or two, I just taught my customer service people, if you get any calls from investors, or VC firms, or anything like that, please just tell them no. Don't even send them my way. We're not interested. So, yeah, that lasted for ten years.

Tim Ferriss: And, how did you develop that relationship with money?

Is that something from your parents? Is that – and, I'm gonna ask a very personal question, also, and you can feel free to not answer it. But, why did your family – why were none of your family members at your wedding?

Derek Sivers: Oh, sorry, they were too. I'm sorry, when I said three guests, I meant other than them.

Tim Ferriss: Alright, now that I've checked that, okay.

Derek Sivers: I hate them! I hate them!

Tim Ferriss: It was in the back of my mind. So, how did you develop this relationship with money where you would say no for ten years? Because that's not what most people would do.

Derek Sivers: Because I had enough. Because I – actually, you know what? It's a bit of a trick reason, because in the early days, I still considered CDBaby to be a bit of a distraction. Because you remember, I was making my living as a professional musician, which was my original goal and dream. So, I was living my dream. I was touring, playing on people's records, producing people's records.

I played about 500 colleges in the Northeast. I was making good money as a professional musician. Like, that's what I really wanted to do, and this little CDBaby thing was a favor I was doing for my friends, to kinda give back to the community, right? So, as it grew. I didn't want it to grow, because it was taking me away from my music. Which is my real love, making the music, not selling other people's music.

So, there as this moment when I think I kind of sadly realized, I've created a business, oh well, I might as well make it something awesome. Meaning, I wanna make it like a utopian dream come true, from a musician's point of view, and I spent the night

brainstorming. What would a real dream come true, from a musician's point of view, look like?

And, I don't know if this will make sense to your listeners, but let's just find out. It was that it was going against everything that was the way that the music distribution world worked at the time. So, it's like, number one, I wanna be paid every week. No. two, I wanna know the full name and address of everyone that buys my music. No. three, you'll never kick me out for not selling enough, because that was a huge problem in the traditional music distribution world. You're given a window of time, kind of like physical books still are.

You have to prove yourself in a window of time, they'll put you into the bookstore, if it doesn't sell well, you're yanked out to make room on the shelf for other stuff. And then, No. four, no paid placement, because it never felt fair that people could come in and buy up the front page to get unequal footing, right? So, that was my utopian ideal for how this would work. The reason why I'm telling you this is, I wasn't trying to make money. I already had enough money, that I had made gigging and touring, and all that stuff.

I already had money, so this is something that I was doing to give back to the community, to create something that needed to exist. Kind of artistically, or just kind of almost like a community service type thing. So, that was the original DNA of this thing, and you know, from what we know about DNA, it helps decide what things grow into, right? So, this was the DNA, and then, as it grew, and then, it became really profitable. And, I was making, I don't know, \$100,000 a month doing this thing, and I had all of my bills paid, there was nothing I wanted to buy.

So, if someone from California contacted me, saying they wanted to give me lots of money to take a big chunk of my business, and help turn it big, big, big. We think you could do an IPO. I would just sneer, like, oh, no, that sounds awful. I don't want that life. I'm enjoying being fully in control here, and doing things for the right reasons, doing things for my musician friends, to make them happy.

Make the customers happy, make the musicians happy. All's good.

Tim Ferriss: What was the business model, in the very beginning?

Derek Sivers: It was only two numbers. Actually, it's a cute story. Most of us,

you know, when we start charging money for the first time, for our services or our goods, we don't know what to charge, right? So, for Marco, my first friend that asked me to do this, and maybe the next 10 to 15 friends that came after, I was charging nothing, I was just doing this as a free favor, this was my community service. And then, once I realized total strangers were sending me their music, I thought, alright, I better charge something. But, I don't know what to charge.

So, I was living in Woodstock, New York at the time, and there was a cute, tiny little record store in town, that sold consignment CDs on the counter, of local musicians. So, I walked in there one day, and, I said, hey, how does it work if I wanna sell my CD here? And, she said, well, you set the selling price at whatever you want.

We just keep a flat \$4 per CD sold, and then just come by every week, and we'll pay you. So, I went home to my new website that night, and wrote, you set your selling price at what you want, we'll just keep a flat \$4 per CD sold, and we'll pay you every week. And then, I realized that it took about 45 minutes for me to set up a new album into the system, because I had to lay the album art on the scanner, and Photoshop it and crop it, and fix the musicians' spelling mistakes in their own bio, and all that kinda stuff.

That took about 45 minutes per album. So, that shows you what I was valuing my time at in those days, that I thought 45 minutes of my time, that's worth about \$25 bucks. So, I'll charge a \$25 setup fee to sign up for this thing. And, then, ooh, at the last minute, I thought, in my mind, 25 and 35, they sort of occupy the same brain cell. In my head, 25 and 35, those numbers don't feel very different when it comes to cost.

\$10 is different, and \$50 is different, but 25, 35, that occupies the same space in the mind, so you know what? I'm gonna make it \$35, that will let me give anyone a discount, any time they ask. Even if somebody's on the phone and upset, I'll say, you know what? Let me give you a discount. So, I added in that little buffer, so I could give people a discount, which they love. So, yeah, \$35 setup fee, \$4 per CD sold, and then, Tim, for the next ten years, that was it. That was my entire business model, was generated in five minutes, by walking down to the local record store, and asking what they do.

Tim Ferriss:

I love that story, because I think there is an infatuation, a fetishizing of pivoting in the tech startup world that has infected many other types of entrepreneurship. Where people think, oh if

I'm not pivoting, I'm doing something wrong. I need to change my entire business model and my customer base every two months. And, I don't view that as a virtue.

Yes, there are times to change, if something isn't working, but, if you don't take the time up front to think about it, and then, you're constantly chasing the latest sort of fad, or whatever appears on the cover of TechCrunch, or Ink Magazine, or something like that, it's a recipe for failure for most people. I mean, there's a huge survivorship bias – I'm just gonna rant for a second. There's a huge survivorship bias, that I think it's important to realize, if you're hoping to become an entrepreneur, or are an entrepreneur. If you're only reading the cover stories, you're only getting the happy success stories.

And, for that reason also, I think it's dangerous to idolize people who bet the farm, and just happen to pull it off, because those are the people who are going to be written about. Much like if you open a Barron's. and look at mutual funds with these spectacular records, well, maybe they just got lucky, and all these other ones can't afford to buy advertisements, because they're no longer in existence. So, it's very similar to that.

One of the essays that you're best known for is, "Hell Yeah, or No." And, this has been extremely important for me to consistently reread, or listen to. How did it come about, and what is the gist of that?

Derek Sivers:

There was a music conference in Australia, that I had told my friend I would go with her to. It wasn't even like the conference themselves were really expecting me. It was my friend, Arielle Hyatt, is one of the best publicists I know, and she was speaking at that conference, and asked if I would come with her, as a co-presenter in her mentoring session, or something. So, I had said yes like, six months before. Yeah, sure, Australia, I'm living in New York City, sure!

And then, once it came close, it was time to book the ticket, I was like, ugh. I don't really wanna go to Australia right now, I'm busy with other stuff, and it was actually my friend Amber Rubarth, who's a brilliant musician, I was on the phone with her, and kinda lamenting about this, and she's the one who pointed out, she's like, it sounds like, from where you're at, your decision is not between yes and no, you need to figure out whether you're feeling like, fuck yeah! Or, no.

And, I said, yeah, that's really what it comes down to, right? Because the idea is, if you're feeling anything less than, oh, hell yeah, I would love to do that, it would be amazing! If you're feeling anything less than that, then just say no. Because most of us say yes to too much stuff, and then, we let these little, mediocre things fill our lives.

And so, the problem is, when that occasional, oh my God, hell yeah thing comes along, you don't have enough time to give it the attention that you should, because you've said yes to too much other little, half-ass kinda stuff, right? So, once I started applying this, my life just opened up, because it just meant, I just said, nope, nope, no, no, no. Then, I was really like, you know what? That'd be awesome. Then, suddenly, I had all the time in the world. And, you know, people say this every time people contact you, every time people contact me, they say, look, I know you must be incredibly busy. And, I always think, no, I'm not.

Because I'm in control of my time, I'm on top of it. Busy, to me, seems to imply out of control. Like, oh my God, I'm so busy, I don't have any time for this shit! To me, that sounds like a person who's got no control of their life.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, no control, and unclear priorities.

Derek Sivers: Yes, exactly. You asked how that still applies to my life. So, still just on the little, tiny, day to day level, even personal things. God, even people you meet, even as I'm dating, you have to do the hell yeah or no approach, or people ask you to go to events, or even people asking to do a phone call or anything, I think, am I really excited about that? And, almost every time, the answer's no. So, I say no to almost everything, and then, occasionally, something will come up. Even a little surprise will be dropped in my lap. Like this thing that just happened two months ago, called the Now, Now, Now Project.

Which, we don't even need to talk about the details don't matter so much, but it was just something that popped up, that seemed really interesting and people really wanted, and luckily, because I say no to almost everything, I had the time in my life to make it flourish.

So, for the last six weeks, all I did full time, was work on this brand new thing that showed up, because I could. So, that's, to me, the lovely result, of taking the hell yeah or no approach to life.

Tim Ferriss: Where can people learn more, and also check out the Now, Now, Now Project? And, also, I should note in advance for folks

listening, that we will also include links to anything we've mentioned in the Show Notes, which will be at fourhourworkweek.com/Derek, all spelled out. But, where can people find out more about Now, Now, Now?

Derek Sivers:

It's, if you go to nownownow.com, you'll find more about that. It was just, in short, I found that everyone has an about page on their site, and people have a contact page on their site, but often, when I'm looking at someone's personal site – even yours, I often wonder, I wonder what he's up to now, like, working on kinda stuff.

And, Twitter and Facebook don't answer that. I mean, you can see somebody's stream of stuff, but it just kinda says, like, okay, here's what I had for dinner last night, here's something in the news I'm mad about, or here's a cute thing I'm sharing. But, it doesn't really tell me, like, how are you? If you and I haven't talked for a year, what's up, how you doing? So, to me, the whole idea of a now page on your site, is just a general, here's what's up with me now, sorta page.

So, I had one of those on my site, I had a now page, and then, a guy named Gregory Brown saw it, liked it, he put one on his site, and all I did was just retweet him, when he told me. I said, cool, I wish everybody had a now page. And, within a few hours, eight more people had a now page, and within a month, 550 people had a now page on their website. So, I put together nownownow.com, as kind of a cute collection of people who have a now page on their website. Anyway, you know what I mean.

As always, the details don't matter, but I'm so glad I had the time to do that. And, it was only because I say no to almost everything, that I was able to just throw myself into this project, and build this new thing on a whim, and catch the momentum.

Tim Ferriss:

So, I am reading a section on this blog post that I wrote, about you and the best email you ever wrote, with the Japanese boxing specialist, and so on, and one of the paragraphs that I put here, for those people interested, it's just the most successful email I ever wrote, but it's everywhere online. And, it reads, "Stranger still, at its largest, Derek spent roughly four hours on CDBaby every six months. He had systematized everything to run without him." And, feel free to correct that, if it needs to be corrected, but what – assuming that's roughly true, what were some of the most important decisions or realizations that made that possible?

Derek Sivers: Hmm. I love the timing for when I read *Four-Hour Work Week*, because it was actually just after I had done this complete delegation of everything. It was feeling the pain, from everything having to go through me. Like, it was my business, right 100 percent, no investors, no nothing. And so, I hired people to help me, it was all me, me, me. So, four years into it, it was growing, it was really taking off. I had, I don't know, 20 employees, but still, almost everything went through me.

And, it made my day kind of miserable, because I'm a real kind of introverted, focused kind of person. I love to just sit down and do one thing for 12 hours without distraction.

Tim Ferriss: You're an INTJ, Meyers-Briggs?

Derek Sivers: Uh-huh, yep, are you?

Tim Ferriss: I'm 100 percent INTJ.

Derek Sivers: Yeah, so I hated going to the office, and being distracted every five minutes.

With my employees asking me questions. That what I felt such pain about, just, argh, I hate this! That I really, literally, man, I booked a flight to Kauai, I believe, and I was going to move to Kauai, and not give my employees my phone number, and literally move. I don't mean take a vacation, I mean, I am now going to be the owner of CDBaby, on a little island in Hawaii, and you guys just figure out your own damn problems, because I was just having so much psychic pain about this.

But then, luckily, with lovely coincidence, that night, that I booked the flight to Hawaii, I watched the movie *Vanilla Sky*. And, in *Vanilla Sky*, Tom Cruise is the owner of this big publishing company, but he gets all caught up with these crazy women, and gets all tangled in focusing on his own happiness, or unhappiness.

And all that, and pretty soon, his company is just wrestled away from him. And, I thought, oh, I don't want that to happen. I don't wanna just plug my ears, close my eyes, and run away, and have my company taken away from me. I need to give this – I need to deal with my problems, instead of running away from them. So, I cancelled the trip to Hawaii, and went into work the next day, and decided to fix this thing.

So, the next time somebody asked me a question, I gathered

everybody around, I said, okay, everybody, Tracey just asked me, Derek, what do we do when somebody on the phone wants a refund? I said, okay, everybody stop working, everybody gather around, okay. Tracey asked what we do if somebody wants a refund. Okay, here's not only what we do, here's why. Here's my philosophy. Whenever anybody wants a refund, you should always give it to them. And, I would explain not just what to do, but they why. It was constantly communicating the philosophy –

To get to the core of it, and I think you mentioned this back in *4-Hour Work Week*, There's almost nothing that really has to be you. You can almost get kind of AI, and figure out how your brain works, how your decision making works.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely.

Derek Sivers: So that other people can do it, and yeah, so that's what I did, for every single thing that ever came my way, I would gather everybody around, explain the philosophy behind it, why we do things this way, why I'm about to say what I'm about to say, and now, here's what I think we should do. Do you understand why? Now, please write it down.

But, it was also important I taught it to multiple people, not just one, and had them write it down. And, the cool thing is, I wasn't doing the hiring anymore. In the company, I had taught other people how to do the hiring. So, soon, my employees were doing the hiring, and then they were teaching new people how to do things out of the book.

And, so, yeah, let's see. So, that really started four years into the company. It was six months of difficult work, to make myself unnecessary. And so, my girlfriend at the time decided to go to film school in LA, so I decided to follow her down there. So, I moved down there to be with her, which is sort of a nice little way to let the company know, you're on your own. And, in fact – so, there's one little caveat to the thing where you said I was working on CDBaby for four hours a year, or whatever you said.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, four hours every six months.

Derek Sivers: Is, that's how much time I spent doing the stuff I didn't want to be doing. The monotony, the bureaucracy stuff. That, I had reduced down to almost nothing. Like, a few minutes a week. But, what I was doing every day, from 7:00AM to midnight, was programming the future of CDBaby. And, it was just, that's just the stuff that I

love doing. So, it was about making my life the way that I wanted it to be, doing the stuff I wanted to be working on, and not doing the stuff I didn't.

Tim Ferriss:

Which – and I'm glad you brought that up, because I wanted to clear up something, which is a common misunderstanding, related, understandably, to the title of *The 4-Hour Work Week*, and it's like, the single largest blessing and curse, that's gonna follow me for the rest of my life. But, it's a catchy title, yes, I tested it on Google Adwords, yes, it had a great conversion rate. That's why it's that instead of something stupid, like *Lifestyle Hustling*, or *The Chameleon Blah Blah Blah*. I had a bunch of awful titles, that one performed best.

But, the objective is not to be idle. The objective is to control this non-renewable resource called time, so that you can allocate it to the things you wanna be doing. So, in other words, I don't have a problem with hard work, as long as it is applied to the right things, that are determined with some degree of self-awareness and forethought, or planning. So, that's sort of a PSA, not for you. Derek, because you've read the book.

But, for every dick that stands up at a public Q&A, and goes. Well, Tim, I just wanted to ask, do you work four hours a week? I just want to turn into one of the Fantastic Four, and punch him in the neck from 300 feet away. But, for everyone that might be inclined to ask that question, there's the answer, read the book. And, I bumped into somebody recently – you mentioned this book, with I guess, the Frequently Asked Questions, and he was like, you should just make – because I was like, I try to be really patient, I try to answer people's questions when they have them.

But, it's so clear that most people asking questions have not read the fucking book, and they'll be like, can I eat bananas on this low carb diet? Can I eat quinoa after chocolate custard on this low carb diet? And, I'm just like, fuck! If you have to ask, the answer is no, and you clearly didn't read it. And, he's like, and you should just make, just have t-shirts that say, what was it? RTFM? Read the Fucking Manual.

But, I'll cut that screed short. The book itself, I wanna dig into some specifics with this manual, this rulebook. When you had multiple people write it down, how did you then convert it into a resource that could be shared with new hires?

Derek Sivers:

Actually, I think we put it on a Wiki inside, but most of it was just

word of mouth, the legend inside. Like, there were a few internal stories, kind of like the Zappos pizza story you just told. The one I always heard was Nordstrom's, there's some legend, that like, a guy buys a shirt from Sears, and it gets burned up in a fire, and he goes to Nordstrom's to return it. Like, they have such a liberal return policy that they'll even let you return burnt stuff from another store.

And, so, a legend like that will travel down, and it carries the philosophy inside of it. So, it's almost like, a little story like that can replace 20 pages of an employee handbook.

Tim Ferriss: Totally agree, yeah. It's an aphorism, or it's a story.

Derek Sivers: Yeah, so, there were quite a few of those especially inside CDBaby, and the people would see the decisions that I had made, and the people that I had given all their money back, in case anything went wrong. Or, just talking to me, and the conversations, and getting my philosophies. And, the early people at CDBaby really got it, and then they would spread it to the new people.

Tim Ferriss: On the – so, if we flip from book writing to book reading, you have a page on your site – sivers.org/book, I'll link to it in the show notes, I think it's book, correct me if the url is wrong. You have notes on over 200 books.

Derek Sivers: Uh-huh.

Tim Ferriss: You appear to be a voracious reader. How do you select the books you read, and how do you read them?

Derek Sivers: Okay, I select – usually, I let – usually, large numbers of people decide. Meaning, like, lots and lots of five-star reviews on Amazon. Occasionally, someone that I really respect, and that knows me will tell me, you need to read this book. And, even if it's had no reviews on Amazon, I'll just trust them. But, for the most part, I tend to go for things that I've seen lots of rave reviews, then I'll browse through the description on Amazon, and really read the reviews that people have said, and okay, this sounds like something worth my time.

Because I don't read fast, and I don't try to read fast. I like to sit and ponder as I'm reading. So, when I'm committing to a book, yeah, that's 20 or 30 hours, often.

So, I don't take it lightly, so I tend to go with lots of Amazon reviews, but then, I also give up quickly. So, if by chapter three, I'm not really into it, I'll just ditch it. And, you don't even see those on my site. So, I've ditched almost as many as you see there. I just don't write them up, I just delete them on the Kindle and move on. So, but here's the interesting thing, is – well, okay, there's a couple interesting things.

So, years ago, actually, it was right around the time when I first read *The 4-Hour Work Week*. I was living in London, even though CDBaby was still up and running in Portland, Oregon. Just because I wanted to experience the world, I was living in London at the time. And, actually, I don't know if I ever told you this cute story. It was my friend Arielle Hyatt, who I mentioned earlier, who told me about you, but who told me a little fable about you.

Tim Ferriss: Uh-oh, uh-oh.

Derek Sivers: So, I can't remember if I ever confirmed this with you.

Tim Ferriss: We'll find out right now.

Derek Sivers: I think, at the time, she was going to some kinda Masterminds seminar, by one of those how-to-be-a-millionaire kinda guys. And, apparently, five or six of those how-to-be-a-millionaire kinda guys held some big Mastermind thing in Hawaii, or something, and you were supposed to be there. And you didn't show – and people like Robert Kiyosaki, and people like that were there. And, you were supposed to be there, but you didn't show up, and you showed up late on the third day, where you showed up covered in mud, because you decided, on a whim, to try sleeping in a tree, or something like that, the legend goes.

Tim Ferriss: Uh-huh.

Derek Sivers: And, she told me about *The 4-Hour Work Week*, but basically, in the context of this guy, Tim, that doesn't give a fuck about convention. And, totally sounds like your kinda guy, that is doing things the way you do it, because you don't give a fuck about convention either, and you should read his book. And, it wasn't even available in England. I think the first time I got *4-Hour Work Week* was some kind of illegal PDF download of it off BitTorrent, or something.

Tim Ferriss: That how it happens a lot. So, that story, I believe is true, because I remember this particular event in Hawaii, around the time that the book came out, or maybe a year afterwards, within the year following publication. And, I remember going to Hawaii, and realizing that I wanted to explore Hawaii, as opposed to sitting trapped in the conference room. So, I rented a car, and ended up finding a bed and breakfast, where the house was built in the trees, this is totally true.

But, it wasn't available, or it wasn't on the market, and the caretaker ended up being this very attractive woman, and I said, well, is there anything that I can do, to be able to sleep in this treehouse? Because I'm really obsessed with the idea, and it looks like Jurassic Park here, with these prehistoric plants.

I'll even – and she had a ditch or something, that needed to be dug, and so I did that, and I did all this manual labor, and I ended up being able to stay in this treehouse. And, I think that it was on the – I wanna say the Hana Highway, if I'm getting that right. Just spectacular. I think it was in Maui. And so, I did show up to the event late. In a tank top, and these absurdly, even to me now, like, European short shorts, and I don't know why. So, yeah, that's a true story.

Derek Sivers: The legend is true!

Tim Ferriss: So glad that could be confirmed, it's so funny.

Derek Sivers: I forget what tangent we were on.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, we were talking about how you read books.

Derek Sivers: Ah, so, right around that time, I've been reading books voraciously for years, and people often ask about mentorship, and did you have any mentors, and I say, well, no, books are my mentors. Books guide almost all of the stuff I do. The stuff I've learned from books totally guides my life.

So, I realized that I would love a book while reading it, and it would sometimes echo with me maybe two weeks after, but two years later, I couldn't even remember if I had read it or not, and I thought, that's really a shame. I remember at the time, that book meant a lot to me. Why is it now, two years later, I've forgotten everything? I said, no, no, no, that's not good.

So, what I started doing in 2007, is every book I read, I would keep a pen in hand, and I would underline my favorite sentences, circle my favorite paragraphs, write notes in the margins, and then, after I was done reading the book, I would put aside two hours to open up a blank text file, and type out everything into a plain text file. So that I could – knowing that plain text files are the most long-lasting format there can be. They will work on everything. You can read them on phones, or new devices we haven't even thought of yet. We'll always be able to read plain text files. So, I started doing this for every book I read.

And then, I would review my notes later. So, every time I'm, say, just eating breakfast or something, for ten minutes, I'll pull up one of the notes from a previous book I read and just kind of rereview it. Sometimes kind of stop, take a sentence that means a lot to me right now, open up my diary, and write about that for a while, really internalize. Basically, I wanted to memorize every lesson I had learned, in every one of these books.

So, that's what I started doing. I even started putting them into spaced repetition programs. And, that didn't really work out too well, because I wasn't really sure how to formulate that knowledge into a Q&A flashcard kinda format.

Tim Ferriss: Using SuperMemo, or something like that.

Derek Sivers: Anki, exactly.

Tim Ferriss: Anki, side note for people, means rote memorization in Japanese.

Derek Sivers: Really?

Tim Ferriss: Yep. A, N, K, I. Sorry to interrupt.

Derek Sivers: So, it wasn't until, say, 2010, that I realized I had all these lovely book notes hidden on my hard drive, just for my eyes only.

And, I thought, well, why don't I just put them on my website? If the publishers tell me to take them down, I will, but maybe they'll be some use to people. So, yeah, sivers.org/book, what you're seeing is all my detailed book notes since 2007.

Tim Ferriss: If you were to, and this may be a very difficult question to answer, but to suggest five to start with. Or so. I mean, I'm just throwing out a random number. But, if you were to suggest some books to start with at sivers.org/book. And, by the way, this is not a setup

for my own book.

Derek Sivers: Oh, no, no, no. God, wouldn't that be cheesy?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. First, *The 4-Hour Work Week*. Second, see rule No. one!

Derek Sivers: So, the – I've actually already answered the question for you, because once I posted them on my site, I realized I should give them a 1 to 10 rating, because I knew this is the next question people are going to ask.

Is, well, which ones would you recommend? So, I give every book a 1 to 10 rating, and it's, when you go to sivers.org/book, it's already sorted for you, with my top recommendations, up top, and I think it's, you know what? I haven't told you this, either. Back in 2008 or '09, you and I were sitting down the hill from your house, at that local coffee shop. And, we were talking about the Charlie Munger book. That big, thick, black one, I forget what it's called.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, *Seeking Wisdom*.

Derek Sivers: Yes!

Tim Ferriss: *Seeking Wisdom: From Munger to Darwin*, or maybe the other way around. By Peter Bevelin.

Derek Sivers: That's it! So, -

Tim Ferriss: That's a fascinating book.

Derek Sivers: Well, I'm glad to have turned you onto it.

Tim Ferriss: Yes, I appreciate it.

Derek Sivers: So, after talking about that book, we were talking about the books that changed our life. And, you told me, I think, *The Magic of Thinking Big*, is that it?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, David Schwartz. I have it face out on my shelf in my living room.

So that I can see it constantly.

Derek Sivers: Okay, so when you told me that *The Magic of Thinking Big* made such a big difference to you, I picked it up and I read it. And, it did nothing for me.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it has to catch you at the right time.

Derek Sivers: Exactly. And, so, that's why –

Tim Ferriss: And, it's also one of those books, sorry, but I'm getting defensive. But, it's one of those books that I read in around 2000, maybe a year or two after college, and I was in a shitty 100-plus hour a week job, where I was sleeping at my desk, and sitting the the fire exit, because that's the only place they can fit me. But, yeah, it has to catch you at the right time.

Derek Sivers: Exactly. And so, there have been people who I tell about how Tony Robbins' *Awaken the Giant Within* totally changed my life, and I give it to friends, and they go, enh, it did nothing for me. So, you're right, it does matter when you read a book. Even, I noticed, on a specific subject. I read, and loved *Stumbling on Happiness*. Loved that book.

And so, I read two or three more books on the subject of the study of happiness. And, by the time I got to the third one, I forget what it's called right now. Maybe *Happiness Project*, or something like that. Whatever the third one I read was, I remember flipping through the book quickly, like, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever, I got it, I got it. And so, I gave it a really bad rating on my website. And, someone emailed me later, and went, my God, that book changed my life, I can't believe you gave it a 2 out of 10 rating on your website!

And, I looked again at my notes, and I thought, you know what? It's probably actually a really good book, I had just read it at the wrong time, because I had just read two other books on that subject, and –

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, exactly, just in a different order, it might've been a 10.

Derek Sivers: Right, exactly! If I read that one before *Stumbling on Happiness*, which I gave a 10 to, then I'd've given that one a 10, and *Stumbling on Happiness* might've been like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know this already.

Tim Ferriss: *Stumbling on Happiness* is a great book, for those people who are familiar with the term I use in *The 4-Hour Work Week*, the deferred life plan.

In other words, saving and retiring in order to retire at some point

in the future, maybe 10, 20 years down the road, 30 perhaps, to redeem all of that toil for some reward, like sailing around the world in a sailboat. Stumbling – I always forget. Is it stumbling on or upon happiness.

Derek Sivers: On. *Stumbling On Happiness*.

Tim Ferriss: *Stumbling On Happiness*, by Daniel Gilbert, is that right?

Derek Sivers: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Is a great, I think, reality check, for that type of extremely risky, doomed to failure deferred life planning.

Derek Sivers: So, I've got to tell you, so we haven't really talked about this yet, but this is so up your alley, up your listeners' alley, people who are into books will appreciate this. So, a lot of my friends – actually, I don't think any of my friends are as into reading as I am. Okay, a couple are, but most aren't.

And so, whenever I tell them about some amazing book I've read, the gist I get from my friends is, just tell me what to do.

Tim Ferriss: Give me the index card, yeah.

Derek Sivers: It's like, yeah, like they don't wanna read the book. So, my friend Jeff, he's a smart guy, he's a lawyer, he's smart. But, he just looks at me with these tired eyes, and is just like, I'm not gonna read the book, dude. You can stop pushing it on me, it's never gonna happen. He said, just tell me what to do, he said, I trust you. I like you, you know me, so tell me what to do.

And, I realized that, if you trust the source, you don't need the arguments. That so much of a book is arguing its point, but often, you don't need the argument. If you trust the source, you can just get the point. So, after reading, taking detailed notes on 220 books, on my site, I realized that distilling wisdom into directives is so valuable, but it's so rarely done.

In fact, the only time I can think of that it was done was Michael Pollan, with his three books in a row, about food, each one getting shorter and shorter. I think the first one was, was it *Omnivore's Dilemma*?

Tim Ferriss: *Omnivore's Dilemma*. Yeah.

Derek Sivers: Which was big, so I know you're the kind of guy that would –

Tim Ferriss: It's a great book, but also, I mean, there are, like 70 pages on corn production in the US, and most people just drop out. Even I was like, God, my eyes are glazing over here. But, I know there's some great stuff coming, so I'll just slog through it. But yes, a very great book, but a very big book.

Derek Sivers: And then, he did another one a year later, that basically took the best stuff from *Omnivore's Dilemma*, and made it into a shorter, kinda more pop market kinda 2 to 300-page book. I forget the name of that one. And –

Tim Ferriss: Could it have been *In Defense of Food*, maybe?

Derek Sivers: Yes, that sounds right, thank you.

So, even that one, I remember someone telling me I should read it, and I remember looking at it and going, I don't know if I wanna read 300 pages about food. But then, about a year later, he put out a teeny, tiny, little book called *Food Rules*. I think that's what it's called. And, it's like, you basically can read the whole thing while just standing in the bookstore. It's, he took the energy and the effort to compress everything he's learned into very succinct directives. And, that's what it is. Sentences that tell you what to do. Do this, do that.

Or, don't do that. If your grandmother wouldn't recognize it as food, don't eat it. And, his tagline for that book, the popular phrase was, "Eat food, mostly plants, not too much."

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Derek Sivers: And, I so admired that. I got inspired by the effort it takes to distill the blah, blah, blah, blah blah, down into the specific sentences for the people that just aren't going to read that 900-page book, right?

Probably all of that same information is in the 900-page book, but we have to be honest for a minute and admit that not everyone is going to read the 900-page book. So, as I'm reading these 300-page books, 220 of them, very often there'll be this, like, brilliant, amazing, important point on, like, page 290, and I feel almost a little sad that almost nobody's gonna read that. I wish that these little, tiny points were extracted, without all the surrounding argument.

So, especially – okay, I’ll admit, this was also sparked by the idea of when I had a kid, and I thought, I might not be alive when he’s my age, or even when he’s 19, I might die before he gets older. How can I compress everything that I’ve learned, that I think he should know, into a real, succinct format, that he will definitely read? And, of course, then I thought, other people will read, too. So, I got onto this idea, of the Do This Project.

Which is, instead of talking around a subject, just giving directives, saying, do this, do that, don’t do this, don’t do that. Which is kinda funny, because it feels very presumptuous, right? Like, who am I to tell others what to do? But then, I think, well, who am I not to? Right, it’s useful, so get over myself. Kinda like you asked about me onstage when I was 18, what was the biggest lesson learned? Like, this isn’t about me, people aren’t here about me, they’re here for their own gain.

Oh, you asked about my advice to TED speakers. That’s my main advice to TED speakers. It’s like, people aren’t here to see you, or your life story. People come to TED, or watch TED videos, to learn something. So, just speak only about what is surprising, and skip everything else.

Tim Ferriss: If people could start with one of your talks – I know I’m interrupting. But, which talk would you suggest, as a starter?

Derek Sivers: My favorite one is, I think on the TED site, it is called “Weird or Just Different?” I call it the Japanese Addressing System.

Tim Ferriss: And, I actually know what that means, yeah. It can be so confusing, everybody does it different.

Derek Sivers: Yeah, until someone explains it to you, and then you realize oh, it’s just a different way of thinking. And, here, I’ll just give you a little teaser. And, the talk is only three minutes long. So, you go to TED.com, and search for Derek Sivers, and it’s called “Weird, or Just Different.” And, the little teaser is, it blew my mind when I found out they don’t – the reason the streets don’t have names, is because they think of the streets as the blank, unnamed spaces, because the blocks are the things that have names.

The blocks are the piece of land with houses on them, that’s what’s important. Whereas, in America, and most of the world, if you say, what is the name of that block, people will look at you weird.

Well, this is Oak Street, this is 3rd Avenue. What do you mean?

You say, well, what is that block called? That doesn't have a name, we don't name our blocks, we name our streets. The blocks are just the unnamed spaces, in between named streets. So, in Japan, it's the opposite. The streets are the empty, unnamed spaces between named blocks.

So, I realized that, how many things in life actually work just as well the complete opposite way we're used to thinking of them. Both ways are correct, so anyway, that's the idea.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. But, we were talking about directives.

Derek Sivers: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: And, how, the advice to give TED speakers is how I took us off track.

Derek Sivers: That's alright, go ahead.

Tim Ferriss: No, I was gonna ask – and, I'm not trying to cut this short, so I don't forget to ask, where can people find the directives?

Derek Sivers: Only in this podcast. No, it's true. I haven't done anything with it publicly. At first, I thought I was gonna make this into a big, keynote speech I was doing at a conference. The World Domination Summit Conference, in Portland.

I spent four months of fulltime work, from 7:00AM to midnight, for four – seven days a week, for four months in a row, just rereading all 220 book notes, extracting, or trying to turn all of this advice or this knowledge, this wisdom, trying to turn it into directives. Because a lot of it, almost never is in the directive format already. People talk around a subject, they talk about findings and research. But, it takes some real effort, kind of like the old philosophers, the – you've read the stoicism book? *The Guide to The Good Life*?

Tim Ferriss: Yes, I have. I have that up on my living room wall, as well.

Derek Sivers: And, in that book, right in the intro, he says, if you were to ask any kind of modern person who calls themselves a philosopher, what should I do with my life?

He said, sit down and get comfortable, because they will tell you, well, it depends on what you mean by what, and it depends what you mean by do, and really, it depends what you mean by life. Or,

really, maybe it depends on what you mean by my life. So, people talk around the point a lot, but back in 600 BC, if you would've asked one of these philosophers, what should I do with my life, they would sit down and tell you exactly what to do with your life. Do this, don't do that, pursue this, don't pursue that.

So, I was really inspired by that intro too. So, the idea was, now, how can I go back, through all of these amazing books I've read, and compress them into specific directives? So, it took me four months of work to come up with the following like, 18 sentences. Do you wanna hear them?

Tim Ferriss: I do wanna hear them. I'm super-excited about this.

Derek Sivers: So, this was going to be a 35-minute long keynote speech, and it turned out to be a horrible, 35-minute long talk. But, it's entertaining for about three minutes. So, here's the three-minute version. Okay, first, I had fun categorizing them. So, this is the category called "How to Be Useful to Others." Ready?

Tim Ferriss: I'm ready.

Derek Sivers: No. one, get famous. Do everything in public, and for the public. The more people you reach, the more useful you are. The opposite is hiding, which is of no use to anyone. How to be useful to others, No. two, get rich. Money is neutral proof that you're adding value to people's lives, so by getting rich, you're being useful as a side effect. Once rich, spend the money in ways that are even more useful to others. Then, getting rich is double useful. How to be useful to others. Share strong opinions. Strong opinions are very useful to others. Those who are undecided or ambivalent can just adopt your stance.

But, those who disagree can solidify their stance by arguing against yours. So, even if you invent an opinion for the sole sake of argument, boldly sharing an opinion is very useful to others. How to be useful to others: be expensive. People given a placebo pill were twice as likely to have their pain disappear when told that that pill was expensive. People who paid more for tickets were more likely to attend the performance. So, people who spend more for a product or service value it more, and get more use out of it, so be expensive. That's it.

Tim Ferriss: This is good stuff.

Derek Sivers: That's just how to be useful to others, that's just one category. I've

got a few more, if you wanna hear them later.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, well, let's – what is your favorite, of the remaining categories? Maybe we could do one more.

Derek Sivers: Well, okay, good. If you imagine that I've got a few more that are done in that format, like, I've got – this is very stoicism, I've got one called, "How to Thrive in an Unknowable Future." That's prepare for the worst, expect disaster, own as little as possible.

Choose opportunity, not loyalty, choose the plan –

Tim Ferriss: Let's do that one. Because you know I'm a sucker for stoicism.

Derek Sivers: Alright.

Tim Ferriss: Let's talk about that one.

Derek Sivers: Okay. So, how to thrive in an unknowable future. Prepare for the worst. Since you have no idea what the future may bring, be open to the best and the worst. But, the best case scenario doesn't need your preparation, or your attention. So, mentally, and financially, just prepare for the worst case instead. And, like insurance, don't obsess on it, just prepare, and then carry on appreciating the good times. How to thrive in an unknowable future. Expect disaster. If you've ever watched a VH1 Behind the Music, you know every single success story had that moment where the narrator would come in and say, "And then, things took a turn for the worse." So, fully expect that disaster to come to you at any time. You have to completely assume that it is going to happen and make your plans accordingly

Not just money, but family, and health, and freedom, you have to expect it to all disappear. Besides, you appreciate things more when you know this may be your last time seeing them. How to thrive in an unknowable future? Own as little as possible, depend on even less. The less you own, the less you're directly affected by disaster.

How to thrive in an uncertain future is, choose opportunity over loyalty. Have no loyalty to location, corporation, or your last public statements. Be an absolute opportunist, doing what is best for the future in the current situation, unbound by the past. Have loyalty for only your most important human relationships. How to thrive in an unknowable future? Choose the plan with the most options. The best plan is the one that lets you change your plans.

For example, renting a house is actually buying the opportunity to move at any time, without losing money in a changing market. And, lastly, how to thrive in an unknowable future? Avoid planning.

For maximum options, don't plan at all. Since you have no idea how the situation or your mood may change in the future, wait until the last moment to make each decision.

Tim Ferriss: Which of these have you most concretely implemented in your own life, from this category?

Derek Sivers: Oh, God, I really internalize this category. It's the whole way I see the world. Like, if you look inside my head, it's just that, you'd think I was a little nuts, in that I'm just always expecting everything to disappear, even something like – I step outside, and I'm living in New Zealand now, and I step outside, it's just gorgeous, I'm surrounded by nature, and blue skies, and I just inhale, and I think, yep. This is all gonna disappear. This is all gonna go to shit. Pollution's gonna wreck this all. But, I don't think that in an awful, doom and gloom way. You can tell I'm not Eeyore.

But, it's just part of my appreciation for everything now. And every person I know, and even just my health. God, when I stand up in the morning, I'm like, I just wake up full of energy. I think, yep, in another couple decades, that's not gonna happen anymore. I better really appreciate this. So, yeah, it's more just a deep mindset.

Tim Ferriss: So, practical, I give a short, 5-minute talk called Practical Pessimism. I think it was just –

Derek Sivers: Yes, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Stoicism as a productivity system, I talked about this, because I think it's so important not to be brainwashed into looking at everything with rose-colored glasses, because it is not always a constructive exercise. In fact, it can very much be the opposite, and the reason, one of the primary reasons I'm fasting right now, I'm eight days into a target of ten, I'm getting a little woozy today, but all things mostly manageable, is – and, I'm also, and I haven't mentioned this to you.

Also unshaven, also wearing the same, mostly the same clothing. Pants, jacket, etc., all week long. And, the reason for that is, and

actually, what you just said reminded me a lot of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. Which were the Emperor of Rome's wartime journals, and never intended for publication. But, it would always start with, today, you are gonna meet rude, ungrateful, arrogant people, and this is how you're going to contend with it.

And, it seems very depressing, until you realize that he was setting a – creating a mindset that could deal with those worst-case scenarios, if they presented themselves. And, similarly, in Seneca – who is a very controversial Stoic, but nonetheless, my favorite to read. I have a huge, like 30 hours of audio coming out related to Seneca shortly. But, one of his, one of my favorite passages from Seneca is –

One that reads, and I'm gonna massacre this, but it's paraphrased. "Set aside some time each month, where you subsist on the scantest of fare, the roughest of dress, etc. etc. Asking yourself all the while, is this the condition I so feared?" And so, not only are you mentally preparing yourself by visualizing the worst-case scenario, you're actually practicing. You're rehearsing poverty, or lack of variation. Or, in my case, no food. I've done this before with, say, rice and beans, for five days, and you're like, okay, it's cost me \$2 a day to eat, and I feel fucking fine.

And, in fact, not having the paradox of choice, having to go to the Thai restaurant and pick from 150 items that all have the same six fucking ingredients? That's been really relaxing. And, so on and so forth. So, that's maybe a slight digression, but I've always appreciated that, about how you have designed your life.

On the books, so, I'm gonna give – sorry, go ahead?

Derek Sivers:

I wanna actually, before we close out this subject, I need to give you sort of the big punchline ending to these directives. Because some of these didn't fit into this do this, do that format, and I didn't want to start making lists of what not to do, because I liked the idea that every single sentence should be actionable. Right, and so don't do this, don't do that didn't feel actionable enough to me, so I had fun, kind of like our mutual hero, Charlie Munger.

Had a speech once that he gave, I think at USC, about how to be a failure. And it was – so I made a category called "How to Stop Being Rich and Happy." So, this is after you're rich and happy, how to stop being rich and happy. And, I thought you'd appreciate this first one. Prioritize lifestyle design. You've made it, so it's all about you now. Make your dreams come true.

Shape your surroundings to meet your every desire. Make your immediate gratification the most important thing. How to stop being rich and happy: chase that comparison moment. You have the old thing, you want the new thing, yes! Do it! Be happy for a week. Ignore the fact that happiness comes only from the moment of comparison between the old and new. Once you've had your new thing for a week, and it becomes your new normal, then just go seek happiness from another new thing. Yeah, you get the idea.

Tim Ferriss: No, I do, and I agree with the first point, people might think that I wouldn't, but I've been doing a lot of reading and practice with meditation and so on. But, if you read, say, Tara Brock, which, she has a fantastic book, called *Radical Acceptance*. Which I highly recommend to people who are Type-A in particular. But, most suffering – actually, Tony Robbins would say this too. I attended my first live event a few weeks ago, which was very fascinating.

And, a lot of fun. But, that most suffering comes from a focus on me, on the self.

Derek Sivers: Yes!

Tim Ferriss: And, as soon as you – I received a piece of advice, maybe five years ago, from someone, who said, if you're having trouble making yourself happy, just make someone else happy.

Derek Sivers: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: And, it sounds so clichéd, but it's actually really pragmatic, and it makes me think of this – something simple that I've been doing, that Gabrielle Reese, Gabi Reese, who was on this podcast with Laird Hamilton, both very famous athletes, and they're married. She said, go first. And all she meant by that was, during your day, be first. Be the first to look at someone and smile, be the first to look, when you walk up to the barista, ask them how they're doing. Be the first to initiate that, and it's such a simple way to put a smile on people's faces. Not always, but a good portion of the time, and that can change your own state.

Two things on books. Just because you're sharing your methods, I'll share a couple that I've enjoyed. One is, on Amazon, I will look at the four-star – if it has a sufficient critical mass, of say, five stars, to be worth looking into, if that's how I'm filtering, then, I will look at the most helpful critical reviews, that are four and three-star. In addition to that, I will go to, I think it's just kindle.amazon.com, and I will read the public highlights.

So, I will take maybe five minutes to look at the most critical three and four-star reviews. Because the five-star, and the one-star and two-star tend to be worthless, in a way, because they're so one-sided. So, look at the three and four-star, most helpful critical reviews, and then, I will look at the Kindle highlights, and that is, in effect, seeing the movie trailer.

It's like, if you don't like the highlights from the movie trailer, you're definitely not gonna like the full feature film, especially when it takes 30 hours, instead of one and a half. And, the reason why I started using a Kindle was specifically so I could export my notes.

Derek Sivers: Yes!

Tim Ferriss: As text files. So, the – that's one of the ways that I filter books these days. But, the question that I always ask, that I'd like to ask you, and I think we might have to do a round two sometime, because I think we're gonna have to hop off in maybe ten minutes or so. But, what – there's so many questions I wanna ask you. What is the book you've given most as a gift?

Derek Sivers: *A Geek in Japan.*

Tim Ferriss: *A Geek in Japan?*

Derek Sivers: *A Geek in Japan*, by Hector Garcia. Because I'm fascinated with understanding the mindset of a place. Right, like, I would really love to understand the philosophy of Brazil, India, China, Finland, France, Japan, Thailand. Like, to me, each place seems to have its own cultural norms, in how it approaches time, or long term versus short term kind of thinking, or what's precious, and should be protected, Or, human interactions, relationships, dealing with obstacles, conformity versus rebellion. Or, just how it approaches people who are unfortunate,

So, we think of philosophies, like existentialism, stoicism, nihilism. But, I'd love to study Brazil-ism, Japan-ism, Thai-ism. I really do think of each country's culture as like a working modern, applied philosophy.

Tim Ferriss: Totally.

Derek Sivers: So, *A Geek in Japan* is written by this Spanish guy, who's been living in Japan for ten years, and while most of the book is, hey,

look at this, check out that, it has a section in the middle, that, I think, explains the Japanese mindset better than anything I'd heard before.

And, I spent months in Japan over the last 20 years. I've gone there five or six times, and I used to play guitar for a Japanese pop star, and toured the country. But, somehow, *A Geek in Japan* made me understand Japan more. So, I give that to everyone who's going to Japan. But, actually, an even better book I've found since then, on describing the mindset of a country, is called *Au Contraire: Figuring Out the French*. It is so deep! It explains the mindset so well. I wish there was a book like this about every country.

I highly recommend it. So, you listeners out there, if you know of any books like this, that explain the mindset of a country, please email me to let me know.

Tim Ferriss: There is a book – and, I'm gonna rely on the readers as well. What is your email, just Derek? If you wanna give it out.

Derek Sivers: Yeah. derek@sivers.org.

Tim Ferriss: And, in the comments, guys – links to all these books, the show notes and everything, will be at fourhourworkweek.com/Derek.

But, there is a book out there, I wanna say Enrico Something, I think is the author, but an Italian – I think it was an Italian, effectively writes *Geek in America*. But, from the standpoint of an Italian traveling through the US, including the heartland.

Derek Sivers: Nice.

Tim Ferriss: So, that's one.

Derek Sivers: Cool.

Tim Ferriss: What \$100.00 or less purchase has most positively impacted your life, in the last six months, or recently?

Derek Sivers: Well, I'm such a minimalist that I always avoid letting any new possession into my life, right? But, I took my little 3-year-old to a café one morning, that had a big box of toys. Little figurines, and cars and dolls and monsters. And he was just in the zone, for like, two or three hours, completely engrossed in all these toys. So, I was like, yeah, I can't push my minimalism on him, he needs toys.

So, that night, I went onto eBay, and I found someone selling a huge box of old, used toys, just like that, you know. Figurines and cars and stuff, and endless hours of entertainment since. Best \$20.00 I've spent in a long time.

Tim Ferriss: That's awesome. Do you have a favorite documentary or movie?

Derek Sivers: No. I really don't watch hardly anything. I don't – I mean, relative to the norm, right? I mean, I watch movies, but more kind of for the artistry, the cinematography, and I listen to music, of course, but, I don't watch documentaries, or TED talks, or TV shows, and also, I don't even read blogs or articles, and I don't listen to podcasts. In fact, I listened to my very first podcast two weeks ago, that was the one with you and Tony Robbins, that was the first time I'd ever listened to a podcast. Because I just have this lovely, optimized life, where I wake up, and I just write, write, write, write, write, all day long.

I have no commute, I'm never really driving anywhere, so I don't have any downtime like that. And, if I'm outside, I wanna hear the birds in the trees, you know? And, if I'm working out, I'll either crank up the hiphop, or sometimes, just enjoy the hardcore sound of the clanking metal plates. So, I really just prefer books as my medium of learning and input.

Tim Ferriss: Of information intake. What are you listening to now or recently for working out?

Derek Sivers: I've started realizing that I don't know my American history of hiphop. I've always been loosely aware of it, but I recently saw the Chris Rock movie, *Top Five*. And, the running punchline in that movie is, he goes around going "What are your top five?" And, people kinda name their top five hiphop artists, who they think are most important. And, there are some in there, I realized, I've actually – I know who these people are, of course we've all heard of KRS-One and Rakim, but it's like, wait, I don't think I actually know their music well.

So, I've started giving myself an education in the history of hiphop, and so, lately, I've been listening to nothing but hiphop, going back to the very beginning, the *Wild Style* movie, and the very early stuff, kinda giving myself the chronological history of hiphop, it's been fun.

Tim Ferriss: Any favorites, so far? I would say Eric B. and Rakim are way up at the top for me.

Derek Sivers: Yes! Especially once I understood the context, when you hear the before and after. Like, right now, you can take, Rakim for example, I mean, sure, you can take him for granted, the way that if you listen to Jimi Hendrix, you can take him for granted, now, because people have expanded on that. But, if you think about what people were doing with guitars before Jimi Hendrix and after, it was just mind-blowing, and so, I think Rakim is like that for hiphop.

You listen to what was going on before him, and then after he came along, it was just such a whole new approach, that changed everybody since.

Tim Ferriss: If you could have one billboard, anywhere, with anything on it, what would it say?

Derek Sivers: Well, my real answer, if I was taking that literally, is that I would remove all the billboards in the world, and ensure that they were never replaced. Have you ever driven through India? It's so sad.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Well, I haven't driven, but on my way to the Calcutta ER, where I spent a week, I was briefly looking out the windows.

Derek Sivers: Even in these small towns in Karalla, there is almost no space that is left without advertising. So, I really admire those places, like Vermont, and I think Sao Paulo Brazil, that ban billboards. But, I know that that wasn't really what you were asking. So, my better answer is, I think I would make a billboard that would say, It Won't Make You Happy, and I would place it outside any big shopping mall, or car dealer. So, ideally – you know what would be a fun project, actually, would be to buy and train thousands of parrots to say, it won't make you happy!

And then, you let them loose in the shopping malls and superstores around the world. That's my life mission. Anybody in? Anybody with me? Let's do it.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it won't make you happy. Very stoic, very stoic. Which does not mean you can't have joy in your life, but it's – I think *Stumbling on Happiness* is a great one for people to peruse. Do you have notes on *Stumbling on Happiness*, on –

Derek Sivers: Yeah. That's on there.

Tim Ferriss: Alright, great, so we will link to that. Okay, last, effectively, last

question, maybe we'll give you one or two more, and then, we'll have to talk about a round two. If people are interested. So, if you'd like to hear more with Derek, please let me know, @tferriss on the Twitter T, F, E, R, R, I, S, S, and you could loop in @sivers as well. What advice would you give your 30-year old self? And, place us, if you would, for where you were at 30, and what you were doing.

Derek Sivers: At 30, well, let's see, I had just started CDBaby, when I was 30, but I think I – the biggest advice I would give to my younger self, more like knowledge learned, like, hey, younger self, you should know this now, is that women like sex. I didn't know that until I was 40. I think I didn't get that. I think that through teenage movies and whatever, we're kind of taught the opposite. Men always want sex, and women don't. I don't know why the media always portrays it like that, but later, I found out that that's not true. But, I think that the more interesting answer is, the advice I would give to my 30-year-old self would be, don't be a donkey.

Tim Ferriss: And, what does that mean?

Derek Sivers: Well, I meet a lot of 30-year-olds that are trying to pursue many different directions at once, but not making progress in any, right? And then, or they get frustrated that the world wants them to pick one thing, because they wanna do them all, and they get a lot of this frustration, like, I wanna do this, and that, and this, and that.

Why do I have to choose? I don't know what to choose! But, the problem is, if you're thinking short term, then you're acting as if you don't do them all this week, they won't happen. But, I think the solution is to think long term. To realize that you can do one of these things for a few years, and then do another one for a few years, and then, another. So, what I mean about don't be a donkey is, you've probably heard the fable about, I think it's Buridan's Donkey, who – it's a fable about a donkey who is standing halfway between a pile of hay, and a bucket of water. And, he just keeps looking left, to the hay, or right, to the water, trying to decide. Hay or water, hay or water?

And, he's unable to decide, so he eventually falls over and dies of both hunger and thirst. So, the point is, that a donkey can't think of the future. If he did, he'd realize he could clearly go first to drink the water, then go eat the hay.

So, my advice to my 30-year-old self is, don't be a donkey. You

can do everything you want to do. You just need foresight and patience. So, say, for somebody listening. If you're 30 years old now, and say you have, like, five different things you wanna pursue. Well then, you could do each one of those things for ten years, and you'll have all of them done by the time you're 80. You're probably going to live to be 80, so it sounds ridiculous to plan to the age of 80 when you're 30, right? But, it's a fact that's probably coming, so you might as well take advantage of it. It's like, use the future. That way, you can fully focus on one direction at a time, without feeling conflicted or distracted. Because you know that you'll get to the others in the future.

Tim Ferriss:

And, I think also, just to build on that. I agree. I think most people – this is not something I thought up on my own, but underestimate –

They overestimate what they can achieve, in a day or a week, so they have 20 items on their to-do list, but they underestimate what they can achieve in a year, or even two years. The way that, if you look at, for instance, a lot of what I've done, much of which ended up being the result of accidental discoveries. But, the book career, but then, you had the angel investing, starting in 2007, 2008 – and I treated that as a two-year, self-imposed MBA.

And, it was like, okay, I want to try this, and really focus on it for two years, and I'm not going to expect to have any kind of financial return, but just as an MBA, I'm gonna sink this amount of cost into it, which was identical to Stanford Graduate School of Business at the time, and assume that the network and relationships and the things I would learn would be worth that two years. And, just viewing them as two year experiments – which I did with the TV also.

Which did not turn out as ideally as I'd like, even though I'm very proud of *The Tim Ferriss Experiment*. Podcast, same thing. It was not a five-year commitment, but it was also not a one day or one-week commitment. It was like, okay, I'm gonna do this for at least six episodes, maybe it takes me six months, and then, I'll correct course at that point. But, yeah, I think a lot of 30-year-olds feel pressured, or younger, or older, for that matter. To pursue many, many things in parallel, when, if you were just to tweak that slightly, and make them serial, the results would be much better.

Derek Sivers:

Yeah. It's a really hard lesson to learn. We can even say it right now. But, it's really tough, I even find that now.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's a constant challenge. The five-minute journal I find very helpful. I've mentioned this to people before, so I won't belabor the point, but people can check that out if they want to, or the Pomodoro Method is also very helpful.

Derek Sivers: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Okay, we are going to wrap this first conversation up, for our dear public, but do you have any asks or requests of my audience before we close up?

Derek Sivers: Not really. I mean, honestly, the main reason I do interviews like this, public ones, instead of just you and me, sitting on the phone and shooting the shit, is I really like the people that I meet through them. Like, the kind of people that would listen two hours into this conversation are my kinda people. So, I usually tell people to just email me. Derek@sivers.org, I read them. I kind of enjoy putting aside a little time each day, to read emails, and I answer every single one. Because I said hell yeah or no to the rest of my life, so I've got time to do it. So, yeah, that's it. Just feel free to email me if you have any questions or anything, or just to say hi.

Tim Ferriss: Awesome, and for those people who do not want to wait for round two – Derek, you're hilarious. I put out a tweet recently, which was what would you want me to ask @sivers, I'm gonna be interviewing him soon.

And, I couldn't ask any of them, because you went online, and basically answered all of them, on Twitter. So, if you search @tferriss, two R's, two S's, and @sivers, you will see – or, you could just look at my tweet, and then all the various responses, and then Derek's responses to almost all of them, you can get an encore performance.

Derek Sivers: Well, I just thought we weren't going to get to all of those questions, so I'd better answer them with a tiny punchline.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, no, fantastic. Well, Derek, as always, so much fun to jam, we need to spend more time in person soon, and thanks so much for taking the time.

Derek Sivers: Great, of course.

Tim Ferriss: Alright, and everybody listening, thank you all for listening, department of redundancy department.

And, the show notes, as always, you can find for all episodes at fourhourworkweek.com/podcast, for this episode specifically, at fourhourworkweek.com/Derek.

Until next time, thank you for listening.