

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 141: Kaskade and Sekou Andrews

Show notes and links at tim.blog/podcast

Tim Ferriss: [Inaudible] guten tag. This is Tim Ferriss and welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show, where it is my job to deconstruct world class performers. Whether they are from the worlds of entertainment, chess, sports, or otherwise. This episode is a special double header. It features one interview and one performance which is a new thing. First up is Kaskade, K-A-S-K-A-D-E. You can say hello to him @kaskade on most of social. He is widely considered one of the founding fathers of progressive house music. He's been voted America's best DJ twice, by DJ Times, headlined Coachella, four times and he's been nominated for Grammy's, five times. Next up, you'll hear Sekou Andrews, that's S-E-K-O-U Andrews so @sekouandrews across social.

And he is the most impressive poetic voice I've ever heard. I first saw him perform at TED where he blew my mind, and so I approached him afterwards.

He is a school teacher turned two-time National Poetry Slam champion. He's presented privately for Barack Obama, Bono, Oprah Winfrey; the list goes on and on. Each one of these takes a few minutes to get warmed up, so be patient. I know it's not a specialty for those in the digital world, but they are gems in both of them among other things. Kaskade covers his first breaks, making his own luck, and formative music influences. If his music were or I should say whether electronic or dance music or a wine tasting, what would you recommend the varietals be? Who should we listen to? What were his biggest albums in the early days?

And we dig into his note taking process. As you may know, I'm a nerd for that kind of thing. I want to know the origins of his biggest hits. How did they come to be – what was the time span between the first note taking and them going live, etcetera. We'll talk about all of that. Sekou will inspire you to be inspired by your story. So, if you want to change your narrative; your internal dialogue to be more successful, this is a good talk to listen to.

If you want to get back on the horse or have an effective pep talk in your back pocket, this might be the recording you'll listen to over and over again. Now, you should be patient. I'm going to mention this again because there's a lot of practical philosophy embedded in and between the lines. So you have to listen to it all and you have to listen carefully. And

these are very contrasting, I should say different rather personalities and very different performances. And so I hope that you enjoy both of them. You can certainly skip around and I'll mention just a couple of notes. These were both recorded at a live event in Los Angeles.

And that sold out in 30 minutes based on an email that I sent out to my newsletter subscribers. If you're not on the newsletter, it's free and you get a lots of exclusives and cool stuff like 5-Bullet Friday which is more than a 60 percent open rate across the board, for people who know what that is that's unheard of.

And you can sign up – try it out for a week or two at fourhourworkweek.com/Friday. Now, since it was a live event there were a couple of audio glitches early on and in the case of Kaskade, we had a mic failure and I ended up pulling out my lavalier mic, you know, the clip on mic that was threaded down my shirt. Pulling it out and handling that back and forth for a bit. So you might hear a couple of missteps here and there. But what you missed was a little bit of background. He was raised Mormon. He was born in Chicago. He went to Utah for college and where he grew up was where they filmed Ferris Bueller's Day Off among other things.

So without further ado, please enjoy this episode with Kaskade and Sekou Andrews.

Tim Ferriss: When did you have your first – when you would consider your first break or mentor in music?

Kaskade: Let's see. When I moved to San Francisco, I reached out to Om Records. They were a small boutique label based right in the city there, south of the market area. And really, they were the only people I knew in San Francisco because I had some demos and I was mailing music to people and that wasn't going so well, but they showed a little interest. And I moved there. Luckily they hired me for like – the funny thing is like my wife and I, we couldn't even make rent for what we were – I mean she supported me for many years.

She was working for Levi Strauss at the headquarters there and it was great. I was like, "Yeah. You did get a good job. I want to do music." I was like, "Let's see how that turns out. I'm awesome. Who you married?" Well, if that are our stock that she had bought, she's pretty happy and I'm imagining I mean it's worked out.

Tim Ferriss: That mean. When did you realize that this is something you could do to support yourself full-time or even think that was possible?

Kaskade: It was like the mid-2000s, so 10 years ago – 10-11 years ago, but people are like when did you really decide you were going to do music? And I, was one of those people that never wanted to admit that's what I was doing. I kept telling my wife. She's like, "What were you doing? What's your plan?" She was pretty organized and very driven and I think I didn't want to say that because I didn't want to be a failure. I didn't want to have like, "No, I want to be a musician. I'm going to write music. I want to – and my whole thing with her was like, "No, this is a cool hobby. I'm doing it."
"These guys hired me. I'll go there and work for them. Let's see what happens. Let's just see what happens." That was always my thing.

Tim Ferriss: So what did you, at the time when people would ask you, because I know people do this since in San Francisco as well as many other cities, were like, "So what do you do?" How would you answer that at the time?

Kaskade: Music – which in San Francisco people think that's cool. There's enough art in the community there. And people like, "That's cool. What do you – how are you living?" I'm like, "My wife, she's got a good job."

Tim Ferriss: So is it – I had in the course of doing research for this, read that when you went from Chicago to Utah, just I know we're jumping chronologically, that that is when you started sort of producing or creating your own music because there wasn't much of a scene. Is that accurate?

Kaskade: This is a great point. So what happened is I'm like, "Okay. I got into University of Utah for Mormons out there and non-Mormons out there. It's like, for me, I grew up as a kid in Chicago. There weren't very Mormon kids out there. I go to school in Utah, me and the Mormon people see what they're about. I was – friends with all of these Jewish kids growing up in Chicago. I was like, "All of my friends are Jewish." Anyways, so I went to Utah and that was great, but I'm growing up going to night clubs all through high school.

Teen clubs were a big deal in Chicago and that's how I got introduced into house music. It was very much a part of my life.

I was collecting records. As a hobby, I was a DJ. So when I got there, I'm like, "What is this music you guys? This is terrible." I have to create some records. Why don't you come over to my house? I got some speakers." So I started throwing my own parties and I really had to get involved. That was definitely a point where I was like, "Wow. If I'm going to be a part of the scene or make music, I'm going to have to be active instead of just like some passive guy." Because in Chicago, I'd just be the guy that went out and collected records and occasionally play at friend's house party.

But when I got to Utah, I was like, “If I’m going to do this, I’m going to have to make my own thing,” which is good because it inspired me to get involved and really get motivated.

Tim Ferriss: How did – loud enough now? How did you get your first gear or equipment and of course that’s evolved a lot since but –

Kaskade: So I hit a local club owner up in Utah and I was like “I create some records.

And what’s your worst night that you have – what’s the slowest night?” when he’s like, “Monday. I’m not even open.” I’m like, “Dude, let me come down on Monday night.” And this is a bar that had opened in the 40s and had all of its original decor. It’s called Club Manhattan. It’s amazing place in the basement. Anyway, the owners like, “I’ll give you a cut of the door. You have your friends come in whatever, invite some people and we’ll see what happens.” Anyway, it turned out the night was a smash. I mean I did it for five years and I ended up doing two nights a week. It was Monday and then I took on a Thursday.

And things worked almost instantly and I quit my – I was working at a clothing store trying to support myself going to school. And I quit like after the first week. I was like I’m done with that. I’m just going to do this DJ thing. This is great. I can make some cash and I can pay it for school. So it started clicking and then when I was making enough money, I started buy my first studio equipment. And I slowly started producing songs and getting into that and learning my way around the studio. I’m like, “Wow. How does this sampler work? How does a digital audio work station –”

How does this all work?” And just understanding that, which was great because I was like I was going to school – I thought I was really busy at the time, but I realize now that I had a lot of free time. I’m so busy. I’m going to sit here for 10 hours and work on this song. Anyway, so I had a lot of time to kind of just learn my craft so it was a good time for me and then when I moved to San Francisco that definitely took up a notch. I work for Om Records for a couple of years and it was good because I was – I knew how to make the music but I didn’t understand anything about the business.

I wasn’t really interested in business. I was like, “I just want to make music. I don’t want to know all this other stuff.” But it forced me to learn some things about the business which was cool because I could see like, “Oh, you can’t just like hang out in your room and make tracks. You have to get out and promote them and be a part of the scene and get out there and people want to know who you are as an artist.

“Who is writing these songs?” And yeah, so it kind of slowly started building up from there in San Francisco.

Tim Ferriss: And if – I’m sure you get approached a lot with people who are hoping to create their own electronic music or maybe they already are. If one of those people were to ask you how to create a self-directed MBA. They’re like, “Look, I have the time. I have a little bit of resources. What skills should I learn? What does the curriculum look like in terms of setting the stage for being a successful musician in that category?”

Kaskade: In this genre, I always tell people that are getting started out. I mean, now there are schools for this and you can – 18 month things, to a 12-month program, so it’s a lot easier to learn the craft now than it was back then. Back then, I was buying these \$25.00 magazines from the UK, *Electronic Musician*. I’m like, “What in the hell? \$25.00? I’m broke, man.”

But anyway they had a lot of good tutorials, so it’s a very different back then. Now, it’s a little more accessible. But I always tell people, I mean like what’s your passion? What do you truly love about this music? Do you want to write? Do you want to produce? Are you a songwriter? Find out what you do best and put all your time and energy into that. Like are you really good at just DJ-ing? Is that what you do? You’re a selector, is that what you do? You can pull good tracks. You have a good ear. Because there are some people like do that and do that really well. Then go out and figure out how to maximize that.

Figure out what it is that you do best and really run with it. Like maybe you – and you have to be honest to yourself. It’s like one of those things that it might took a year or two to discover, you’re out in the mix, you’re going to clubs, you’re trying to get gigs or whatever it is. But I think it’s just kind of good to sit back and like check the climate and like, “What am I doing well and what are people drawn to me? Like what’s working here?” And then just do that as much as you can.

Tim Ferriss: How did you – and feel free to verify this also again just in the course of doing research – but when did you realize that you’re very good at warm, melodic music as supposed to some beats or rhythmic based? And I would love you for even to just differentiate those for people.

Kaskade: Well, much of dance music is very rhythmic. My dad would ask me, “Why is the kick drum so damn loud?” And I’m like, “That’s the answer.” So it’s very – many people see it as repetitive, whatever that – that’s kind of the old dance music, because it was pretty simplistic. We didn’t have the technology. It wasn’t as sophisticated as it is now. And when I moved to San Francisco in 2000, that was kind of like the beginnings of more melodic electronic music.

Songwriting was getting involved and there are couple acts. There was one band locally called Solstice. They were great. Extremely talented. They're a band, but it was more electronic sounding. And I remember sitting at the label, they were assigned to Om, I'm like – because I've been around all this stuff that was very sample heavy and rhythmic.

Kind of the trend at the time like, but I wasn't making any head room. I was – there was no headway. I was just kind of like – because I was like every dude out there. My demo sounded just like everybody else's. Anyway, as I kind of sat in the office and sat back and I was like thinking, "What would work and how could I make myself different?" I thought, you know, there was not that much melodic stuff out there. What if I focused more on the song? And I had been in the scene quite a long time even at that point in my career that I'd seen, like this goes in cycles and people get into different styles. And one production style, progressive house, is cool today, techno's cool tomorrow, drum and base is cool next week. It moves really quick in the underground. So I was like, "Man, if I focused more on songs and songwriting that could be my thing. That could be my space, and there's not very many people doing it, so I could make my own name that way."

Tim Ferriss: And it would be more evergreen I guess in that respect, right, and have more durability.

Kaskade: Yeah, and then, I mean, that was just – I didn't think of that at the time, but that's kind of what happened naturally. And then it all kind of coincided with me meeting some people that were really good songwriters. They were like, "Man, you're talented in the studio, but dude that's just one part of it. Making the music, a song that's an instrumental, that's half a song, that's half an idea." And I was like, "What, yeah. Oh my gosh. This is great." I felt that was a song. That's a song, you know, and they're like, "No, this is a song." So I met and hung out with some people that had some different ideas.

Tim Ferriss: Are there any particular songwriters who had a large influence on you or that you look up to?

Kaskade: I mean I go with like classics like Sting or The Morrissey. I grew up in the 80s, so like new wave was a big deal for me. Robert Smith of The Cure. I love this guy, he's a brilliant songwriter. So that stuff I was always drawn to.

But as I work with more songwriters, I was like, "Okay, I can develop this. This is a craft." I fancied myself a bit of a writer. Writing songs is different but it's still kind of just getting your idea in a little short three-

minute piece. So kind of marrying the two things that I was doing, but then that's when everything kind of changed in my career, things really as I started producing that kind of music, people noticed me. But I started touring quickly after that. I mean 2003 is really when things started to move. I think that year I did like 70 or 80 shows, and I was like, "This is insane." And that's when my wife was like, "What did I sign up for? What – you're never here," you know.

Tim Ferriss: What is your record for consecutive shows or consecutive days with shows?

Kaskade: I don't know; I've never counted that. That's a really good question. I know I've done like 12 or 14. I mean it's not uncommon for me to do 23, 24, 25 shows in a month in the summer.

Summer is extremely busy. I mean, it's always summer somewhere, so it's busy all the time, but I always take our winter, I always kind of slow down a little bit.

Tim Ferriss: How do you – what type of rituals or self-care do you have to keep from getting extremely sick during that type of just onslaught in a month where you're constantly performing? Is there any particular diet or something?

Kaskade: The performance part of it is not hard for me because I feel very natural. I mean, I've been doing this for over 20 years. So for me I feel very at home on stage and doing – in my space. And I feel like that that's just naturally keep things out. It's very aerobic. It's like a workout really. I walk off stage, I've lost five pounds, I'm drenched in sweat. So I think that part of it is actually quite healthy. And then just like eating and living clean really while I'm on the road. You know, we're traveling from place to place.

So it was like we travel during the day and we sleep on the planes and we perform at night. When I say "we", I travel with a small clique of guys that help me execute the shows. Although I'm the artist, I have a tour manager, photographer, videographer, a lighting guy, a visual guy, sometimes a sound guy. It depends on the size of the show, but it can be anywhere from five people up to 25 people. But I think that kind of philosophy has just kind of worked its way down to everybody I work with. That and when I can, I travel with my family. I'm married and I have three children, so I'm always trying to figure out, "Okay, how can I make this work?" You know, putting the stones in the bucket like, "Okay, what's really important here and how can I fill the bucket with the things that are really important to me?"

Tim Ferriss: How would you describe your parenting style?

Kaskade: I'm sorry?

Tim Ferriss: Your parenting style. How would you describe your parent – or how do you think of parenting?

Kaskade: My style of parenting, wow, I've definitely never been asked that. Oh man, I wish Naomi was here, my wife. She's amazing, because listen, she gambled on me and took – she had no idea where this was heading or where it was going. And she has really been there to take care of the family and been like my biggest fan and champion in my corner from day one. Without her, honestly, none of it would be possible, because it is fully a team effort on every front.

In my business, she was my business manager for 10 years and she has been the primary parent and the disciplinarian in our home, because she is there. And she has to be because I'm not there as often as she is. So that's extremely important to note that, because that's how it worked in my home. Me, I'm kind of – she always gets mad when I'm angry at the kids.

She's like, "No, no, no. I have to be the angry one, you have to be like the soft guy that gives them everything." I'm like, "I'm totally cool. I could do that. I could do that." I'm like, "Ice cream." "It's Monday, no." Because usually Monday and Tuesday are typically my weekend, because I come home on Sunday or Monday from traveling all weekend. And then I've got Monday and Tuesday a window to kind of hangout with the family. And they're back at school, so I always wanted to do like, "Let's go to movie on Monday night." "No."

Tim Ferriss: I am a constant note taker, and I watched an interview of yours where you talked about writing down ideas for songs in a notebook. Do you still take a lot of notes?

Kaskade: I have a notebook just like that at home filled with gibberish and highlights and little things. Yes, I think that interview was about – early on in my career I got pulled over, stopped in London after I'd been on like a four-show binge. So I showed up at the border and I looked probably completely cracked out. I hadn't slept in days.

And they pulled me over because I didn't have the right permits or the right work credentials to get in there. And I sat in this room for 12 hours and I hadn't eaten, I don't know, it was a very down moment for me. But they had taken apart this notebook and photocopied everything. I mean, this thing was almost full when I got there. But I keep one of these with me and I thought they thought it was some like drug log of where I was traveling of my drops. So they photocopied everything and like, "What does this mean?"

I'm like, "That says to do my laundry when I got home. What are you talking about?"

Tim Ferriss: It's not a code, I need to do my laundry.

Kaskade: There's no code there, man. Eventually they let me off and everything turned out okay. Except that I was escorted back on the plane the next day with a cop all the way into the plane. That was funny. Another time. But yeah, I mean this is how I organize my life.

I have a lot of ideas and thoughts all the time and I just continue to write things down and look over that and perfect that process.

Tim Ferriss: Do you have a particular routine for reviewing the notes, or is it more of a journaling exercise or just put it down and you don't go back and review it?

Kaskade: For me it's in the morning, kind of when I first sit down I look at what I was trying to accomplish the day before and what's kind of overlapping and what didn't happen and kind of curious over into that the next day and then I look throughout the week. And then I look at any potential song ideas or any notes that I have or ideas that could lead to a song.

Tim Ferriss: What do those look like? I mean, I'm assuming do your laundry isn't one of them. But like what is the – what form does it take? Is it just – could it be a single word? Could it be a phrase?

Kaskade: I always like to use the example, I wrote a song called 4 AM, and it's one of my more popular ones in my catalogue, thank you. And I'll tell the story because it's – I was playing at King King, not too far down the street.

I was in from San Francisco, and when I played King King there was like a 6:40 a.m. flight, so I'd play all night, and then I could get French toast across the street and I take my luggage, eat the French toast and then get in the cab and catch the flight; get home on Sunday morning to see my family. Anyway, I was sitting there at 4 a.m. and I was – just one of those massive nights in my career where I kind of hit a moment where I was like, "This is really going to work." I have a few of these moments along my career, but that was one when I was like, "What an incredible night."

And I mean looking back it was a very small club. It holds like 400 or 500 people, maybe. But it was like lined around the block and I just knew things were clicking. So I was on this – I was on a high. I was just floating. And it was 4:00 in the morning when I walked into French toast

place and I got my luggage there and I opened up my bag. And I'm like, "I have to write a song about 4 AM and sleepless gliding."

And these words started coming to me and it was just like a couple of phrases and talk about 4 AM, eating French toast and gliding on the streets without any sleep. And that became the first verse, and then it just blossoms into an idea. I think it's kind of like looking back at my notes when I'm in the studio and thinking, like is this something anyone else could relate to, you know, and then making a song out of it, really.

Tim Ferriss: How long did it take from that initial note taking to being out in the world as a song would you say?

Kaskade: I think I wrote that album, it was about six months later, so sitting around circled in that book. You know, I'd go back to it and like, "Oh, that's a cool idea." And then when I was in there, I was like, "I should develop this more and sit and write a song about that moment."

Tim Ferriss: Do you collect anything or had you?

Kaskade: Records.

Tim Ferriss: Records, vinyl?

Kaskade: Lots and lots of vinyl. Thousands and thousands of records.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. Any particular genre?

Kaskade: I have a problem. It's all, I mean it's mostly particularly – it's like dance music, house music, early house music stuff that I started collecting when I was a kid.

Then when I had a little bit more money, I started buying like old new wave records or punk records. Some hip hop, just stuff that interested me. Bands that were seminal to me personally.

Tim Ferriss: So for dance music, if people here like myself, I'm naïve of the entire genre and I really – I can enjoy dance music, but I know the first thing about it. If I wanted to do the equivalent of a wine tasting with dance music, so I try like, "Oh, yeah." I think that's Merlot, I'm not sure. Try a few different options to educate myself. Are there any particular artists or albums that you would suggest people start with? Among many, of course, I'm not asking you to pick favorites. I guess I am, but –

Tim Ferriss: I think that's kind of an old school way of thinking. I think if you're into electronic music now I'd flip open Spotify and go listen to -- there is like a

million playlist that -- I run Kaskade Radio and I add four or five tracks on there every week that I'm like, "Oh this is stuff that I'm feeling."

And it's predominantly electronic music, I wouldn't say dance music because there's a lot of left field stuff in there but yeah, seminal records. I mean Daft Punk Homework to me is still kind of like one of the top records that define our genre, or Discovery. I'm not as big a fan as Discovery, that's a very controversial thing to say, but I'm a Homework guy because, I don't know, that hit me at the right time, time in my life. That's a big one. Any Craft Work record. I don't know. There's a lot of stuff out there.

But I think going to Spotify and hitting it, because what's interesting about electronic music is, I think, at one point it was a genre and it was a very specific -- it kind of surrounded a culture. But now really and truly this is pretty much how most of the music is made. I mean everybody works on a computer, on a laptop. You know if they're recording rock and roll and it's all augmented and processed and it's all electronic driven.

For better or for worse, I mean that's another conversation. I could argue both sides. I see the downsides in that but really the way they were thinking 25-30 years ago, working with drum machines and sampling and oh, recording on a multi-track that's in a computer. This is just how everyone operates today. I mean, that's what pop music is. I mean, you turn on the radio, to me it's all dance music. I'm like, "Ah, we were doing that 10 years ago." This is cool, this is a modern take on what was happening a long time ago.

Tim Ferriss: So I know if -- we have a hard out and I'm really happy that you're able to make it. We have a couple of minutes so I'm going to ask a couple of the normal questions that I tend to when wrapping up. What book or books have you gifted most to other people, if any?

Kaskade: I knew you were going to ask this. But I thought about it and I'm like, "Man, I don't give any books away." But I just recently gave *Lights Out* to a friend, so I'm going to say that because it's most recent thing I read.

Tim Ferriss: *Lights Out*?

Kaskade: Yeah, and it's about cyber terrorism, [inaudible] like they're gonna cut the power off and we're going to be screwed. It was a really interesting read, and it scared the crap out of me.

Tim Ferriss: If you had to pick an under-appreciated festival, what would you pick?

Kaskade: That's a great question. And I'm stalling to – oh man, there's so many cool [inaudible]. If I wasn't here in California I'd say Coachella, because to me that still is the best festival in the entire world. And I've played literally hundreds, if not thousands of festivals, but I don't know. They got a lot of cool stuff going on in New York. Electric Zoo in New York is actually really cool. It's in Randall's Island and you're looking at the Skyline while you're playing. It's pretty cool.

But there's a handful of those. I mean that's one I'd have to think and like go through my diary and be like, where have I been recently?

Tim Ferriss: We could do a round two sometime. When you think of the word successful, who is the first person who comes to mind, and why?

Kaskade: My wife, man. She is the rock. I mean she is who I look to all the time. It seems like she kind of effortlessly glides between family life and supporting me and making everything work. So yeah, she is success. She's the model of success to me.

Tim Ferriss: If you had one billboard anywhere and you could put anything on it, what would you put on it?

Kaskade: Let's see, probably Time Square because that's where most people would see it. I don't know. I'd probably throw one of my brands up there, Redo or something, or Kaskade, I don't know.

And a big picture of me like, "I'm coming to get you."

Tim Ferriss: Do you have any mottos or quotes or anything that you say to yourself when you're getting ready to perform that you could put on the billboard?

Kaskade: No, but one of the quotes that always goes back to me in my career and something I always think back to, every time I left the house my dad would always say, "Remember who you are." And I'm always like, "Man, that's," now that I am a father, this is a very profound thing to me. At the time I was like, "Dad, what the hell? You're so weird. Like I'm gonna forget who I am? What are you saying?" Now, I'm like, "Gosh, that guy kind was of smart."

Tim Ferriss: You know that basically answers the next question, so I think we'll wrap up with just asking you where people can find more about you, your work, your music, whether it's – anywhere online really.

Kaskade: Yeah, I don't know. I'm on Twitter, Instagram, all of the social networks kaskademusic.com. Come and check me out. I appreciate the time, you guys.

Tim Ferriss: @kaskade with two Ks.

Kaskade: @kaskade, K-A-S-K-A-D-E, yeah.

Yeah, if you follow me on Instagram you get some pretty crazy photos on there.

Tim Ferriss: I'm sure, we would. Thank you so much. I really appreciate the time.

Kaskade: Thank you. I appreciate it.

[Clapping]

Sekou: Anybody ever taken a sole selfie, anybody? I know you all take selfies, but have you taken a soul selfie? Y'all don't know nothing about this. I'm a hip. I'm gonna put you all on. I'm gonna put you all on. The soul selfie is the way that you can remind yourself instantly that you are mighty enough. That you are beautiful enough. That you are powerful enough and strong enough to get through anything, and I want you all to do it with me right now. Everybody stand up really quick. Stand up. Stand up. Stand up. Stand up. Stand up.

All you have to do. All you have to do put one hand in the air, turn it around, make a little claw like you're holding a hand mirror, bend it off at your arm, lean into it, and when you see how powerful and beauty and mighty you are, you have to say the words "I am awesome."

Let's say it with me, ready? One, two, three "I am awesome." Hold on. Hold on. Hold on. I don't believe you. Hit it again. "I am awesome." You're damn right, you are. Sit down on your power. Sit down on your power. Damn right you are.

That's how you get those days, right? One of those days like I'm having right now, you know when my drive crashes, right, or my self-worth, stalls by the side of the road. My ambitions' check engine light comes on, mid-hustle, and I find myself at my bathroom mirror, finger to glass, scratching the word "Can't" into the hot and steam. But, as I stare at my murky reflection with this broken down eyes, my reflection sees its reflection in me from the other side and thinks to itself, "Oh, I don't know what he thinks he sees.

But he must not be looking at me, because I am awesome." So I don't be wasting my tears. I am more than enough to get through this. And I have to scrapbook full of I can't do it's to prove it, for I maintain a level of awesomnity (sic) in everything I do. So my awesomation is not

speculation, but irrefutable truth. In fact, the census bureau just released the report that two out of every three people are awesome. And if that is true, then out of you and you and I, the question we must now ask ourselves is, “Which one of you two is the one that’s sucks, because I am awesome.”

Like finding money in dirty laundry, awesome. Like parking at that one meter that’s broken, awesome. Like that perfect person at that perfect time saying that perfect thing, awesome. Like making a living, doing what you live for. Like somewhere rocking out in New York City is a dude whose resume actually reads National Air Guitar Champion. What? Somewhere in the Ukraine is a woman who boast a trophy for National Sand Art Champion. Here before you in Los Angeles is a dude who has earned the title National Poetry Slam Champion and -- thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that, because to most of the working world, all three of those titles are equally freaking ridiculous. But the most awesome five people on the planet are we who embrace our ridiculousness.

We live what we love and we love incorrigibly, which is why I sleep quite well, but I go to bed horribly. Anybody else always hopped up on a triple shot of purpose? Juggling my dreams like 13 flaming swords and chasing my aspirations through the graveyard shift so that the world can awake to my awesomenatiousness. Look it up. And I admit, I’ll admit I used to think that awesome was the word for surfers and skateboarders, you know, smokers and valley girls.

But I was like totally mistaken. Awesome is gangster. Awesome is stupid fresh. Awesome is the new Cronk and the new cool beans and new bomb digidy and a bee’s knees, my new mantra that helps me breathe into all of that I believe and see that within me is all the might I’ll ever need, because there are those days when I’m pushed to the edge where still waters meet earth.

And I fall to my knees to look upon the water’s surface, but as I stare at my murky reflection with these broken down eyes, God sees His reflection in me from the other side and thinks to Herself, “Oh, I don’t know what he thinks he sees, but he must not be looking at me, because I am awesome.” Like the science of miracles and the mathematics of purpose, awesome. Like how the mind; the mind can always calculate the what, of who and the when of where, but the soul must solve for why. Awesome. Like the thought of God and logic, having faith that we will figure ourselves out. Awesome.

Like how the moment I truly discovered the great I am is the same moment I discovered how truly great I am. And I am not perfect, but I am perfect like I am. I’m not beautiful like I used to be. I’m beautiful like I

am. Like the scar where a breast once was. Like survival where a death once was. Like the better where a best once was. Every grey hair, a trophy, every wrinkle fold, a story, every pound of fat, a challenge reminding me that there is always something to pursue... and always something to celebrate. That is why I never smile for no reason. That is a concept I don't believe in. [inaudible] never without a reason to show off your teeth a bit. Let me see them. Let me see.

There, baby. There you go. Spread out your cheeks a bit. Let your gums breathe a bit. If you can learn to reach deeper, you can take yourself a piece of bliss and make yourself a feast of it. Like when you go buy a smoothie. And they fill it too full, right, making more than your cup can hold, but instead of letting it just spill all over. What do they do? What do they do? They give you a little extra cup and you feel like you just won the smoothie lottery over here. Whoa, awesome. Like that perfect day overjoys. That perfect day, right. One of mine was like the first time the stretch limo driver pulled up to the first – the five-star hotel to transport me to my first class flight after my sold out show and curiously peering at me through the rearview mirror he asked, “What do you do for a living?”

And with a pocketful of sand and the air guitar in my hand, I replied, “I am a full-time poet. Now, roll up the damn divide.” Okay, I didn't actually say roll up the damn divider, but it would have been awesomer if I had, right? It would have been, but you know what, “Hey, hey, next time.” And you better believe there will be no shortage of next times. But that's the thing, before you can believe it, I have to believe it. I have to believe there will be no shortage of next time. That's why this thing that I'm doing tonight is not just pretty words, not poetry for poetry sake. This is survival for me. This is survival for us. I mean this is how we get through. We have to have instant ways to access our power and our purpose and our passion, our truth, to get through those days and to do this thing we do, this entrepreneurial innovation, you know, me against the world, instigation against all odds, death to all the haters, thing we do.

Okay, maybe not death to all the haters, that's negative. We'll stay positive, like stubbed feet and paper cuts and warts to all the haters thing that we do, right? And it ain't easy. I know that. I know that. Nobody knows that more than me. That's why I'm going to give you a powerful takeaway tonight. Okay. I don't care what is said on this stage. This will be the most powerful thing that you leave here with to help you get through your challenging days of crafting your successful life.

And all you have to do is repeat after me right now: At least I'm not trying.

All: At least I'm not trying.

Sekou: To build a successful life.

All: To build a successful life.

Sekou: From poetry.

All: From poetry.

Sekou: I got no sympathy for you all please. Whatever. Is it hard for you?

What are you in a tech industry, your billion-dollar industry, I built my business off the dead art form you hated in high school. Please. DJs and skateboarders got it easier than poets. People look, when I used to introduce myself as a full-time poet, people used to look at me like I said, “Hi. My name is Sekou. I’m a full-time mermaid. Nice to meet you.” Right, they don’t – they don’t get it, but that’s all right. That’s all right, because with every moment of confusion within someone else, it was an opportunity for clarity of purpose within myself, right.

I had to believe that I – and I did. I believed that I could create a new user experience for the art form of spoken word that could affect the masses. I believed that I could dissolve the line between business speaker and performance artist, right, and create a new experience that enhanced both. And so against all the advice of everyone saying forget poetry, instead I embraced my ridiculousness.

And I created a new style of speaking called poetic voice that just blends inspirational speaking with spoken word poetry, to create an experience that allows me to go out and inspire people and help them tell their story, and show them the best version of themselves, right. And to do that to awesomefy (sic) my life. I had to be okay. I had to be fine with people not getting it the first time so that I could believe in myself long enough to create no shortage of next times. Next times. And now you don’t have to guess, just check my specs. I’m no longer afraid to double down because I’ve tricked the deck.

I’ve already seen my future, so I’m unfit to bet. That’s why whenever failure challenges me to Russian roulette, I rock a waterproof poker face impervious to sweat because I don’t gamble with my life. I count the cards. So my success is mathematics. So as long as my dealer is God, I can always even my odds.

Even my own odd days I can’t get over it; I go through it till it’s behind me. On the days I can’t levy the waves, I’ve just learned to surf tsunamis. On the days I can’t slay the beast of despair with my mighty sword of

confidence, I can still tuck a razor blade beneath my tongue and paper cut despair one positive affirmation at a time. And when I return home from the wild rumpus of my awesome fest, I'll always vacuum with a smile as I clean up my awesomeness. For there are bits of mountain top buried in the grooves of the soles of my shoes. Every footprint tracked through my floor testifies to the heights I've climbed and proves I made it back home each time. So please remember, embrace your ridiculousness.

Please go out there and vacuum with a smile. Please remember your awesomenationess and be the little extra cup for somebody else, because I find that on those days when my weary soul can't seem to do another single thing, when the 24th hour threatens to pop my day's scenes, when the cup of my ambitions begins to runneth over into screams, a perfect person at that perfect time says that perfect thing.

And I am handed an awesome, little extra cup by my homie who shows up at my door with a bottle of Dom Oleo, four dirty jokes and a scrapbook full of we're going to laugh about this later. A little extra cup by my lover. Sipping espresso at midnight in a fireproof suit who takes over the juggling of my flaming swords and says, "You need to get some sleep tonight, baby."

A little extra cup by my friends, my family, my fans, my colleagues, my community. This kind of community that shows up, that comes to you to hear me inspire and amaze, and wants to hear that poem that ends with that fiery blaze, but shows up to find me how the one of those days. When I stand on this stage trying to guide someone home that can't seem to believe the words of my own poem, but you do. You see in my story your truth that you are perfection in process, that you are rapture in root. And I stare at my reflection in this audience's eyes and you stare back at your reflection that my pupil's provide, and we shout a loud but to ourselves with fire and pride.

I don't know what you think you see from your side, but you, you must not be looking at me, because I am awesome.

Thank you all. I appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you.