

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 144: 10X Results with Joel Stein

Show notes and links at tim.blog/podcast

Tim Ferriss: Hello, boys and girls. This is Tim Ferriss and we'll do another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show. I'm garbling words late at night whispering in a hotel room in New York City. Outside of my window is a Christmas tree with white lights on it and all of the children are snug in their beds with visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads. But I digress.

This episode is a special one. And if you've enjoyed in between-isodes in the past, this is not a long form interview – actually it is kind of a long form interview – then this might be your favorite episode ever. It might end up really being your top pick for most actionable information packed into one interview that I've ever done.

And it came about in part because I have many conversations with journalists and the pain always strikes me when I have a one- to two-hour conversation and then it gets cut down to a single sentence as a quote and a pieced, oftentimes a misquote. And then the one to two hours just never get used. And then furthermore I can't use it if they have a recording and they have a boss who is a boss who has a boss it just turns into a huge headache and it makes me sad. So how do you fix that?

Well, you record it yourself on your side which doubles as a way to cover your ass with media and journalists. You say, well hey, I'll record it on my side via Skype with e-cam caller recorders as backup. Cool. And if they're recording and you're recording and you all agree, then you're not breaking any laws and it sounds good and fantastic.

And I actually spoke to Joel Stein who is one of the funniest writers I have ever read, and I'm not alone in this. There are many, many, many, many people who'd agree with me and you have to check him out. I asked him if I could use this audio. He very graciously said, yes, go for it. Do whatever you want with it. And his site is [TheJoelStein S-T-E-I-N.com](http://TheJoelSteinS-T-E-I-N.com) and on the Twitter you can check him out. One of my favorite people to follow on Twitter, hilarious. Right up there with Patton Oswalt is TheJoelStein. So [Twitter.com/TheJoelStein](https://twitter.com/TheJoelStein). Please say hi to him.

What do we cover in this episode? We cover how I choose what to improve. How do I pick the one single thing to tweak out of infinite options? How you can subtract your way to success. The genius of Ben Franklin, why self improvement doesn't have to mean self centered and tactical tips for fulfilling that. How I say no to time consuming lunches, coffees and so on, which is a massive time suck. How I tackle, and others might tackle, the bane of so-called cold introductions. God, do I hate those.

The last few things I've improved in my life, Lyme Disease, some of the ways that I was able to surmount that by making hypotheses. A couple of notes, mostly taking a break from startups is something I say in this. That is now 100 percent true. I am off completely, as of six months ago, out of the game completely. I did write a public piece called Why I'm Taking a Long Startup Vacation or How to Say No When it Matters Most. If you just search Tim Ferriss or Ferriss, two Rs, two Ss, and startup vacation, it'll pop right up, if you are interested in reading the entire manifesto which applies to almost every possible area of life.

My podcast process, we get into how I thought about automating and really streamlining my podcast process. And this was recorded in 2015. This is like about 100 episodes ago so you get to see the early thinking, which hasn't changed that much. So that might be fun for some of you.

Tools and tactics for reversing email overwhelm. A couple of notes on that. Number one, slack, I mentioned that once, pops up again. This is 2015. And slack folks, this one's on me. Hope it makes you a million bucks. Okay. Next time, give me some money. Thanks. IBM man who eliminated email, I mentioned this, I'm not sure if it's IBM man or Intel woman, I'm not sure, but I believe it was someone at IBM. If you know the name, please let me know via Twitter at TFerriss [inaudible].

This was all initially recorded for five episodes that Joel hoped to use to help improve himself, each time picking an important area. And he wanted to talk to me first about how to select those damn areas in the first place among other things, I mean, dig into everything.

And he wanted me to promise something that I couldn't deliver, so I'm not gonna do that but I came up with a substitute. I implore each and every one of you to watch or re-watch the movie Idiocracy. It might have some relevance for our current

presidential election/process/theater debacle. It could help you out so check it out, Idiocracy treated as a documentary but with some time travel involved.

And last but not least, please check out Joel. You will be so happy that you did, TheJoelStein.com and on Twitter @TheJoelStein. So Twitter.com/TheJoelStein T-H-E-J-O-E-L-S-T-E-I-N. And as I always say but seldom comply with, without further ado please enjoy my conversations, about 30 minutes with Joel Stein.

Joel Stein: Okay. So the idea for this podcast, I'm just doing five episodes, is that I'm going to improve myself in some way in each podcast. Like I'm gonna become a better husband and I'm gonna maybe find a new job and become more assertive, things like that. But we haven't even picked all five yet so I wanted to turn to you. And first of all, how do you get started in self improvement?

Tim Ferriss: Well, I think self improvement is a dicey term and area because there are a lot of charlatans, a lot of motivational speakers who are light on daily practical tactics, things like that. I would just say that you should identify your pain points. And an easy way to do that is to sit down with whatever it might be. You could use an application like [Inaudible] or Word or whatever's comfortable for you or Notepad and do an 80/20 analysis to identify the 20 percent of – make a list of the say 20 percent of activities, relationships, people, whatever it might be that cause 80 percent of your negative emotions and negative outcomes, right.

So really just go through a brain dump as an exercise and then you can start to identify the changes that correlate to removing those sources of stress. And I think that's one of the failures of most self-help recommendations is that number one, they don't really have a solid grounding in behavioral change and the science and research behind that. And secondly they focus on always adding additional things and not creating a not-to-do list. So I think the subtraction can be just as valuable as the addition. So the 80/20 analysis is a good place to start, I think.

Joel Stein: You know, okay. One – this is a very small pain point but points to something larger. And I feel like you deal with this so much more than me, which is like people you know and kind of like who ask you to lunch and just become a time suck, even though they're nice and interesting and everything, how do you say no to them when you – I always say I'm busy that day but then they just pick three more days.

Tim Ferriss: Right. Then it just gets punted to paying further down the line. I have a couple of different approaches I use and there are many different coping mechanisms for this, some work better than others. I will say either categorically I'm avoiding certain types of activities. So for instance, I'm taking largely a break from startup investing at the moment for a host of reasons that we can get into if you want, but I won't bore you with it right now. And I'm very highly concentrated in that kind of asset class.

So when I respond to say an introduction from a venture capitalist to a CEO, which is the hardest to turn down because you're now going to offend two people not just one. And requests for lunch related to kinda categorically that type of activity, I will just respond with heads down on deadlines or on other projects taking a break – you know, taking a "startup vacation" for the next X period of time.

And I've noticed that there are many people who use this – busy people in some cases worth hundreds of millions or more, who will use this "vacation" for many different things. I'm taking a meeting vacation for X period of time to focus on A and B. I'm taking a fill in the blank vacation for X period of time and that way you're not pushing it off and basically you're giving – you're not putting a Band-Aid solution on it that's just gonna rub off and come back to you in a month's time. And they'll say, hey, following up just like you suggested. And then you're gonna really paint yourself into a corner. So that's one approach.

Making sort of public announcements about policies, writing – I mean, you're a writer so this works perfectly for you, so I will probably be putting out something public soon about, for instance, cold email introductions where someone doesn't ask permission to email you and they introduce you to fill in the blank type of person who can then reply and cc all the cofounders, whatever it might be.

It's a huge problem but you have the leverage of a platform and the ability to write, so that actually gives you a very easy out in some sense because you can write about tackling these issues.

Joel Stein: Yeah, I thought as a general rule you have to ask someone's permission before you introduce them. That's like an Adam Grant role.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's a very good role but it's violated all the time. And I think it's particularly rampant in the early stage startup investing world but it's true in many, many, many other places as well. But the crux

of self-improvement, I think, and there are differing opinions on this, could be echoed by say Peter Drucker the management [inaudible]. So what gets measured gets managed.

I think that nebulous goals produce very, at best, mediocre returns. So you have to – for instance, like learning Spanish is not a great goal because it's not measurable. Becoming a better husband, in the abstract a great goal but in the implementation, a terrible objective because you don't really have – it's not granular enough and you don't have metrics, right. So you'd have to decide how you're going to measure your before, your baseline and how you're going to assess your progress or your after. And that's something I feel very strongly about and I'm kind of militant about that aspect when I try to tweak variables in my own life, which are either – oftentimes associated with some type of performance goal but not always.

Joel Stein: So what are the last few things you improved in your life so I can get an idea of what's measurable.

Tim Ferriss: Sure. I had about nine months of my life removed by Lyme Disease. I had a very severe – very severe symptoms of Lyme Disease, and it was confirmed. I contracted it on Long Island which has some of the highest –

Joel Stein: So did my dad got Lyme Disease twice. He lives right near you actually. He lives in [Inaudible].

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it can be a very debilitating disease with a lot of neurological symptoms and joint pain and so on. So I started experimenting with various diets based on hypotheses that I had, right. So you have to start with any scientific experiment, which is what I would view what you're doing as. You have a hypothesis. So doing X will make me a better husband.

Or in my case I thought potentially Lyme is similar to say like herpes simplex that it can lay dormant and then neurotoxins –

Joel Stein: I don't know anything about herpes whatsoever.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, well, for us –

Joel Stein: Make that really clear.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I know. All you need to know is that people talk about chronic Lyme as a recurring condition, right. So there are a couple

of hypotheses. One is that there could be common triggers like certain artificial sweeteners that I should remove and then I could assess sort of the severity of symptoms as they correlate or don't correlate to that.

The other thing is – and I won't go too deep here but is, I have a theory, right, hypothesis that Lyme may interfere with carbohydrate metabolism in some way. So I tested the Ketogenic Diet which is like the Atkins Diet and had a device called the precision extra which is intended for diabetics, but it allows me to measure my ketone levels in a [inaudible] concentration. And low and behold, my cognitive symptoms and everything else effectively vanished when I got to a certain keto level. Now, is that causal? Is it just correlative? Are there other variables? Sure but it's a very promising start. So that would be one way that I might measure it.

You could do this in a less technical way where you have – you either assess or someone else assesses you on a zero to ten point scale. So for instance, I have a friend, he's an older gent, he's in his sixties, he has a very good marriage, has a very good relationship with his wife, very good relationship with his kids. Every quarter his wife grades him on a ten points scale in four categories, father, husband, provider and lover.

And what was so fascinating and, I thought, smart about how they did this, is that he doesn't have to maintain a certain ranking in each category. He has to maintain a certain total. So let's just say for the sake of argument that it's a 30-point scale. Well, he might be traveling a lot for business and not spending a lot of time on the phone or otherwise communicating with his wife for a given quarter.

So he might have a very high provider score, say eight, nine, ten, a very low husband score and probably a low lover's score but he could make up for that by being a good father, right, really focusing on the father category. And that would ultimately give him the total number of points necessary to check the I am being sort of a good version of myself for my wife and my family. So that's a simple nontechnical way to approach something like that, for instance.

Joel Stein: Yeah, that sounds like a good way to have the excuse to buy your wife's love.

Tim Ferriss: Well, it also, I think, underscores something else which is you shouldn't take advice from anyone who has not been able to implement the same advice successfully for themselves. And in this case, I was not talking to someone who had been married for a year. I was talking to someone who had been married for 20 plus years.

Joel Stein: Right.

Tim Ferriss: And –

Joel Stein: -- it worked.

Tim Ferriss: -- it worked, yeah, at least – and again, that isn't necessarily the only contributing factor but he felt very strongly that it was. And all that means is you have a hypothesis worth disproving, right. It gives you something to test, that's it.

Joel Stein: So one thing I've thought about as far – because I've done things – like I'm in really good shape now as I did a story for GQ where they had me get in really good shape. And I've done things where I've kinda changed myself. And I always wonder with self-improvement, as I improve myself and really focus on myself, am I actually just doing more damage by making me a bad person because I'm not focusing on other people, you know, my family?

Tim Ferriss: I think it depends exactly, or entirely I should say, on what you're focusing on. And I don't think improving oneself and improving either or both your interactions with other people or the world at large are mutually exclusive, right.

So I think it might be a false dichotomy in so much as if you look at say Ben Franklin and his 13 virtues, you had humility, sincerity, these are things that affect other people and ostensibly would improve his ability to interact with the world around him. And I think that it depends entirely on the objectives that you choose. Whether you're focusing on self-improvement or not, I think that your focus determines how selfish, self-interested or otherwise you are. So I think that it can cut both ways and it just depends a lot on what targets you choose.

Joel Stein: But have you found that people who follow your advice sometimes become self oriented in a bad way?

Tim Ferriss: That's a good question. I would imagine that is the case. I would imagine it has to be the case. If I have whatever it might be, 2

million people or so per month coming to the blog as you meet visitors, I would imagine that you have all sorts of interesting patterns in the data including people who end up focusing on themselves to the exclusion of others.

Now, I would emphasize, or I would propose, that it's possible, I'm not saying this is altogether the case, but it's possible just in the way that it's easier for people to focus on say improving the world and philanthropic work, like Bill Gates for instance, after they have amassed a certain amount of capital and satisfied the majority of [inaudible] hierarchy of needs. I think it's possible that to be as selfless as you are capable of, you might focus very selfishly on yourself for a period of time coming back to what you asked earlier about saying no to people, right.

So saying no to a thousand things so that you can focus on the one most important highly leveraged project in your life may, in the long term, allow you to do the greatest good. So I think it's a calculus you have to run.

But is it possible that someone could be a selfish bastard by focusing on reading a thousand self-help books and never lending a helping hand to other people? Sure, I'm sure those people exist.

Joel Stein: And what are the things people most want to improve upon? I mean, I have my guesses but what does it turn out to be, the stuff they can actually measure?

Tim Ferriss: I think that the fears of modern men and women could kinda be boiled down to getting fat and getting too many emails. I think that those are two that crop up continually. I mean, there are many fears, fears of death and so on, so you have the Peter Thiels and others here in Silicon Valley trying to crack the code of immortality. But if we really wanna focus on the daily grind and the basics, I think that fat, having too much fat, eating too much fat, whatever it might be, and email overwhelm or the general state of kind of digital overwhelm are two things that most people seem preoccupied with. And fortunately they both provide a lot of different metrics you could potentially use.

Joel Stein: I thought you were gonna mention, in addition to fat, money and sex.

Tim Ferriss: I'm sure people worry about those things and they're also both measurable. I mean, you could compare Tinder to other dating profiles. You could use data to say take five or six profile photos

and put them up on OKCupid using a service they offer called My Best Face, which allows people to vote on your photos so you determine which get the highest click-thru rates. And these can all be broken down to measurables. And so I –

Joel Stein: My measurable would be, I think, cutting down on my time spent on emails and stuff. It would be great. So the measurable is what there?

Tim Ferriss: Well, the measurable could be the number of emails answered, right, so aiming to answer fewer emails total, which I think is a good metric, simply because if you listen to people like say Robert Scoble who's a technologist, his hypothesis, which it's not really a hypothesis based on his experiences, that for every email he sends out he gets, I think, 1.75 on average in return, right.

So the goal should not be to just do more things, right, because it's possible to be very efficient i.e. do things quickly, but focus on things that are unimportant. So my goal is always to try to, in this case for instance, focus on being effective which is doing the right things. And in the case of email is having say an auto response, a piece of public writing that'll allow you to safely ignore 70 or 80 percent of your email as opposed to simply responding to those emails in a faster fashion.

Now, the metrics you should – you can come up with a laundry list and then pick one or two that are kinda your key metrics. And this goes for behaviors as well. And what I mean by that is you want to try to pick the variables in your life that have a cascading positive effect. So, for instance, if your goal is to drink less coffee, you should ask yourself, well, why do you drink so much coffee? Well, it's because I wake up and I feel tired. Well, why do you wake up and you feel tired? Because I go to bed really late.

Well, why do you go to bed really late? It's because I habitually go out three or four nights a week and have drinks with friends. Okay. Why do you go out to have drink with friends three or four nights per week if it makes you feel so shitty? Because I have a tough time saying no to their invitations. Okay. We can kinda track back to an initial snowball that leads to these other things. So if you just try to cut back on your coffee, it won't work unless you address kinda the earlier cascading effects.

And I think that's true with variables, right. It's possible to improve your speed ranking in answering email, but if that's just leading to

you answering more trivial email as opposed to the critical few, you're playing the wrong game.

But, I mean, for instance, a tool that I think is very easy to implement if you're using Gmail is Boomerang which allows you to schedule emails to be sent in the future. It allows you to automate follow-up so that if someone doesn't reply it brings it to the top of your inbox. It removes a lot of the cognitive load of email processing. And those would be a few examples. I mean, there are many more.

Joel Stein: One of the few things I ever fixed about myself was being late, which I fixed in my late twenties. And basically I had to do all the work you just described which is figuring out, oh, I'm really self-conscious if I get somewhere early and I don't know what to do physically with myself. It was before you could play with your cell phone. I had to train myself to go in public and stand there and not feel self-conscious, and then I was able to not be late anymore.

Tim Ferriss: Right, yeah.

Joel Stein: So I think what you're saying about email is the same thing, like I am afraid of confrontation and being thought of as a jerk, so I'm afraid not to respond. So I have to fix that.

Tim Ferriss: Yep, exactly.

Joel Stein: Being afraid of confrontation.

Tim Ferriss: Well, I mean, you could – and we don't necessarily have to go into a psychoanalysis session now but, I mean, you could go back – that may not be the end of the story or the beginning of the story, right. I mean, you could go back even further and say, why am I afraid of people thinking ill of me or thinking of me as rude. And it would be very helpful – I know I'm digressing very briefly here. I will sit down in the morning after I meditate for 20 minutes, which I think is a huge kinda force multiplier for a lot of these behaviors, and sit down and journal for five minutes and basically try to take all of my anxieties, whatever those might be, and put them on paper.

And that will oftentimes sort of empower you to make decisions when you see how groundless most of them are. But how do you – it can take many forms, right. I mean, you could – number one, there's like the fact gathering mission, right. So is this assumption actually based in fact, right. So can you find examples where that's the case? And in my particular instance with the startup, the startup

world and venture capitalists are introducing me to founders without asking me first. And then those founders say, hey, great to meet you Tim, looping in my five co-founders, whatever the hell, it would turn into a mess.

And then I looked at my most successful deals, and you could look at the most important pivotal projects in your life just say, pieces of writing, whatever it might be that led to positive inflection points in your life, were any of those the direct response to saying yes to invitations you otherwise wanted to turn down, right.

And in my case I realized none of my best startups, if I look at again 80/20 analysis, what are the 20 percent of the deals I've invested in that have produced 80 percent or more of my returns. None of those deals came from cold email introductions from VCs, not a single one. So I think that decreasing anxiety and tackling some of these thornier psychological issues starts with testing assumptions and fact finding

Joel Stein: Wow, this is all incredibly helpful. I'm gonna ask my producer Shara – Hi Shara.

Shara: Hi.

Joel Stein: Anything else we should ask him?

Shara; Yeah well, this is a very specific question but I know that there was a Buzz Feed writer who recently got rid of his email altogether. And, I mean, what do you think of that because we have so many different forms of communication now, why just – maybe we should just be eliminating some of them and that could reduce some of Joel's potential anxiety. And the true people who wanna get in touch with him get in touch with him.

Tim Ferriss: I agree with that. I agree that email is a tool that has been misappropriated for a lot of tasks for which it was not initially designed. And there are many people who have gone off, I shouldn't say many but more than a handful of people. There's another gent from IBM who has banished email from his toolkit and has done so for several years.

There are many different tools in the toolkit, right. So I think that some of the options worth examining could be, number one, some type of project management software, whether that's Asauna, Basecamp, Trello, for instance, for assigning tasks with deadlines so that email does not become a follow-up system is very helpful.

Identifying and now sound like I'm beating a dead horse but doing an 80/20 analysis of your inbox, right. So who are say the top five – who are the five to ten people who communicate with you most via email, and trying to identify asking yourself what other tools could do this job better than email? And I think you'd find that project management software very helpful.

But on top of that you could look at say, within any given organization, using a tool like Slack. Slack has become extremely popular in fast-growing startups who might be hiring 10, 50, 100 people over the course of several months. It becomes more and more important as you scale. And I think that if, for instance, you're trying to – I'm just using a hypothetical, but in my case, rather than say training multiple people to help me moderate comments on the blog, I could use a tool like Screenflow which allows you to record your screen and your voice while you're moderating comments.

I take that video and I put it into Dropbox and I never have to teach that skill again. Now I have a link that I can send to anyone I need to train to do that. I never have to explain it again. So for any repetitive tasks, if you're thinking about this like an engineer, engineers abhor repetitive tasks. That's why they write scripts and get good at programming and so on.

If you start thinking about your life in that way and sort of for a repetitive task if you only could do this once and never again, what system would you have to put in place? You can cultivate this kind of tool agnostic problem solving mindset.

Joel Stein: And wait, just because I'm gonna go do this as soon as we hang up, 80/20 analysis is I figure out what the 20 – what the things are that – 20 percent of my things that are using up 80 percent of my time or causing me 80 percent of my pain?

Tim Ferriss: That would be one implementation and it doesn't have to be – 80/20 is a guideline. So it could be that 1 percent of the people who email you produce 99 or more or 100 percent of your email. But –

Joel Stein: But in general using it to find my pain points.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, using it to find both the good and the bad. So for instance, if you're running a company, or let's just say from an income standpoint because you mentioned money. so it's like, what are the

20 percent of the projects that you work on that produce 80 percent or more of your income. This will allow you to separate the trivial many from the critical few.

If you're trying to kinda replicate your successes while avoiding the noise as much as possible, I find it helpful for people, because people seek out self-help typically not because everything is working great and they just wanna make it perfect. It's because they have pain points or sources of stress that are causing them some type of overwhelm or self doubt.

In that case I find it helpful to start with what are the 20 percent of activities in my life that are causing 80 percent of the stress or negative emotions, insomnia, etcetera. Who are the 20 percent of the people I spend time with who are producing 80 percent of the headache, the anxiety, the anger, the insomnia, etcetera.

And that gives you a not-to-do list around which you can build routines and habits that you can test to assess how those feelings go up or down for instance.

Joel Stein: And besides the ketones, what are you working on right now on yourself?

Tim Ferriss: Let's see, besides my ketones I'm working on podcast process, so production process plus production process. And the first thing that I'll do is I put together a Google dock and we have maybe, I don't know, 10 to 12 discreet steps that I'm currently using to take a podcast from kind of planning stage to booking a guest to recording the post production.

The first thing I'll do is try to eliminate as many steps as possible. So rather than just asking how do I do all these things faster, which of these steps are redundant, unnecessary or just unimportant? I think they're really important but they're not actually that important, such as putting up a blog post. How important is it to put up a corresponding blog post? And the way you assess important is how's that affecting my metric? And my metric is, let's just say, number of downloads or listens per episode, right.

Then so let's say I take that 12 steps and I cut it down to 8. I decide that – and I'm in the middle of doing this right now so with someone else trying to cut down 12 to 8 or 7 or whatever it is. At that point then I ask, what can I automate here, some kinda defining things. Then I'm asking automating, what can I use technology to automate here?

So for instance, as soon as I put up a blog post, if I decide to do that, I could use a program like if this than that, which I think is just I-F-T-T-T or I-F-T-T to automatically put promotion up on Twitter and Facebook. So I don't have to think about it. I don't have to delegate it, okay.

So it's kind of definition, elimination, removing as many steps as possible, automation, choosing tech to automate things so that people aren't involved. And then last is the sort of delegation piece, so at that point what is remaining and what of those can I delegate. So if I need artwork, for instance, for a thumbnail for each podcast, which I don't but let's say I did, I could go to like a 99 Designs or a Fiver or one of these sites and have someone else manage that process for me.

Joel Stein: I feel like there are six or seven apps you haven't even mentioned yet.

Tim Ferriss: There are – I don't actually have that many apps on my phone. I think that technology is a wonderful tool and a terrible master. And a lot of people confuse amassing tools or motion with progress. And it's a very seductive, easy path to take because we're constantly sold the hype of downloading this one new app and it'll change your life, download this other new app and it will streamline A, B or C. And I think that most people are drowning in a glut of tools. And the reason for that is that they don't have any precise goals. They don't have precise goals and measurable goals.

Shara: I have one more question, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Yep.

Shara: So one thing with this podcast that we've been thinking about is that we have these bigger ideas. And one of the topics that we wanna tackle too is assertiveness. So for using assertiveness as an example, we would do the 80/20 for assertiveness and see what the pain points truly are for Joel and what is making him more passive than assertive?

Tim Ferriss: Well, assertiveness is – to be honest, I would have to think on that. I don't wanna give you a kneejerk response that isn't helpful. But the assertiveness, I would start with Joel sitting down and journaling and kind of going backwards and asking three or four whys about why he has trouble being assertive, right. So he could do an 80/20 analysis on his sources of stress. This is a general broad 80/20 of, as I described, the sources of stress.

I would start there because maybe being assertive or assertiveness is not the problem you need to fix, right. I will take your word for it but let's start with just 80/20 to identify the 20 percent of activities, people, etcetera that are causing 80 percent of the negative emotions that he wants to avoid.

From there then he could sit down and journal, meaning just kinda freehand [inaudible] conscience, write trying to answer the question like why do I feel I'm not assertive enough and just write for five to ten minutes. And whenever he thinks he's reached a conclusion ask why, right. So if it's, I answer more email than I should I feel compelled to answer more email than I should. Why? Answer that. Well, it's because I feel A, B, C, D, right. Well, why do you feel those things? Because this, this, this. And at the end of it, looking at that and asking which of these assumptions have not been tested. That's where I would start

And I don't wanna make it seem like – assertiveness is a very big broad word and I get anxious when people are trying to fix anything that's very broad. I think you have to get very specific, so the 80/20 analysis, the journaling. And then I would ask, okay, how could I test these assumptions, right. How could I test these assumptions?

And one of them might be, I need to respond as quickly as possible or I'll lose the respect of my coworkers and that will end – why do you care about that. Well, because it'll have this effect. You could just test that – and I'm not saying this is what you do, right, because certain jobs are suited to this and some are not but you could test an auto responder.

And to give you an example, this is one of dozens of potential tools but let's just say that's how you test the assumption. I have this radio station manager come up to me at South by Southwest. At one point he said, I'd love to try an auto responder but there's no way I could do it because my boss would probably fire me, and I need to be responsive at all times, especially during the conference.

And I said, well, that may or may not be true but it's an assumption you can test. So why don't you set up an auto responder that you can turn off literally with the click of a button if your boss gets upset. And, no, I think you're underestimating your value during a busy conference. He's not gonna fire you and hire someone new in the middle of the busiest season. It would be a stupid managerial decision.

So he put up an auto responder and he sent me a follow-up and he said, I thought you'd love the response. And his boss wrote to him, who was managing multiple stations, and said, love this approach. I wish more of the managers would use this and CC'd all the other managers because this boss was getting CC'd on every bit of minutia. And his problem was ten times worse than those other managers. And so his assumption was completely unfounded. In fact, the way his boss felt was exactly the opposite.

So that's a lot but I'm just saying 80/20 analysis, as I described, journaling, why this, why that, why, why, why, going back identifying assumptions that you haven't tested, determining how you can test them. And I can't spoon-feed you the answers to that. You just have to sit down and do some hard thinking. And then determining the metrics, the numbers that you could assign or use as a measurement for testing those assumptions.

And then at that point you can form the hypothesis, if I do this then desirable outcome X, right. Now, at that point then you're moving into behavioral change. But before you change something you want to assess your kinda current state of matters.

Joel Stein: And the final question is, after talking to me right now, what do you think my likelihood of success is?

Tim Ferriss: Impossible to answer. If you follow the prescription that I have put out and focus on measurable objectives, changing as few variables as possible, don't try to change ten behaviors at once, and rigging the game in that way so that it is possible to win, and you have a timeline that has been rationally thought through, I think the likelihood of success could be very high.

Now, I will tell you, I understand this piece has to be entertaining, and I'm not sure if it would be entertaining if your path to success were very clear. So to that extent, that's an unknown in my head. But, I mean, you're a smart guy. You've changed behaviors before. I think that there's a very high chance of success if you kinda follow a framework that has worked for thousands, tens of thousands, probably millions of people. Because a lot of these principles go back hundreds or even thousands of years. These are not new principles.

Joel Stein: Well, I can't thank you enough. I didn't mean to take this much of your time. We took 45 Tim Ferriss minutes which your – that's four human hours.

Shara: Yeah, [inaudible] –

Tim Ferriss: Gotta measure it in dog years but any friend of Neil's is a friend of mine. And I enjoy your work so I'm happy to chat.

Joel Stein: Oh, I'll definitely put that in the podcast. And I will call you when this whole thing's over just to ask some wrap-up questions.

Tim Ferriss: Sure thing. And ping me anytime.

Shara: Thanks, Tim.

Joel Stein: Thank you so much, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Of course, guys. Take it easy. Bye.

Joel Stein: Bye.

Tim Ferriss: Hey guys, this is Tim again. Just a few more things before you take off. Number one, this is Five Bullet Friday. Do you want to get a short email from me, would you enjoy getting a short email from me every Friday that provides a little more soul of fun before the weekend? And Five Bullet Friday is a very short email where I share the coolest things I've found or that I've been pondering over the week. That could include favorite new albums that I've discovered. It could include gizmos and gadgets and all sorts of weird shit that I've somehow dug up in the world of the esoteric as I do.

It could include favorite articles that I've read and that I've shared with my close friends for instance. And it's very short. It's just a little tiny bite of goodness before you head off for the weekend. So if you want to receive that, check it out. Just go to FourHourWorkWeek.com, that's FourHourWorkWeek.com all spelled out and just drop in your email. And you'll get the very next one. And if you sign up, I hope you enjoy it.

And until next time, thank you for listening.