

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 4: Ryan Holiday

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Tim Ferriss: So, Ryan, to start off, I suppose we could talk about our mutual love of stoicism and how we both fell into the throes of philosophy...

Ryan Holiday: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: ...but for many people, I think they, number one, don't know perhaps, the origins of how you encountered stoicism. I remember one of your friends, one of our mutual friends telling me about how you were one of the odd ducks out who was fascinated by stoicism in high school. I think that is part of the story, but maybe you could give us a little bit of background on how you ended up encountering all these various characters, historically, and getting into it.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, it was weird. It actually wasn't high school. I was in college, I was writing for a newspaper and I got sent to this conference that Dr. Drew Pinsky, he has a show on HLN, he's the host of LoveLine, he was leading this private session with college journalists about. And, so I sit through the whole thing, and after, I walk up to him and I don't know what possessed me to do this, but I asked him if he had any books that he would recommend, because he seemed like a very smart person who read a lot.

He was like, "You know I'm reading this book about philosopher named Epictetus, it's a philosophy known as Stoicism, I think it's really good and you should check it out!" And so I went and I bought it on Amazon. I still have the Amazon receipt, so this would have been in 2006, so I bought it and then I bought this other book called the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, which Amazon suggested when they link purchases. This was before Amazon Prime, so Marcus Aurelius comes first, and I sit down and I read it and it just totally blows my mind in the way that a book can blow the mind of a 19 year old boy, I guess. Tyler Cowen calls them quake books, books that sort of shake everything. It was that for me, it was this book that totally turned my whole life upside down.

At the time I'd been, I just got dumped by this girl that I dated for a super long time, and I was deciding whether I wanted to do this college thing or not, it was just this book that was the perfect book as the perfect moment. And it's philosophy yes, but as you know, it's philosophy that you can actually read that helps you with actual problems that you're dealing with, so it was the perfect thing, and I got introduced to it by the guy who does calls about STDs on the

radio from midnight to 2:00 A.M., which is not what I would have suspected, but the rest is history.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. It's funny, I actually had no idea, which is hilarious given how much we've talked about this type of thing before, that that was how you were introduced to all of this. So Dr. Drew also deals with... is very involved with a number of non-profits that deal with say, heroin addiction and I can imagine why he would pick that book up.

As a side note, what year of college was this, if you remember, and secondly, not the year itself, but were you freshman, sophomore, etc. And secondly, how old was Marcus when he was penning this notebook, I suppose, that became *Meditations*? And then lastly, what type of decisions did you make as a result of reading the book?

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, sure. So I was just starting my sophomore year of college and I ended up dropping out at the end of that year. And I think we met, if I remember correctly, a few months later and you quote Seneca in the Four Hour Work Week, and I think that's one of the things we connected by.

So it sort of all was happening at the same time. Marcus Aurelius, he wrote *Meditations*, as far as I understand, while he was emperor, so he would have been in this 30's and 40's. He died fairly young. We don't know how long he was writing the book, there's a few places that allow historians to date it somewhat, but we don't know what each specific meditation was referring to or why. We just know that he was writing them usually at night, during what would only be a very stressful job that you would have to decompress about every day.

And so, for me, when you go through a break-up, you are usually, you're angry, but then you're also, not self-loathing, but you feel crappy and worthless and you don't know what to do. And so for me, it was this idea of get off your ass, you can make the best of this situation, like what are you going to do about it?

So, one of the things that I did when I read this book, is it sort of sent me down this path of other things to read, like he says in the book, go directly to the seat of knowledge, in terms of how to learn. So, it actually says throw away your books, go directly to the seat of knowledge. So I sort of did both. I went and I read every book that I could about philosophy, about life, biographies, and that set me, I've read hundreds and hundreds of books since then, but I also snagged these mentors that showed me real life, and they taught me things in person and I think that's when I learned that this idea of philosophy and a life of doing things and being successful and working were not at all mutually opposed.

I think a lot of people find philosophy and it just sends them down this rabbit hole of books and they get further and further removed from reality as a result, and so this did not have that effect for me.

Tim Ferriss: How would you... I feel like philosophy... we talked about this when I originally proofed early, early drafts of *The Obstacle is the Way*, your latest book, that philosophy... selling philosophy is problematic, right?

Because, the term for most people conjures an image of the schmuck in Good Will Hunting in the bar who's paraphrasing literature without giving any credit, or some tortured graduate student at NYU who loves to quibble over semantics of words that really, at the end of the day, the argumentation is just a lot of fancy tail-chasing, and I think that's a very mainstream interpretation of this word philosophy. How do you view philosophy? How do you present it to people so that it's palatable or attractive?

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, so when I sat down to write the book, I totally empathized with that. Nobody wakes up and says, "Hey, I need philosophy." They say, "I have this problem and I need a solution to this problem."

Well, it turns out, historically, that's what philosophy actually was for, specifically stoicism. There's a great quote from Henry David Thoreau that says, "To be a philosopher is not about having subtle thoughts or founding this school. It's about solving the problems of life, not theoretically, but practically." And I think the stoics understood that much earlier, like 2,000 years ago.

Cato, who you've written about, was considered to be a philosopher, but not because he wrote anything down, but because of how he lived his life. Socrates didn't write anything down, Epictetus... we only have his lessons because a student of his wrote them down as notes. And Marcus Aurelius wanted to be a philosopher, but he was in line for the throne and so he had to mix his philosophy with being the most powerful man in the world.

And so what I think is really interesting about stoicism, and I talk about this in the book, is when you look at it, and you see that it tends to have a resurgence when times are really, really bad. So like, stoicism was very popular during the American Revolution. George Washington read the stoics as a teenager. At Valley Forge, he actually put on a play about Cato, which is one of the most popular plays in the world at that time. Thomas Jefferson died with a copy of Seneca on his nightstand. And then during the Civil War and the Victorian era, you saw another resurgence of stoicism. Stoicism was big during the American Revolution, Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment, the Renaissance.

And there was also, like Marcus Aurelius was living in the decline and the fall of the Roman Empire. It doesn't get much worse than that. So basically, at it's core, it's philosophy that says like, "You don't control the world around you,

you only control your response to that world." And so that's a very practical and beneficial philosophy when a lot of things are happening around you that you wish weren't happening.

Tim Ferriss: That makes perfect sense. I can't recall how I was first introduced to Seneca, specifically. I had read at some point, or been forced to read, I'm sure, some excerpt of say, Epictetus or Meditations, probably in college, and as with most things you're forced to do, I most likely did not find a lot of joy in it, but Seneca really grabbed me. I don't want to go into a long story of why that's the case.

You have this, let's just call it the trifecta of Stoicism, or the big three. Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca. It seems like Marcus is primarily your guy. I don't know, but I've been very curious to see how different people resonate with different stoic thinkers. And I'm curious, number one, who your primary influence is, and secondly, why you think that is, and how you think different people are attracted to different stoic thinkers.

Ryan Holiday: Sure. It's interesting too about philosophy, most people are never forced to read the stoics because professors don't like them as much because there's not as much room for interpretation. It's pretty straightforward. And I think that's why you like Seneca, I like him as well. He says these, sort of, very timeless imminently practical truths in a straightforward clear way. And they talk about it in the context of our actual problems. They talk about hey, Seneca will be writing a letter, "Hey, I heard your wife died. Here's some advice."

Tim Ferriss: "I hear you're getting slandered in the senate, or there's a lawsuit pending. Here are my thoughts."

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. Totally.... totally. So, like you, I lean toward Seneca but also Marcus Aurelius because they were two, Seneca was one of the most financially successful men in Rome. He was an adviser to Nero, he was a famous tutor and playwright, but he was also skilled at investments. So he was very financially successful. So when you read his stuff, he's dealing with sort of the same timeless problems that anyone who has success or works in business deals with... bad markets, luxury. He's dealing with all the temptations of business that he's talking about. So I like him a lot as well.

Personally, I like Marcus Aurelius. I like the notion, like what's so fascinating to me about him is that he was literally the most powerful man on the Earth. He was worshiped as a God in his own lifetime. He could do whatever he wanted and you read this book that he wrote primarily for himself, and it's just notes about self-discipline about being a good person, about forgiveness, about honor, about treating people well. So that's where I like it.

I get the most practical benefit in terms of leadership and self awareness and stuff like that. So that's why I like Marcus Aurelius. Although I will say that I

think it's funny that you read this book and at the beginning, Marcus Aurelius is sort of thanking all the people who gave him lessons, and like, one of the lessons he learned was not raping his slaves. So on the one hand it's very relatable, he congratulates himself for never having laid a hand on his slaves. So it gives you a pretty clear idea of what he's alluding to there.

But you realize, it's very relatable, but then also very foreign at the same time. I mean, what other foreign... what other person in that position do we have a document about their thoughts? You could literally do anything you wanted without repercussion, here's a guy writing notes to himself about being a good person, not taking advantage of everything that he could take advantage of, forgiving people and all this stuff which I take a lot of personal value out of. And I think his writing is so clear and straightforward, and it's written in these epigrams that are easy to remember.

Epictetus is great too, he's a little more lecturey because he was a teacher, so you're getting the lectures.

Tim Ferriss: It gets into the cosmos a bit too and some pretty esoteric ways that aren't immediate. They're more abstracted, I think more professor friendly for interpretation.

Ryan Holiday: He's the most religious of the philosophers.... of the stoics as well, which, personally not being a religious person doesn't have the same amount of relevance for me. When you read Marcus Aurelius, he's not talking about Zeus and stuff, which I think makes it feel a little bit more relatable and definitely the same is true with Seneca. If someone... if you'd never heard of Seneca and someone took his works and translated them and took out all the anachronisms, you could very easily fool someone into thinking this was written in the last decade.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, for sure. Yeah, that, for me, was critical. The way that I try to define philosophy for people who have never read philosophy or have been put off by philosophy as they perceive it, is this is an operating system for making better decisions in your life. That's it. And I found it so incredibly powerful.

You mentioned something just a moment ago, about Seneca being one of the wealthiest people in Rome, if not the wealthiest at one point... extremely shrewd investor, investment banker, financier, and let's talk about stoicism for a second because the word stoic or stoicism has developed modern connotations that I think perhaps turn people off of the concept of studying something or reading something called stoicism.

I remember a quote, and I don't remember the attribution, which was, "Most people face life with the same stoicism as a cow standing in the rain," and I think that people... a very common perception of stoicism, and perhaps this is

true for some people, Cato seems the most Spock-like in a lot of ways, is that you feel neither pain nor joy, you are just basically a cyborg and the goal is to not experience emotions, whatsoever.

And also, I think people perceive it as asceticism, or foregoing all of your worldly possessions, and of course Seneca was very highly criticized and continues to be highly criticized as the opulent stoic. Like, how can he talk about foregoing riches, and I'm kind of laying this one up because I've obviously read a lot about this. I'd love for you to talk about how you would reconcile some of those things. Stoicism, is it compatible with material and financial success or being famous, or are they completely at odds with one another?

Ryan Holiday: Sure. Look, weirdly I think because both of us are authors, we can very much relate to the problem that's happened with the stoics over the last 2,000 years, which is... it's a bunch of people psycho-analyzing people they've never met based on their work. And over the generations, it builds on itself and the problem is that they're forgetting that the stoics were... it's a philosophy that's designed to solve certain problems, and specifically only those problems.

So, Marcus Aurelius isn't writing notes to himself at night that says, "Hey, women are really pretty, don't forget," or, "Hey, you should laugh and have a good time," or, "Money is nice." No one needs a reminder of certain things, right? And specifically, since he was not writing a book for other people, he was writing a book for himself, I think you can safely assume that he's writing reminders to himself about the things that he's particularly bad at.

And so, it's a deliberately selected view of a person who's struggling with tough things in their life. He's not, again, trying to explain a systemic world view that you should keep in mind. He's working through problems in his own personal way.

And maybe if Seneca had had different friends that were really somber and sad all the time, he would have written them different letters. Like, Cicero was a stoic, or studied stoicism, and there's more joy in his writings, maybe just because it was a totally different situation.

So, what I want people to keep in mind is that stoicism is not about being sad or not having emotions. It's about keeping an even keel or not getting upset or delusionally happy, either. I actually think there's a core tenant of optimism in stoicism, like I call the book *The Obstacle is the Way*, and it's based on this exercise from Marcus Aurelius where he's saying, "Look, it doesn't matter if you're trying to do something and you get blocked, this is actually an opportunity to practice virtue." So, basically what he's saying is, "Hey I know this thing that happened that you think is bad, it's actually good and it's actually a chance for you to do good things."

To me, that's cheerful and that's happy. That's the kind of attitude of someone who never gets depressed because they always feel like they have a way out. I think what the stoics were saying is that if you go around thinking that the world is gray, and that it's always going to work out exactly as you planned, and that people are always going to treat you well. And in one of the things, Marcus reminds himself that tomorrow, when he wakes up, people are going to be rude, they're going to cheat, they're going to steal, they're going to argue with you. They're going to do all these things. He's doing that so he can go out and interact with them in a positive way, rather than feeling let down and pissed off all the time.

So I think that's super important, and I think that's something that's been totally missed from stoicism. I think that's why you and I are attracted to it and find value from it in our lives. It's not confirmation of our pessimism or cynicism. On the contrary, I actually feel like it's intimately connected with being happy and fulfilled as a person.

And that's why I don't think it was a contradiction at all that Seneca was successful and seemed to genuinely enjoy his life and had financial riches. I think Naseem Nicholas Taleb is another person. The point is, making money is usually a result of being successful or good at something. It can also be a result of luck or fortune. Having it doesn't say anything good about you, and it doesn't say anything bad about you either. Being financially successful, there's temptation to spend money on negative things. But the real problem is thinking that you need this money to survive.

So it's funny. Seneca has this reputation for being opulent, but in letters to a stoic he talks about actually practicing poverty, like one day a month, pretending that all his money was stolen or lost and that he's walking the streets as a homeless person. He's doing that so he can enjoy his wealth while he has it, but never feel like it's integral to his survival or existence as a person.

Tim Ferriss: Right.... right. Not to bring "Fight Club" into this, but the things we own end up owning us, and I think there's a big difference. This might actually be a Thoreau quote, who had his own contradictions like we all do. I heard he used to sneak off and have big meals at Emerson's house while he was at Walden. That is that the problem is not having riches, it's when riches have you. I think Seneca comments on that quite extensively.

The problem is not having wealth, it's when it becomes a source of fear and greed and it dictates how you behave as opposed to being a tool. Therein lies the problem. So besides these fantastic works of literature, or I suppose that might not even be a fantastic label. In some cases, there were journals of sorts.

Coming back to seeing out mentorship in real life.... teachers in real life... was Robert Green really the first person to take you under his wing in that way, or was there someone else who was a pivotal teacher to you? How did that come to be?

Ryan Holiday: Before I met Robert, I was working with Tucker Max, who we both know.

Tim Ferriss: Right. Just to get some context, maybe you could give some context on both of them.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. So Robert Green wrote *The 48 Laws of Power*, *The Art of Seduction*, and *The 33 Strategies of War*. I met him in 2006 or 2007. I was in college. I met him through Tucker Max, who's another number one New York Times best-selling author. He's sort known as a really good internet marketer and thinker, and also does crazy things.

Tucker showed me about marketing. He introduced me to Robert. Robert really showed me about writing, researching and learning, and I worked with Robert on his last two books. He wrote one called *The 50th Law*, which is about fearlessness, with the rapper 50 Cent. Then he wrote one called *Mastery*, which is about becoming a master at whatever it is that you do.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Great book.

Ryan Holiday: I love it. It was an honor to be a part of it. Those were my two mentors in direct mentorships... but, I also think...

Tim Ferriss: Not to interject, but how did you... how did you initially connect with Tucker Max, just in the details and the nuts and bolts?

Ryan Holiday: It all goes back to this college newspaper. I had a column there, and I decided I would use it as an excuse to write articles about people I wanted to meet. So I wrote a review about Tucker's website and I emailed it to him. We just started this relationship. Then I would just email him and ask questions. It's funny. You probably see this.

People think mentorships are these very official relationships, like the way that an apprenticeship was how your parents basically sold you to someone in exchange for room and board for a certain number of years, then you officially learn a trade. A mentor is anyone who you learn from who gives you advice and teaches you things. You don't actually have to need them for them to be your mentor.

Seneca talks about this. I forget who he's talking about, but he says to find yourself someone that you can use as a benchmark or ruler to compare yourself

to so you can decide, when you have difficult choices, what would this person do in this situation? How they would act? What should I do here?

I would even say you were definitely one of those people. We don't have some official mentor-mentee relationship, but you've taught me so much, and I've asked you questions and hopefully it's gone both ways. You're older than me, you're more successful than me, you've taught me things, and that's what I think a mentorship is. You can have that with basically anyone. I think a lot of people hold out for this sanctioned, official relationship, rather than just learning from anyone who has wisdom, advice or value that they could pass your way. And if you put it into practice and you do something with it, they see value in that as well.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. No, I agree, and I appreciate the kind words, obviously.

Ryan Holiday: I was studying stoicism and it was interesting to me, and I think I mentioned it to you. Then you encouraged me to write an article about it for your site, which sort of set me down this whole path to begin with. I think it's weird how these little conversations can have such a big impact on your life. It just depends on, I think, how people respond to and treat the opportunities that they get that often don't look like opportunities when they first make their appearance.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, definitely. Jack Canfield, who co-created *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, is largely responsible for the *4-hour Workweek* becoming a book. It was just one or two off-hand comments that he made to me that were encouraging in the early days that produced the proposal because it coincided with a bit of downtime. He effectively helped force my hand by making introductions that led to conversations with agents.

It's incredible how, in the case of Jack, he became a mentor to me because, very similarly to the newspaper, I used volunteering for tech non-profits as a way to meet the people I wanted to meet. These events would put on these organizations like the Silicon Valley Association of Startup Entrepreneurs - it's a mouthful, but SVACE - or TIE, The Indus Entrepreneur, put on large events. Every few weeks or every quarter they'll have an event where they bring in thought leaders and their panels and so on.

So I volunteered for SVASE when I first moved to Silicon Valley in 2000, and really just kicked ass as a volunteer for a few months and continually took on more and more responsibility until I was invited to sit in on the board meetings, just as an observer, basically. They were talking about their next main event, I think is what they called it. They were like, "Who we were going to get to do this, manage the event and wrangle the speakers," and I just shyly put up my hand and said, "I'll do it. I'll take care of it."

So they handed it over and I put together a panel. It was called something like, "Titans of Consumer Products", or something. I invited the creator of the Clapper and the pet rock. I invited Ed Byrd, who's jointly responsibly for popularizing creatine in the United States as an athletic supplement, which was a huge, huge deal; the founder of CLIF Bar; Jack Canfield; and so on and so forth.

I got to know Jack by inviting him to this event and having a bunch of emails back and forth. Over the years, I would ask him every once in a while, pretty rarely, very specific, short life questions. That's how the whole thing came to be.

In the case of Tucker, for instance, how long after you initially introduced him to the article you wrote, did you start asking questions? Over what period of time? How frequently did you email him? I think this is something people need to understand because asking someone to be a formal mentor is the absolute best way to never have a good mentor. It's like, "Hey, you wanna sign up for an unpaid part time job because you have so much free time?" It doesn't work. So I'd just be curious to hear what you did and what you would recommend people do if they're trying to find or looking for that type of teacher. I think mentor is problematic, because they think of it in such formal terms. Maybe you could talk on that point.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, totally. I think it was once every couple weeks, or a couple months probably. I would just ask questions that I thought would be helpful to me, but very easy for him to answer. "If you want me to read your manuscript, that's a lot of work for me to do. This would be more for you." If someone wants you to read their manuscript, that's a week of your time. If someone wants you to give a five second instant opinion on a title, you're like, "Sure, that's one email." One... people don't think about what they're actually asking, and two... they ask a lot over and over again. It's interesting. There's thing called the Ben Franklin effect. I don't know if you know this story.

Tim Ferriss: About the lending library?

Ryan Holiday: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, why don't you tell the story? This is such a great story.

Ryan Holiday: So, Benjamin Franklin... There was this member in Congress, or one of the things about the American Revolution. I don't really remember where it is, actually. But Benjamin Franklin faced this enemy in a legislative body who he desperately needed his support, and they seemed to be intractably opposed to each other.

What Benjamin Franklin did was, he heard this guy loved rare books and had a prized library of rare books, one book that he valued above all the others. So Ben Franklin, being somewhat of a bold man, walks right up to this guy and just asks him if he can borrow his most prized possession. The guy, who was stunned, said, "I guess." Benjamin Franklin borrows it, just puts it on his shelf for two weeks, doesn't touch it, doesn't use it, and then returns the book to the guy.

What he finds is that having borrowed this guy's most prized possession, they not only have a shared connection, but the guy has to justify in his head why he would loan this thing that's so valuable to someone else.

So he starts to tell himself this story that Benjamin Franklin must be good, he must be someone worth loaning this thing to, sort of using cognitive dissonance to your advantage. It's been verified by psychological studies since then. It turns out that when you do someone a favor, you feel indebted to them. You would think that doing someone else a favor would make them indebted to you. In fact, asking something small of them in some ways can build a better connection because now they're invested in you. I would try to ask questions or think about things that they would like and that they would feel like they got value out of too. It's a subtle psychological shift that people miss for some reason.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Ben Franklin is such a fascinating character. I really enjoyed reading Walter Isaacson's biography of Ben Franklin, which leads me to ask you... which historical figures do you find most instructional or helpful? Who are the figures, outside of the big three stoics, that you repeatedly look to as your own benchmarks or to learn from?

Ryan Holiday: There's obviously a bunch. In the book, I talked a lot about Ulysses S. Grant, who I thought was really interesting and is a totally underrated, under-appreciated historical figure. I talk about John D. Rockefeller. All these people have problems, so I don't want to descend into hero worship of any kind. You look at the people, and you look at the good that they bring to the table. You focus on that, not on the negative stuff.

I talk about Ulysses S. Grant. William Tecumseh Sherman, who was another Civil War general, I'm really interested in. I think Richard Feynman is a fascinating character who asks all sorts of interesting questions. He had what seemed to be this joy and curiosity to him that I appreciate a lot.

Cyrus the Great is another really fascinating character, who again was one of the most powerful people in the world but seemed to be universally regarded as a good person, and not in a propagandist way.

Those are some of my favorites. I don't think it's a stretch to use fiction, either. I find it weird that people don't look at fictional characters as either good examples or bad examples.

Tim Ferriss: So who are some of your fictional favorites?

Ryan Holiday: One of my favorite books is this book, *What Makes Sammy Run?* by Budd Schulberg. It's about this Hollywood screenwriter. It's a young Jewish kid who's a total hustler and endlessly ambitious. It's very Gatsby-esque, the book. The point is, this guy's hustling and running all the time but he never stops to question why. The moral conclusion of the book is that he gets everything he wanted and it's the worst thing you could ever wish on someone.

That's something I try to think about a lot, too. It's about finding the people that you relate to in fiction or nonfiction, and then seeing what you like about them or what you like about them and what you like about yourself in them and using that to bring out more of it, and also seeing what you don't like about yourself in them and using it as a cautionary detail.

Tim Ferriss: Right. That's a really good point. I have a few books on my bookshelf facing out. I just moved into a new place, so I had the chance to organize my books however I wanted, which is a delightful and extremely time consuming, monkish process for me being as OCD as I am.

One of them is *Zorba the Greek*. Zorba is just such a great cautionary tale for me because you have the intellectual/want to be intellectual who's very introverted and spends too much time tail chasing in his own head, versus Zorba, who's very engaged in the moment, etcetera, maybe very epicurean in some ways. That's really interesting. Also, I thought a number of the characters in "Dune" were very, very interesting. "Stranger in a Strange Land", as well.

Let's look at where you are now, because I've been continually impressed by how at what a young age you have accomplished certain things, whether that's responding to huge responsibilities at American Apparel with marketing, responding to those criticisms publicly, dealing with all sorts of difficulties or challenges that we all have professionally on a pretty public scale. You're 26 now. Is that right?

So this is your third book. To put it in a chronologically, *The 4-Hour Workweek* was published or written when I was 29, so you're still 3 years ahead of me with three books. To what do you attribute your ability to get shit done? I'm just very curious as to if it's just like, "Well, you blend my two parents and here you are. That's how my parents are, this is how I am." How much is it nature versus nurture? What has contributed to your ability to multitask and also to get this much stuff done at this age? I'm curious to hear your opinion.

Ryan Holiday: Sure. Obviously, I had two smart parents. They inculcated in me a love of reading and questions and told me I could do whatever I wanted which my life, which was all very helpful. And I talk about those types of people in my book, the people who came from sort of nothing or worse than nothing and that's why they were successful. That's not me. And then, I had these amazing mentors, which were very helpful.

And I also have a big head start on people. I mean, I dropped out of college when I was 19 years old. So, I've been doing this... most people my age started at 21 or 22, so they're sort of just getting started. But that being said... and, the reason I wrote this book is because Stoicism was... I can trace so much of the good stuff in my life to specific passages in stoicism that helped me or made me think about certain things.

This idea of the obstacle being in the way, that there's no such thing as bad things happening to you. That everything is an opportunity to prove yourself or to do something good is something that has been enormously beneficial to me.

There's a quote in book five of *Meditations* that I used to have printed up on my wall. And it's this conversation where Marus is sort of actually having it with himself, like it's dialogue. But he's like "So, you're waking up in the morning and you're covered in the blankets and you know you should get up," but you say to yourself, "But it's so warm here, I want to stay here."

And he says "But look, you're a human being. Your job is to get up and work." And, it's like "What do you mean you've worked enough?" Would an animal say that? Would an animal ever say that they had done enough work?"

And then he says, "People who love what they do wear themselves down doing it. They forget to eat and sleep. They just work because it's not work. It's who they are."

And I think for me, getting stuff done has been a function of being able to start having that conversation with myself when I was 19 years old, rather than partying late at night and then waking up hung over every day. I didn't do that.

But, I really think it's the cumulative process of waking up every day and going to work and really working and not caring about the rewards or the success, but working because I love what I'm working on.

Compounded interest is one of the most powerful forces on earth, right? And you can apply that to your own work. And every day, if you wake up and you work on something, you get a little bit closer and it grows. And I think that's been... you write one book, it's easier to write another book, you know? And then, you write two books and it makes it easier to write a third book.

I've never been a fan of doing... and I think you're like this, too. I don't get how people do just one thing. You're really good at investing, but you could just do that? I don't think that would fulfill you as a person.

Tim Ferriss: I couldn't do that alone.

Ryan Holiday: And I think it's weird, but I found that the more things you're doing... it's like, okay, if you do one thing, you could be really good at it. If you do two things, you feel really busy. But if you do three to five things, you're not that busy and they all help each other and make you better at them.

So, for me, writing and marketing and research and all the things that I was doing at the same time made me better at all of them and it sped the whole process of learning up really fast.

Tim Ferriss: When you are most productive, how often are you running? Because I know that that is another part of your life or at least historically has been.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. So, I run almost every day. I run every day. But from some of your stuff and other people, I know it's not the best thing physically for you. So, I usually do CrossFit two days a week. And then, I try to swim one day a week and so, I run the other days.

Tim Ferriss: Right. I think long walks are also very underrated.

Ryan Holiday: Totally.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, we could go through the long list of people who have said that, historically.

Ryan Holiday: I definitely don't think of walking that way and I actually try to not think of running that way, almost not as exercise. It has a better impact on your brain than it does on your body. Definitely walking...

I've written huge chunks of my books because I went for a walk, and then I had a breakthrough that I wasn't expecting.

Tim Ferriss: I think it might be Ann Antolop [00:43:52] who also doesn't trust people who won't go for a walk when they speak with him. I could be just making that up, but I'm pretty sure I'm not.

Ryan Holiday: That sounds about right.

Tim Ferriss: It sounds about right. And then, he'll sprint to imagine... what did he say? When he has to motivate himself to sprint, he will think of running after the head of

the Federal Reserve and smashing him with a baton on the back of their head or something. He's a hilarious guy.

You're a prolific reader. You have sort of a recommended reading list that's quite popular, an e-mail list that people subscribe to, and I've really been impressed by your synopses of the books that you read.

But, for someone who is not a semi-full-time researcher like yourself, what are the top, say, two or three books that you either discovered or delved into while researching the obstacles away? I mean, if you had to pick your top two to three. You're like "Alright, if you want to maximally gain in whatever way," I'll leave it open to you, "read these two or three books."

Like, if these are the only two or three books you'll read this year, you'll be better off for having done so.

Ryan Holiday: Okay. Well, I'm looking at the bibliography right now. And some that jumped out at me that were total favorites... Ron Chernow's biography of John D. Rockefeller, which is *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller*, was a total game changer to me. It was an amazing biography.

I like Sarah Bakewell's book *How to Live*. It's like a series of essays about Montaigne, who invented the essay.

Tim Ferriss: What's her name again?

Ryan Holiday: Sarah Bakewell.

Tim Ferriss: Cool.

Ryan Holiday: I read this book *The Fish That Ate the Whale: The Life and Times of America's Banana King*. He was this totally fascinating but a relatively unknown historical figure. He started a fruit company buying the about to expire bananas that would be imported in late 1800's America and he would sell them by train car.

He ends up buying United Fruit. He starts a small fruit company that he grows to be so big, that it buys United Fruit Company, which is the biggest fruit company in the world. So, that's why he's known as the "Fish that ate the whale." He's this sort of fascinating Jewish businessman.

I read a really good biography of Edison by Matthew Josephson called *Edison: A Biography*.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Ryan Holiday: And if there was any others, I'm trying to think. And I read a really good biography of Ulysses S. Grant called *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity* that I loved a lot.

Tim Ferriss: Cool. Just writing these down myself. Because I need another 20 extra books on my Kindle that I haven't read.

Ryan Holiday: Right. I want to give you some more 700-page biographies, because I know you need more of those.

Tim Ferriss: Very cool. "The fish that ate the whale." That is a fantastic moniker.

Ryan Holiday: That one's really short and you'll really like that guy. He was crazy. And he was like... I can't even describe. You should just read the book. It's amazing.

The writer that wrote it, Rich Cohen, wrote another amazing book called *Tough Jews* about Jewish gangsters. Basically, like the people that you see on "Boardwalk Empire." He's an amazing writer who you'd really like.

Tim Ferriss: Cool. So, I view books, oftentimes, as tools, right? Part of the toolkit for making these better decisions, obviously, and enjoying life at the same time, I do love reading.

Are there any other tools that you use or rituals that you have had consistently and found useful? I'm curious, maybe we can start with the second part of that. What is the first 60 to 120 minutes of your day look like? When do you wake up? What does your morning routine look like? And then, maybe, we can talk about your daily routine, if there is one.

Ryan Holiday: So, I try to wake up somewhat early, like 7:30 to 8:00. I'm not always successful at it. I try to wake up early and I try not to check my e-mail in the morning, if I can. But I'm not usually successful at that, either.

But, I try to sit down and I write for the first hour to two hours in the morning. I find that there's less going on, there's less people bothering you. There's a great writer, he has a site called Farnam Street. His name is Shane Parrish.

Tim Ferriss: What is the name of the site?

Ryan Holiday: Farnam Street. F-A-R-N-A-M.

Tim Ferriss: Okay.

Ryan Holiday: And he wrote an article recently where he's like, "The number one productivity secret is just wake up early," Because there's less going on, you're more productive at the beginning at the day.

So, I try to get my writing done in the morning. Like, whatever I'm working on, I try to bust out an article. If I'm working on a book, I try to tackle a chapter. I try to write in the morning for an hour or two. And then, I sort of get to work from then when everyone else is kind of waking up and getting going.

Tim Ferriss: Right. Okay. And then, what does your day look like from that point forward?

Ryan Holiday: I usually go out to breakfast. I try to eat at the same restaurant every day, rather than deciding what I want to have for breakfast.

Tim Ferriss: What do you eat?

Ryan Holiday: Usually three eggs and two sides of bacon, so I get a ton of protein. And then, I'll have guacamole or something with it if I want to liven it up a little.

Tim Ferriss: Get some non-animal matter?

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, exactly. Although I got chickens at my house. I don't always go out anymore. Sometimes, I have fresh eggs at the house.

Tim Ferriss: And you're in Austin?

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, I live in Austin. And then, I go to work. I have one index card that I write, usually the night before, my list of things to do that day. And I try to keep that list pretty small. Like five to seven things, usually.

And I cross all those things off. It could be small things like, "E-mail so and so." Or, it could be "Write chapter 3." It could be a big thing or a little thing. I cross those things off.

And then, the rest of the day is responding to stuff that's happening, whether that's e-mails or phone calls that I've scheduled or meetings that I have to do. I try to avoid as many meetings or phone calls as humanly possible.

Tim Ferriss: How do you go about doing that? Are you diplomatic? What's your approach to deflecting meeting requests or coffee dates and so on and so forth?

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. Paul Graham actually has a great essay about this called "Maker Versus Manager."

Tim Ferriss: Such a good essay. That's a great piece.

Ryan Holiday: But it's really hard. You're someone who fits in this category when you're both a maker and a manager. Most makers are just not good at doing the other things,

so they don't do it. It's hard when you actually have stuff that you have to manage.

But I just say... sometimes, I'll just lie and say, "Hey, I'm traveling. I can't do the phone." Or, "Hey, I really prefer e-mail. If we can hammer this out over e-mail, I'll be much better." And I know that, sometimes, e-mail takes longer than doing a phone call, because you have to go back and forth. But the point is, it doesn't interrupt what you're doing and it does it on my schedule.

I just try to be upfront about it. I say, "Hey, I really hate jumping on the phone. Can we just do this over e-mail?" And most people are understanding.

And the people that aren't, I either don't care or I understand that they're more important than me and they get to dictate the terms, you know?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. I'm glad you brought up the point about... number one, I have the exact same habit with index cards. That is the finite surface area, much like Parkinson's Law helps to refine how you prioritize.

But, the point you made that I think is really important to underscore, among others, is that just because e-mail might take slightly longer does not mean phone is better. And similarly, you might choose a slightly longer driving route. Because it's easier to remember and it's more scenic.

Ryan Holiday: That's a great analogy.

Tim Ferriss: As opposed to being like, "Yeah. I'm going to sit through horrible traffic with people honking. Where I have to really pay attention the whole time and can't daydream but it's 15 minutes shorter a route."

An important question that I've learned to ask myself, and I'm sure I didn't create this, but I don't remember the attribution if I didn't. And that is, "It's not whether you can afford the time or not. It's whether you can afford the distraction." That's why it's like, yeah, it might only take you five minutes to call someone.

But you and I both know, if you're writing something or if you're a coder, that could mean you start the clock from zero and it's going to take you 45 minutes to get back into the flow of what you were doing.

Speaking of flow and writing... I admire your writing because it's a reflection of clear thinking. And I'm wondering what you see as the most common mistakes that writers make. What are some of the most common mistakes? You write for quite a few outlets online and you're really prolific. You write a lot more than I do. And I'm envious, in a way, of your output. What are the biggest mistakes

that you see writers making? Not professionally, necessarily... But just stylistically, editorially, what are some of the bigger mistakes, do you think?

Ryan Holiday: I think it's weird. I write a lot, but I think I write a lot out of humility. I'm trying to get better. And I think that the only way you do it is by making commitments to write a lot, publishing and sort of getting feedback.

Three books in three or four years is a lot, but plenty of people do more. The articles are designed to make the books better. That's the way that I think about it. But a couple mistakes that writers make. One, they don't have anything to say. They think that writing is the skill that is scarce and good. Like, putting sentences and words together is good.

I would read a biography written by someone with a seventh grade education if what they were talking about was fascinating. Have you ever seen that thing where it's like they take a bunch of sentences and they take all the vowels out or they move the words around and you can still read it?

It's not the technical skill that's rare. It's having something interesting and compelling to say. So, I think that's the big thing, is people don't have that much to say and they focus all their time on technical writing, rather than saying something that's never been said before.

This maybe ties into that. But, I see a lot of writers who start writing before they've figured out exactly what they plan to say and who they're saying it for, like they're trying to find the point while they're going.

I use note cards to organize my research and I very rarely write anything that isn't fully outlined and sketched out, especially books. The writing is the easy part. Figuring out what you have to say and doing the research and bringing something new to the table, that's what's special and rare.

I focus my energy on finding the stories or the thing that I'm bringing to the table that no one else but me could bring, and I think far too many writers skip that. And that's why we get these crappy bulleted lists. On the other hand, like an 8,000 word article that could have been 20% of the length. Those are mistakes that writers make a lot.

I think, also, just not being honest. I think a lot of people are either pretending and puffing themselves up with their writing or they're hiding something. Like James Altucher, we both know...

Tim Ferriss: I was just going to mention James. He's so good at doing the opposite.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. He has this rule where he writes the thing that he doesn't want anyone to know about himself. Whatever he's afraid to say, that's what he wants to write an article about.

And look, sometimes, that ends disastrously and he gets in trouble. But most of the time, it creates this vulnerable, authentic voice that people relate to because no one else is saying these things. Your job as a writer is to touch something inside of the audience. And you can't do that if you're lying to yourself.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely. I find the writing process just endlessly fascinating.

Ryan Holiday: Totally. Because no one does it the same way.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Everyone's different. It's one thing I realized really early on. There are best practices for marketing bestselling books. There are very few consensuses about the best way to write a best-selling book, if that makes sense.

I mean, that's part of the reason why I fell in love with "Daily Rituals," which profiles 170 or so world-famous creatives, whether it's writers, composers, scientists, etc. and how their daily schedules are laid out because they're so different. It's really fascinating to me.

Do you watch documentaries? If so, what are your favorite documentaries that come to mind?

Ryan Holiday: I love documentaries. But I don't watch that much TV. So, I don't get to watch as many as I like because... yeah. But some favorites, I like "Fog of War," I think is amazing.

That Phil Spector documentary from a couple years ago is pretty crazy. I think it's called "The Wall of Sound," but I forget what it's called exactly. There's the guy who did Fog of War has a new one out about Donald Rumsfeld that I want to see called the Unknown Known.

But I love Ken Burns, I've watched pretty much every Ken Burns documentary you could ever see, including all 10 hours about the Civil War and all 10 hours about the National Parks System.

I love when you... I love any art where the person doing it is clearly the master of their craft, and to me, Ken Burns is like the best person who ever lived in documentaries and I don't know how anyone could beat him. I'll watch 10 hours about National Parks because it's that good, even if you don't care. So, I love his stuff.

Tim Ferriss: That's funny you mention that, that's how I feel about John McPhee as a non-fiction writer.

Ryan Holiday: Totally.

Tim Ferriss: He's, for those people who don't know who he is, he's at least a one time, maybe a two time Pulitzer Prize winner. And, I was fortunate enough to have him in seminar for non-fiction writing, the class was called the Literature of Fact when I was undergrad for one year, which was amazing. It was really hilarious, too, to get back a three page writing assignment and to have more red ink from him on the page than black ink. You really feel like a dumbass when you realize how sloppy your thinking is when you get something like that back.

But he's written books on, everything from an entire book on oranges, an entire book on one tennis match, an entire book on hand-carved wooden canoes, a book on Plymouth Rock, just the breadth is so amazing, but if it's a book written by him I just don't care. If it was a book written on chopsticks, I'd be like, "Absolutely, I'll read a 200 page, 300 page book on chopsticks written by John McPhee."

Ryan Holiday: He has that one, *Control of Nature*, that's really fascinating. Just about the Mississippi River, some volcano in Iceland and the hills of Los Angeles. And you're like, this should not be fascinating, but I am hanging on every word because you're so good.

Tim Ferriss: It's so good. Chances are, he's been writing for so long, he's been a staff writer at the New Yorker for decades and decades. I think he's got to be in his 70's or 80's even now, but I remember researching Four Hour Chef, and I bet there's something that McPhee has written on cooking and food, and I bet it's going to be one of the best pieces in the English language.

And low and behold, there was this piece from sometime in the 80's called Brigade to Cuisine, written about this tiny restaurant in New York and just this maniac Executive Chef. And it's like, "All right, there we go, best I've ever read about cooking or food and, of course, it's John McPhee."

What are some of your goals for this year? I'm just very curious to know. Do you believe in resolutions that are long term resolution? Is it tiny habits by day? What are some of your goals, whether for this year or a shorter term? Or longer term, for that matter?

Ryan Holiday: Sure. I don't know. It's not that I don't believe in goals. It's actually been a weird, and this sounds I'm sure, like a humble brag, but it's a genuine problem, or a first world problem. I wanted to write books, that's what I wanted to do, and I wanted to be a writer, that was my thing.

Tim Ferriss: That's what you wanted to be, even growing up? Is that what you thought you were going to be?

Ryan Holiday: Right. Yeah. And, I accomplished it very early, and now it's like, "Okay, now what?" But I don't have, "Well now I want to be the biggest author in the world." One the benefits and also consequences of stoicism is that it's very humbling and it sort of helps filter out very selfish or materialistic goals, I would say.

I'm not, "Oh I want to have millions of dollars, or I want to have hundreds of millions of dollars." It's like, "I'm quite comfortable, I'd like to continue to be comfortable." But, like, that ambition is someone sated.

I have more book ideas, and I'm in the process of thinking about and potentially selling another book, but I'd like it to take longer and I'd like to challenge myself in ways that way. I think I may get married... well, I'm engaged, I'll probably get married this year, so that's something. I think in a lot of ways.

Tim Ferriss: I would hope you'd have some plans for getting married. Or if there was just like, "No, I figured out the engaged part, but I'm not sure on the marriage part."

Ryan Holiday: Well, no...

Tim Ferriss: It's like a hold option.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. Right... right. Now I've got some time, I bought myself some time.

Tim Ferriss: An option agreement with your girlfriend...

Ryan Holiday: I locked it down and I'm now I'm just going to wait. I think I would like to focus on less, sort of, external goals, and maybe more internal goals. I don't think there's anyone out there that's like, "I'm exactly as low stress as I want. I'm exactly as kind or forgiving as I want. I'm exactly as happy as I want." I want to focus on sort of internal, personal stuff, in terms of integrating and adjusting all the things that have come into my life over the past few years, into the kind of every day norm that I would like.

So it's not a specific thing, and that might hold me back in some ways, but it's less about the external, publicly validated success, and more about, "Alright, is this the person that I want to be? Well, kind of, but here are three or four things that I would like to fix, let's focus on those."

Tim Ferriss: Right. So two related questions that are follow ups. The first is, if you want to be a writer and you write a lot, you mentioned that one of the problems with a lot of writers is they just don't have anything to say. How does one go about having something interesting or meaningful to say? And how do you do that? Let's begin with that and then I have a question about working on internal goals.

Ryan Holiday: Sure. So the best writing advice I ever got, and I think it came from Tucker, but I don't remember, someone asked him, "How do you become a writer?" And he said, "Writers live interesting lives." And that's how you find something to say. You go and do interesting, and yes, this is true for fiction or non-fiction. Go do interesting things, experience the world and develop some sort of perspective or knowledge or wisdom that you can pass along through your writing.

So before our work week came for near experiences for running a company, and deciding to travel. My first book, "Trust Me I'm Lying," came out of my experiences in marketing and doing a specific kind of marketing and having sort of an existential crisis that came along with that.

And, this book came out of my studies and experiences, you know, like researching and reading and just living my life in a high pressure, high stakes environment. And I know that seems weird, but just like the best marketing decision you can make for a product is to have a really good product that people want, the best way to have writing that people want is to live a life and have experienced the world in a way that allows you to communicate something to people that they'd never heard before.

I think it's especially true in fiction because at least in non-fiction, someone can go out and study and objectively find, academics can write good non-fiction books based on their research. But, non-fiction, you have to be able to communicate all these intangibles to the reader.

Tim Ferriss: You mean in fiction.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, I'm sorry, in fiction. Yeah. You have to communicate all these intangibles about life and relationships and how the world works. And if you haven't gone out and lived it, and experienced it, you're at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to communicating those things because you're like the 40 year old virgin who's trying to talk about sex.

Tim Ferriss: Right. Like a bag of sand, it felt like a bag of sand.

Ryan Holiday: Right. You can fake it until you say something that's so obviously wrong that just everyone in that instance knows that you have no idea what you're talking about.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Good point. That's been my way of compensating for what I perceive is a very imperfect writing style. I don't think I'm the best writer out there. I view myself as a teacher first and foremost. So my cheat has been to follow in the footsteps of someone like George Plimpton, who's a really fascinating character, who's the editor of the Paris Review, and really popularized what he called participatory journalism, where he would go become a professional football player for a season, he's go try to join the circus for a season, he would go try to

box three rounds with Archie Moore, for instance, and then write about the experience.

You do not need... just to underscore what you said, you do not need to be a college educated, wordsmith to have compelling writing if you have a good story to tell. It's just that simple, and I remember talking with Tucker about this and a lot of it really just comes down to, I think, writing in a natural voice, basically writing as you are, which takes practice, but having a good story to tell. Working on... actually before i get to the internal goals, what does financial security mean to you? How do you define that, for yourself personally?

Ryan Holiday: Are we talking like specific numbers or are we talking about what is financial security, sort of generally?

Tim Ferriss: Both... to the extent that you're comfortable.

Ryan Holiday: Sure.

Tim Ferriss: It's whatever you're comfortable talking about. It's just that I think this is such a huge piece of so many decisions that people make, bad and good. I'd be curious to know how you have resolved this for yourself to the extent that you have.

Ryan Holiday: Sure. Well, I guess there's a couple ways to be rich, right? One is have a lot of money so you can buy a lot of stuff. Or, the second, if you sort of express being rich as being able to buy whatever it is that you want whenever you want it, there's two ways to do that. One is to have tons of money or two is to not want as much stuff. So I think if you meet somewhere in the middle where you keep your tastes under control.

Like, for instance, I don't fly first class. I can afford it but I don't fly first class because, and I have before, but the point is, I don't want to get in the habit of flying first class, because now it means if I want to travel somewhere it's going to cost me x amount and I'm going to have to do things that I don't want to do to be able to get that money. And I'm going to make decisions for the rest of my life around that assumption, and I don't want to have to do that.

So how do you limit what you, there's that quote from Paul Graham about keeping your identity small. "If you can keep your tastes at a level at which a reasonable salary or financial situation covers it, then you don't need to go out and do certain things for money that other people do."

Like, to me, financial success is I have a house that I love in that it's nice, that I can keep my stuff in, that I have my books in, but I don't have like 6 spare bedrooms that I needed to fill up with furniture because I wanted to send a message to people that I have a really nice house. You know? And I don't live in New York City because I don't need to live in New York City, which means that

I spend a lot less just to have the same thing. Can I go to a nice steakhouse and buy whatever I want and not care what the check is? To me, that's being financially secure about what I need to not care about money.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Ryan Holiday: And then I think the other, it's not just being financially smart on your spending, but do you actually understand investing and managing your money in a smart way so it's not, like there's all these people... I'm sure you deal with investors or start-up founders or whatever, who have credit card debt, and it's like, why are you trying to invest in start ups when you can make 13% more a year by not carrying a credit card balance? You know what I mean?

So I think just sort of basic financial responsibility and management helps you make what you're doing go further, so that's been beneficial to me. There's the study about if you make any amount over \$70,000 does not correlate to any increased amount of happiness. I think that's definitely true having made a lot more than \$70,000 a year and a lot less.

So for me, it's like, somewhere above that is happy and comfortable. And the rest should just be saved and managed, like the stoics say, for a much worse time because you never know what's going to happen. Don't spend the money you make because you might not have it, and you might want it some other time.

Tim Ferriss: Sage advice. Yes, it's hard to predict, nay impossible to predict, when the next black swan will hit.

Ryan Holiday: Totally.

Tim Ferriss: And I've been thinking a lot about this, not to misdirect the conversation, but the fact that much like human action and climate change, technology, in a sense, has led to super storms, let's say storms of the century happening as often as every 3 to 20 years now, which was a recent piece that came out of MIT.

The instantaneous dissemination of hysteria through social media, I think, greatly increases the probability of higher frequency black swans, because everything is so interconnected and humans are, for better or for worse, certainly in large numbers, pretty irrational masses. I just feel like, if anything, these once a century, twice a century stock market crashes and so on, are probably going to happen more often, but that's pure speculation on my part.

Ryan Holiday: I think it makes sense. It's like, look, do you want to, I quote this in the book, there's the line from Warren Buffet about being greedy when others are fearful and being fearful when others are greedy. And we definitely live in a time

where people are very greedy. And I think it's really important, too, that you don't at all correlate being financially successful with worth as a person.

So the fact that I know someone whose worth x million and I know someone who's worth less than nothing doesn't say anything to me about their value to me as people, and how I should respect or treat them. And if you can keep that in mind, you won't feel like the fact that so and so is making \$80,000 a month on info products... I know this, but it doesn't make me care about making info products. It's like, I want to write my books because they pay me enough to be happy and that's what matters.

Tim Ferriss: So speaking of valuing people and different people, and feel free to answer this however you like. For your circle of friends, number one, these days, how do you curate them? If it's not on net worth, which, I agree, it shouldn't be, how do you curate your friends that you end up being the average of in a group, and over time, let's just say over the last 5 years, 10 years, what has become more important or less important?

Ryan Holiday: It's weird. I think a big part of it keeping like, toxic, unhealthy people out of your life. Like, people who have drama and problems and pathological issues. I think those are important people, not only not to be friends with, but to extricate yourself from as much as possible. So that's something I've thought a lot about.

I like people who make me laugh, I think that's important, people who I don't have to try to impress. It was weird, one of my friends from high school was in town over the weekend, and it was like, I don't think we talked about work at all because he was doing his thing and I'm doing my thing, and what matters is that we have a shared history or a thing that we relate over.

So to me, I don't know about you, where when you work is also tied up in your personal relationships, I really value people who I can exist in the present moment with. So, it's like, I can do something with them, I can have a conversation with them, and it doesn't... the fact that they do this and I do this is irrelevant, and the fact that they live here and I live here is irrelevant.

I look for people that, I may have gotten this from you, is like the idea of someone you can sit and have a nice long dinner with. To me, that's a friend, not someone I have to meet at a bar, or any other context.

Tim Ferriss: Makes perfect sense. If you could pick, let's do just a couple of rapid fire questions.

Ryan Holiday: Okay.

Tim Ferriss: And one to think on, just as we're doing this, I'd like to hear a story of what Aisha Tyler called self-inflicted wounds... so just a ridiculous story, a debacle, a

fiasco of some time that we self... sometimes that's involving alcohol for people that hasn't have to be true for you. Since I'm not sure if I've ever seen you drink alcohol. But first one... what would be your theme song or your ring entrance music, if you had to choose one?

Ryan Holiday: Let me pull up iTunes, let me see if I have anything. I don't know, I like Iron Maiden. If I had to pick an awesome entrance song, probably something from Iron Maiden.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Ryan Holiday: This is ironic. I don't love my voice that much.

Tim Ferriss: I feel the same way. Not about your voice, but about mine.

Ryan Holiday: Do you think there's anyone who's not a narcissist, that enjoys the sound of their own recorded voice?

Tim Ferriss: I haven't yet met them, but I'm sure they exist.

Ryan Holiday: I heard it's actually because you hear your voice differently. Apparently, it's like when you're just talking, the voice that you hear is different than how it's recorded. And it's just the difference that makes you feel bad about yourself.

Tim Ferriss: You know that's an enabling belief, so I'll take it. Thanks for that. When you think of the word "Successful," who is the first person that comes to mind and why?

Ryan Holiday: No one comes to mind. I talk about John D. Rockefeller in the book, so there's an example. One of the world's richest men.

Tim Ferriss: Got it, all right. If you could study a new subject with any expert in the world, who would it be and what would you study?

Ryan Holiday: Like a new subject or just a subject different than the one that I study?

Tim Ferriss: By "new," I mean new to you. So, yeah. Different from what you've already immersed yourself in.

Ryan Holiday: I think I'd love to do archaeology or something like that. I don't know a specific person. But some sort of agent site or dig would be fascinating to me.

Tim Ferriss: And you spent time in Rome looking at the burial site of Seneca and so on, is that right?

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, I spent some time in Rome when I was finishing up the book. And I just went to the sites and stuff that are in the book, for sure. And I was in Dublin two weeks ago. You'll love this. They took us into this crypt, like a burial site that preserves the bodies. And they have these mummies there from the 12th century.

And they let us touch them. I was like, "We are a long ways from America." We touched the hand of this guy who died in the Crusades.

Tim Ferriss: Wow, yeah. That would be definitely cordoned off in the U.S.

Ryan Holiday: I think so, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: "Do not chew on the mummy." If you could offer your younger self one piece of advice, what would it be? Let's place that. Younger self, freshman in college...

Ryan Holiday: Relax. Relax.

Tim Ferriss: Why?

Ryan Holiday: I think you probably get this, too. Every young person that I talk to, especially an ambitious one that seems to want to talk to me, I feel like they're on the verge of a nervous breakdown or an explosion of some kind. Because everything is so serious to you when you're that age.

And maybe it's our parents that did it to us or whatever. But they're like "I've got to do this or I'm going to die." Everything feels like an issue of life or death, you know? And it's so the opposite of that.

It's like in all of history, you are in the safest most Nerf, bumpered area that has ever existed. You could do anything short of murder and you're probably going to be fine, you know what I mean? You have unlimited time. Just relax, take it easy. You're not going to care about this in a little bit of time. And that's probably what I would tell myself.

Tim Ferriss: So, just to take a quick sidebar from the rapid fire. You dropped out of college. I feel like there is a survivorship bias in media that leads to a romanticizing of dropping out of college.

Ryan Holiday: Totally.

Tim Ferriss: And I'd love to hear your thoughts on who you would advise to drop out of college? Who would you advise to stay in college? Because you ended up, very uniquely, in my experience, extremely well-read and extremely well-rounded.

And when people drop out of college, oftentimes, they say, "Well, because it's not going to prepare me for job X or Y or Z." In my opinion, at least in a liberal arts college, still is that the goal is not to prepare you for a single career. The goal is to make you a well-rounded, developed human being.

So, I'd just be curious to know what your caveats are, who you would recommend. Consider dropping out versus not.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. So, it's funny. There's a Wikipedia page that's like a list of college dropout billionaires. And it's funny. It's the definition of a survivor bias. Because let's say there's 500 billionaires in the world and 20 of them were college dropouts. That means even among billionaires, most of them went to college, right?

But you only care about the ones who dropped out of college. For me, dropping out of college, it was a pretty simple calculation. "Would I stay in college and graduate and hope to have this same opportunity that I'm being offered right now?" And the answer was...

Tim Ferriss: And that was the Tucker opportunity?

Ryan Holiday: It was Tucker, Robert Greene and then working for Aaron Ray, who we both know, at the Collective in Hollywood. So, it was three things; either one of them individually, I would have killed for as a post-grad job.

And so, I said, "I'm going to do this now and see how it goes." What I think... the problem with dropping out of college that everyone misses in a discussion is that dropping out of college is not a thing. You take a leave of absence from college. Meaning you can go back at essentially any time.

So, again, when I'm saying, "Relax," to the 19-year-old version of me or whatever. It's like, "Dude, it's not as black and white as you're making it out to be. Take risks, you're in a cohort where you can absorb risk. And then, understand that you're not going to starve to death if this goes poorly."

For me, it was like, "I'm going to take advantage of this. And a year from now, if it's not working out, I'm going to go back to college because college is the best default option if you don't know what you want to do." Because it keeps you on the level with everyone else and it gives you some sort of certification that sets you apart from people who didn't go to college.

So, that's how I think about college. And usually, I'll say this. The people who should not drop out of college are the people who are doing poorly in college. Because college is exactly like life. It's a system that you figure out how to get the most of and do your best at. And if you are failing out of college, you are

probably going to fail at life because... if you don't address the root reasons why you're doing bad at college, you know?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Learn to game the system while you still have headgear on.

Ryan Holiday: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: Cool, all right. I appreciate that because it's something that I get asked about a lot. So, it's nice to have your input. Alright, let's...

Ryan Holiday: One other note on that. I always hear from people and it's like, "I want to leave college so I can travel," or, "I want to go to college to start a company or get a mentorship." These are not things that you have to leave the womb to do. You can do them in college.

And so, you should leave college if you have an opportunity to do something that can only be done outside of college. And you will kick yourself if you let that opportunity pass and it doesn't come back your way again when you're graduating.

Tim Ferriss: That's a great point, actually. I think that it would be very fascinating to look at billionaire dropouts and see how many of them had started the company that was going to later make them a billionaire and proven to themselves that it had very real legs and a time-sensitive window before they dropped out. Because I think the percentage is probably very high.

Ryan Holiday: Right. That's what Zuckerberg did.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. And many others. Awesome. So, we'll take just a little bit more time. I'm going to do a couple of rapid fire so people to get to know you and not just your thoughts on stoicism. Alright, so, you walk into a bar. What do you order from the bartender?

Ryan Holiday: If it's in Austin, I order Topo Chico, which is a Mexican sparkling water. If it's not Austin, I'll probably just get soda water with lemon and lime or cider.

Tim Ferriss: Do you ever drink?

Ryan Holiday: Just cider. It's the only thing that I like.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. So, it's not a moral decision, it's a taste decision?

Ryan Holiday: It's a little of both, but yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. What makes Mexican sparkling water different from normal sparkling water? I have to ask.

Ryan Holiday: I just like it better than Pellegrino. But I will say that I fully embrace the ridiculousness of drinking imported water from Mexico.

Tim Ferriss: Especially Mexico. All right. Who is your favorite person to follow on Twitter? And you can give two or three, if you'd like.

Ryan Holiday: I like fake Jeff Jarvis, who I think is hilarious. I like Felix Salmon a lot.

Tim Ferriss: Who is Felix?

Ryan Holiday: Felix Salmon he's a blogger for Reuters. And then, I don't know who else. Media Redefined by Jason Hirschhorn is a pretty good Twitter feed to follow. Oh, and Maria Popova of Brain Pickings.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, that's a great site. Speaking of "sites," what sites do you visit on a regular basis?

Ryan Holiday: I don't visit a ton of sites. I use my RSS reader. So, I use Feedly, where I subscribe to a bunch of feeds. Felix is one of my favorites. I like Ta-Nehisi Coates, who blogs for The Atlantic. I like Mark Cuban's blog a lot. I think Reddit, if you subscribe to the right sub-Reddits, is a really good way to get highly curated news.

Tim Ferriss: What sub-Reddits do you subscribe to?

Ryan Holiday: "Stoicism" is a good one.

Tim Ferriss: Besides not suitable for work.

Ryan Holiday: "Stoicism" is good one. "Philosophy" is a decent one. "History Porn" is a pretty good one, which is just like old photos from history. "Ask Historians" is my favorite. People ask unusual questions about history that only academics or historians answer. "Today, I Learned" is a great one where it's just like a fact that people, it was unexpected.

I like "First World Problems." I think that's a funny one. And then... there's one about civil war, there's one about writing. And then, I like Reddit Books as well.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Reddit Books is big. What is the first face that comes to mind when you think "punchable"?

Ryan Holiday: "Punchable"? I don't know, that's a good question though.

Tim Ferriss: We can come back to that. It can be a fictional character too, if you'd like. Dogs or cats?

Ryan Holiday: Dogs, of course.

Tim Ferriss: Why?

Ryan Holiday: Cats are just an animal that lives in your house.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. So, elaborate on dogs, because you said something to me that I was hoping to have you elaborate on. Which you think dogs make you a better person. I was curious how you think they make you a better person?

Ryan Holiday: Well, dogs exist totally in the moment. Dogs are the definition, I think, of sort of unconditional affection. And I think it's really interesting to have an animal that evolves to live and depend on humans the way that dogs do. Dogs, they think, were domesticated because wolves would come and eat scraps from the campfire. And basically, we slowly selected the most, sort of, docile, friendly, mischievous of the animals and that's where dogs come from.

So, I think dogs are great because this thing that depends on you and needs you. But at the same time, you can never truly disappoint. So, it's this great, sort of, metaphor for life. I think it's just great practice. Plus, they're super cute and they do hilarious things.

I have two pet goats also. I don't know if I told you this.

Tim Ferriss: No.

Ryan Holiday: I have two goats which are pretty funny. They're like really dumb dogs.

Tim Ferriss: Do you milk the goats or do you just have them for comedic effect?

Ryan Holiday: Just mostly for comedic effect. People have asked that, but I just don't have that much need for goat's milk. Because they're Nigerian dwarf goats, you have to breed them to get milk, which I'm not really interested in doing.

Tim Ferriss: Sounds really low-yield. It's kind of like milking cats.

Ryan Holiday: Right. What do I need? Then, I'm just this guy who's always trying to pawn goat milk on people. Like, "Let me give you some," like the friend that has teh orange tree...

Tim Ferriss: As delicious as "Nigerian dwarf goat milk" sounds... that could become a thing in San Francisco. You could export it.

Ryan Holiday: Probably.

Tim Ferriss: What book are you most likely to give out as a gift?

Ryan Holiday: Probably *Meditations*. God knows how many copies that I've gone through. And then, the second one would be *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, that's a great book. Let's see. What movie can you not resist if it's on, assuming that you had a TV in an imaginary world?

Ryan Holiday: I have a TV. I'm not a weirdo. I love TV. Probably "Gladiator."

Tim Ferriss: That's appropriate.

Ryan Holiday: "Spinal Tap" is one of my favorite movies.

Tim Ferriss: Have you seen "Shaun of the Dead"?

Ryan Holiday: No, I haven't.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, my God. You have to see "Shaun of the Dead," S-H-A-U-N. It might become one of your favorite movies. It is splendid. I wrote about half of the "Four-Hour Work Week" with that on repeat on the TV.

Ryan Holiday: I don't know how you do that. I have to have total silence.

Tim Ferriss: Well, here's where I am a weirdo among many other ways, is I would play the movie, because I tend to write late at night. And it's easy to feel isolated and crazy and like Nicholson in "The Shining," if you're always by yourself, at least for me. So, particularly, without any dogs or anything or people.

So, I put the movies on with characters that I liked. And I would mute the TV and listen to music while that is just human forms and motion in the background, oddly enough. Just a habit that I have.

Let's see. Who was your first celebrity crush, if you've had one?

Ryan Holiday: Celebrity crush?

Tim Ferriss: Or current celebrity crush? Any celebrity crush.

Ryan Holiday: I don't know. I really don't know.

Tim Ferriss: Nicolas Cage?

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. I'm a big Nicolas Cage fan.

Tim Ferriss: Do you cook?

Ryan Holiday: I cook bacon.

Tim Ferriss: Okay, I know that question and answer. If you could choose three people, let's just say living people, to be your sort of circle of advisers or elders to help you with major decisions, who would they be?

Ryan Holiday: It's weird. I've gotten an iteration of that question where it's like "Oh, you've worked with all these people? Who else would you want to work with that you haven't?" And it's weird. I feel very fortunate that I haven't... like, Robert Greene is one of the most respected strategists about power and life and history. He's someone that I call when I have questions about stuff.

I think you're one of those people that I call. And you're a world-renowned writer and marketing expert and investor. And then, the third person is my girlfriend now fiancée, who I think is really good at sort of reading people. And more importantly, she knows me and what my weaknesses or issues are, which I think is really important.

It's not just about objectively what the best thing to do in a situation is. It's like what can you do given your constraints or tendencies? Like, "Oh, you should totally take this job." Well, if you're someone who's pretty flaky, that's not great advice.

Oftentimes, it's what you can do with your... taking you as a person for granted who's going to behave how you've always behaved. You're going to have someone who understands you well enough to give really good advice. I think that's super important.

Tim Ferriss: I think that is a great note to wrap up on. How can people better or best get to know Ryan Holiday? Where should they find you online? What should they read of yours? Give us some suggestions so that people can dig a little deeper, which I hope they do.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah. So, my website is ryanholliday.net. I'm @RyanHoliday on Twitter. I suggest people start with the books, too, because I put myself into the books. So, *The Obstacle is the Way*, *Trust Me, I'm Lying*, is my first book. Did a book called *Growth Hacker Marketing*, which started as a Kindle book and now, it's going to be a paperback.

And then, I write almost weekly for Thought Catalog. And then, I'm the editor-at-large of the New York Observer, where I have a series of columns about media and life and other things there.

Tim Ferriss: Fantastic. Well, Ryan, thanks for the time. Always nice to chat. And this gives me an excuse to sort of ask you 20 questions in a way that isn't totally socially weird over a meal.

Ryan Holiday: This was amazing.

Tim Ferriss: This was super fun. I'm sure I'll talk to you soon. So, thanks for taking the time.

Ryan Holiday: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Tim Ferriss: All right, Ryan. I'll talk to you soon. Bye.