

Turn Your Creative Idea into a Successful Career – Jeff Madoff with Dave Asprey – #744

Announcer:

Bulletproof Radio, a stage of high performance.

Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's episode is one that I hope is going to be really helpful for you because it's about creative careers. And if you haven't noticed, there's something like 50 million people who might be looking for a new career right now and it's a rough time. So if you're one of those people, you're sitting at home going, "What am I going to do next?" I brought on a friend and someone who just wrote a book about how to make a creative career. What you will find is that if you have the calmness and the presence of mind to learn from a master, you can shortcut decades off your progress.

Dave Asprey:

And this is how I've done a lot of what I do, if you look at the people that I interview. They are people who've done it before and done it at a very high level of mastery, whether it's I wanted to get a Nobel prize or I did get a Nobel prize for my work on biology. Okay. That's a master. Or someone who here says, "Well, I started out as a fashion designer and I was one of the top 10 designers in the US and then I got bored. So I became a director, a photographer, a writer run a film production company. And I've been in The Wall Street Journal, USA Today and all those things. And I've been a playwright and a theater producer."

Dave Asprey:

So how did he do all that stuff? Would you like to know, would you like to maybe call on that in your life? Well, you can. And the guy I'm talking about is named Jeff Madoff. And his book, Creative Careers draws on decades of experience. And he also interviews and draws on the stories of 40 entrepreneurs and artists and business leaders. So like me, he learned from other masters because that's how you cheat. You don't have to go discover it yourself. You just ask someone who's ready and willing to help because they have achieved a level of mastery where it helps them to help other people. Knowing Jeff personally, he's one of those guys, his book is worth your time because it's summarizing an entire lifetime of experience in the creative field and tells you how to get started on that. So Jeff, welcome to Bulletproof Radio.

Jeff Madoff:

Well thank you for having me on and I'd love to meet that guy you're talking about. He sounds fascinating.

Dave Asprey:

I've been so blessed on this show to be able to have an excuse to talk to just amazingly smart and accomplished people who are willing to help. So for me, it's been the most impressive learning experience. So of course I can facilitate introductions. You're one of those guys too, though, because you've also been an adjunct professor at Parsons School of Design for about 15 years. So one group of people says those who can't teach, what do you think about that?

Jeff Madoff:

There's the old, the what is it? The C's hire the B's and the A's teach. What I think is probably what you think, Dave which is that teaching is a fantastic way to learn.

Dave Asprey:

There you go.

Jeff Madoff:

I mean, I think that when I interviewed you, I learned from you. When I am fortunate enough to interview the kind of people that I do, like I'm sure the people that you do, you learn a tremendous amount and it enriches you. So I think teaching is not only incredibly important, it's incredibly enriching.

Dave Asprey:

I fully reject that statement, that those who can't teach. I taught for five years at the University of California. And I did it because it was the only way I could think of to learn the incredible complexity of the emerging cloud computing area and to actually have an influence on it. And I couldn't have done what I did in my day job if I didn't spend the deep learning it takes to be a good teacher. What I thought was interesting about you is that all the things you could have taught, I mean, you could have taught production or something like that. Your course is called Creativity: Making a Living With Your Ideas. So it's very actionable.

Dave Asprey:

And that's what I think people want to hear on the show is all right, great. I want to be creative. I can paint trees or whatever. But how do I turn that into a vocation or at least something that pays the bills for a while? And so you ended up because you were tied to results, making one of those popular classes at Parsons. What's the gist of it? How do you tell people this is how to make money from being creative instead of just how to be creative because it makes you have an open heart and all the good stuff that creativity does.

Jeff Madoff:

Well, I think that there's two questions that come before that and I actually start my class every semester with that. One is, what is creativity? How do you define it? Because most people think of the traditional definition of the arts in some fashion. But you could be a dentist, come up with some innovative way to whiten teeth that's painless, fast and inexpensive. That's very creative. Every entrepreneur that starts a business is creating something out of nothing, that's creativity. So I think that for me, I define creativity as the compelling need to bring about change.

Jeff Madoff:

And that encompasses a great deal because I think that all creatives like yourself, you created a business out of nothing that you had a compelling need to change. And as long as I've known you, which is a few years now, that's an ongoing quest. You haven't stopped even though you've gotten quite successful in what you're doing. You're on a quest, probably a lifetime quest for the learning and to do that and to bring about change be it in healthcare, well-being, all those kinds of things.

Dave Asprey:

It's true that for a certain kind of creative, if you don't do it, you get antsy and you're not happy. Are all creatives like that?

Jeff Madoff:

No. I think that compelling need is something that is shared among true creatives. And I think that that's a shared trait and there's other shared traits also we can go into. And there's also a lot of myths about creativity. And I think that those are pretty interesting too. So defining what creativity is, is I think an important starting point.

Dave Asprey:

I think it's worth also just saying the kind of people... So you took your own experience as a framework and you validated it and you interviewed me for the book obviously but Tim Ferriss, Tom Bilyeu, Daymond John from Shark Tank, Joe Polish, Dan Sullivan most of those guys have been on my show at one point or another because they're masters. So you reached out and said, "All right, I'm going, going to talk to them just about creativity." And these are some incredibly creative insightful people. Did you have to define creativity for them or did they all have their own definitions that were different?

Jeff Madoff:

Interesting question. And we talked about the nature of creativity. And of course with the people you mentioned, a huge part of that execution of creativity is entrepreneurship. And so we talked about that and what does it take to be an entrepreneur? And what is an entrepreneur? You and I have been to enough conferences where there are a significant number of people that believe being an entrepreneur is an end in itself. Well, that's only the beginning. It takes a lot of work to build a business. Starting one I think is relatively easy. I think building it is hard. And I think sustaining that is even harder. And I think that a lot of times people gloss over the tremendous effort it takes to be an entrepreneur and build a business.

Dave Asprey:

Okay. So there's three stages of creativity that people have to pay attention to. One is the inspiration to get started, which is relatively easy, right? And then there's to grow it, which is another stage. And I would agree looking back over my own experience creating things, whether it's in the world of tech or in food and supplements, things like that. And then once you get to a certain point, there's a stagnation that can happen where if you become like Bob Ross and you can paint trees, I think I'll paint trees every day on PBS for 40 years. But what was the next level there? He didn't have a Sistine Chapel that I'm aware of or maybe he did. So where do people get stuck the most when they're just getting started? Is it that first act of putting pen to paper or doing whatever their creative inspiration is? Or is it more about just growing it once they start doing it?

Jeff Madoff:

I think there are people that get stuck each step of the way. And one of the things about it is, and I give this as an example in my class, I said, "How many of you have been to an art gallery and seeing things and thought, I could have done that." And lots of hands go up. And I said, "Well, what's the difference between you and the person who's got something on the wall?" They did it. So a lot of people don't start.

Dave Asprey:

Hang on a second here. I would have said the difference between the guy who has the thing on the wall and you is that they marketed it. Not that they did it.

Jeff Madoff:

Well, you can't even market it unless you do it. Right?

Dave Asprey:

Okay. That's a fair point but aren't there 10 times more creatives who do good stuff. Like I get all the crazy inventors call me with the latest biohacking stuff. And I love it. But most of the time they're frustrated and frankly a little bit angry because I have this thing that can change the world and no one will listen. I'm like, "That's because you didn't tell the story right." And so, how much of this really is about getting started? There are people who have great paintings in their house and they don't know how to get it out the door. It feels like there's a lot more of those listening than there are people who just didn't put pen to paper. I keep talking about writing and painting but I have no painting skills whatsoever. But I'm a pretty good writer. So I don't know, whatever kind of creativity people are into. So I don't want to be discriminating against dancers or whoever the heck else I have to think about.

Jeff Madoff:

Well, I think that first of all, doing it is really important because a lot of people are afraid to commit and afraid to do that. And as a result, they don't do it. And so there's a lot of sort of sideline critics. But where to put this as more actionable information for your listeners is don't say no to yourself. Don't disqualify yourself by thinking you're not good enough. Your idea doesn't have enough value, all those kinds of things. And then you don't do anything. Because a sure way to make sure nothing happens is to do nothing. So there's a risk involved in even starting. And a lot of people are afraid to make that leap because of doubt. And they're afraid of taking that risk and not succeeding.

Dave Asprey:

So it's fear of failure that's stopping people listening to the show from doing that first artistic endeavor or maybe have some skills but to do something and share it with the world basically.

Jeff Madoff:

Yes. Fear of failing or not being adequate or up to the task or those kinds of things. Yeah.

Dave Asprey:

How do you get past that? How do you stop that?

Jeff Madoff:

Well, there's a few ways to stop it. One way is look at a risk assessment if you will. If you look at one end of the spectrum being catastrophic, has screwed my life forever. And the other end is, man, not much is going to happen. Probably most of the things that we encounter are in that lower third. But it seems since it's right in front of our faces to be looming large. So I think that that risk keeps people away but they aren't really assessing what the risk is. Because in most things that we do in life, it's not the catastrophic, horrible life ending stuff. It's fairly moderate to small risk.

Dave Asprey:

It feels big though.

Jeff Madoff:

That's right.

Dave Asprey:

I mean, I remember when I started to get attention on my blog, the number of just mean spirited trolls who popped out of the woodwork was incredible. And it took a certain amount of resilience. And I'm like, "All right, I got this." And you just learn to either engage or not engage and who to ban and whatever.

And I've noticed the greater my success has been, the Bulletproof Diet comes out. People have lost a million pounds on the diet. The Telegraph says, "The Bulletproof Diet is everything that's wrong in America in a book." I'm like, "Wow, thanks guys."

Jeff Madoff:

You're having an impact.

Dave Asprey:

Well, I think that that might be something important for creatives. Look, you put your first painting out there. You're going to have a group of friends who say, "My God, it's so good." Even if it sucks because they're your friends but not good enough friends to be like, "You know what? You need to paint that one again because it sucked." You need real feedback. And then you get a bunch of people who don't know you, who are going to say it sucks even if it's the best piece of art on the planet, just because they're feeling inadequate and they'll feel better by tearing you down. So how is someone sitting at home listening to this right now saying, "I want to do something creative." How do they get over that first hump of okay, I know I'm going to put something out there and then people are going to shit on it. What do you say to them?

Jeff Madoff:

So I think that it's important to have realistic expectations. And among those expectations as you found out there are going to be people that resent you, not necessarily for any good reason but they're going to resent you. And because they can be anonymous online, they have a voice and they can even have impact. So I can ask it as a question to you. What kept you going in the face of all of that? Because that's a trait that is essential. And so what would you say kept you going?

Dave Asprey:

Coffee.

Jeff Madoff:

What kind? What kind did you have?

Dave Asprey:

I can't remember. I had so much of it now. What kept me going was a sense of mission. And you go into a flow state when you're doing an act of service. So that flow state is good for you. And I just realized for every one of those hateful comments or not even really hateful, I'll just call an empty comments but

unsupportive comments, I would get that people would say, "Dave, you changed my whole family. You changed my life. I thought something was wrong with me and it's fixed." And I've tens of thousands of personal comments like that. It's hard to not be motivated by that.

Dave Asprey:

So if you look at writing the way I do and synthesizing as a creative act, which I do, that kept me going because you could get 10 Dave viewers snake oil salesman kind of comments, but then you get one that says, "Dave, I'm 16 and I just lost 80 pounds and my life is back on track. And there aren't words to say this so I just wanted to send you this direct message to tell you." And I'm like, if someone had done that for me, when I was overweight as a teen, I mean, it would have meant the world to me. And the fact that I could do that one time is worth all the crap that people throw at me forever. Right? So keeping grounded that way worked.

Dave Asprey:

And the other thing was humor where one of the guys on my teams, the day was April fools. I've got an idea. So we did a whole post about the new Bulletproof grass fed snake oil. So people would call me a snake oil salesman. And I actually said, I'm going to launch a fake product that's grass fed snake oil. We bring the snakes out carefully after feeding them grass. And it's low toxin. And it's not the cheap snake oil. And I made fun of all the real work that I'd done to bring MCT oil into the world. And my God, it felt so good just to be humorous about it but not by making fun of others but by making fun of myself and just staying grounded. Those are just off the top of my head I never thought about. You didn't interview me about those questions when you called for the book.

Jeff Madoff:

Well, because I think we both do. The best interviews aren't interviews or conversations. And it's kind of like jazz improv. There's the melody. We know what we're talking about but then you might go off and do a solo. And I think that's what makes it cool. And I would suggest that that trait that keeps somebody going is mission that's great to have and incredibly important to have, why are you doing it? What's your sense of purpose? Why are you doing it? But it also requires perseverance so that you can endure the inevitable crap that's going to be thrown at you along the way. Because if you give up easily, if you are wounded easily, you're not going to make it because it's too hard out there. And so I think that having a mission is great, a sense of mission because you always have to remind yourself, I think, why am I doing this?

Jeff Madoff:

Especially when it really, really gets rough. But when you remember why you're doing it, never lose sight of that. Then it's the perseverance that allows you to endure it. And then the nourishment you get from that person that writes to you because you're an empathic individual who had the same problem you had and you're fulfilling a need both for them and for you, you're showing an empathy you never got. And you are a generous enough of spirit to give that to that person to support them. And I think that's a huge, huge deal. And that propels you forward through more of the crap you're going to get along the way because those enriching experiences far outweigh the negativity.

Dave Asprey:

What's the worst piece of criticism that you've received? The thing that almost took you off your path and what'd you do about it?

Jeff Madoff:

I've been fortunate. I mean, it's an interesting question. But one of the things and I don't know why I had this instinct but I always did. My dad used to say to me, "Look who's applauding before you take a bow." So you can get a lot of praise and inflate your head about it. Or you can realize this is going to be a rocky journey. And there's going to be those clear paths that are great with praise or are going to be the boulders in the way. But what I've always been able to realize is they don't know me. So they may not like what I do. They may not like what I write. Writing a book as a risk. Who's going to read it? Nobody knows who I am. I haven't marketed myself. So nobody knows me.

Jeff Madoff:

So I'm writing a book that I hope people are going to read. It could be a two-year waste of time if it doesn't manifest. But if people don't like what I've written or if people don't like what I'd say, they don't know me. And I think it's really important especially if you're a creative to have a moat between yourself and that audience. And so on one side, you've got the trolls as you're talking about but you also have to realize that some of the praise you get maybe hollow because somebody wants something from you as a result. So I think it's being centered in yourself as to what your sense of mission is, why that's your mission and that perseverance to keep going. Because when the objections and the insults and whatever become too great to overcome in your mind, then it's time to pull back.

Jeff Madoff:

But you never stopped. I haven't stopped. And it's not to say that it's always easy but I have recognized the need for that moat to protect myself emotionally. Give you a quick example. Some years ago Liza Minnelli asked me to escort her to this big Met Ball. And she and I were working on a project together at Radio City Music Hall. And so she said, "Would you mind escorting me to this?" And I said, "Sure, I'd love to. It'd be great." So we had a really nice evening. She's a very talented person, an incredibly sensitive person. As we're leaving, there's all the paparazzi out there and they're yelling at her. "You're nothing like Judy Garland, her mother. And you're nothing like Judy. You're a loser." And they're yelling all this horrible hateful stuff at her. And I see the look on her face and the pain that that's causing her.

Jeff Madoff:

They don't know who she is. They have no idea. And she just kept going. And I can't say it didn't hurt her but it left this searing image in my brain about the insensitivity to people. And that you do need to protect yourself. And you do need to know that all of those people out there don't know who you are. So their attacks are hollow when it's a personal attack like that. If they're taking issue with the kind of work that I do, conclusions that I've reached and you want to have a rational debate about it, I'm fine with that. But if you just want to insult me, I don't need to pay attention to you. I'm not going to get anything from it.

Dave Asprey:

It's become a lot easier. I went through this just incredible wave of people coming after me after Joe Rogan pulled that stuff. And it was calculated and it was financially motivated. But at the time it didn't feel that way. And it was a conversation I think with Tim Ferris actually that I had after I interviewed him for something or another. I'm going to credit him with this and Tim, if you hear this and you didn't say it, correct me. But I'm pretty darn sure it was you. I know Tim said, "Dave, you have to watch the scene in Ratatouille." Which is that animated film about a rat who's a chef of a creative activity if there ever was

one and a big quote, you guys can all Google this about critics and all this great speech about how they'll tear you down.

Dave Asprey:

But then there's also this equation which is that it takes a critic like that anywhere from a minute to five or 10 minutes to come up with something bad to say about you. And they can say, "Dave, you're a snake oil salesman." And then just hang up, like whatever, no one listens to that. But if they're going to really set the knife in a good way, it takes work. And for you as the creative, let's see, it takes about a half a second to click ban and delete. And they can never see your work again. They lose your work. You never hear anything from them again. And you just realize you win on every one of those transactions over and over and over. And so I took that and I started just doing ban delete without any angst.

Dave Asprey:

Before I'd be like, "Well, maybe I could help this person." It's like, "No." You come in, you actually like a douchebag you're out. You come in, you challenge my work, I'm going to talk to you because I want to learn from you. But what ended up happening is it turns out it was really only about 400, probably all people who were bullied in seventh grade. Most of whom by now are in ninth or 10th grade who were doing most of the really egregious posts. And all of a sudden, my social media cleaned back up. And to this day, if someone comes in with a super attitude like that, every now and then it's fun just to play with them. But otherwise you just get a ban and a delete and then you have a clean, engaged, happy audience. Because otherwise it's like someone coming up and peeing in the swimming pool. No one wants to swim in that. This is an environment where we're all here to do good things. So if that little story is helpful for people listening, worried about critics, you just learn that.

Jeff Madoff:

That's your moat.

Dave Asprey:

Yeah.

Jeff Madoff:

That band delete is your moat.

Dave Asprey:

Yeah. It works really well. Let's say that you've figured out what your creative gift is. So maybe you're a cook. Maybe you're a yoga teacher. Maybe you're a writer, painter, musician, whatever the thing is. And by the way, all of those except maybe painters are just hammered by this stay at home stuff. Restaurants are closing left and right. And it's a rough time but these are creative acts. All of them are. You are nourishing another person, you are creating something of beauty. How do you know how much you should charge to do what you do now that you don't have a job? How do you know how valuable you are? How do you establish your rates as a creative? And I'm just going to say an artist, what do you teach in your course about that?

Jeff Madoff:

So it depends on what you're doing. And if wonderful artist, Zaria Forman who did my class, whose work is astounding. I suggest that your viewers check her out. She does these massive photo, realistic paintings of glaciers and oceans and she does it with her fingertips. I mean, it's crazy when you look at her work, it's unbelievable.

Dave Asprey:

Yeah. I've seen that. It's super crazy.

Jeff Madoff:

Yeah. She's fabulous. And so I asked her that question because in art in particular, there's no real boundaries. Why does this sell for 1,000,005? And that sells for \$200? And they might be the same size. So I asked her, "How did you price your work the first time you put it out there?" Because in my world, there's a certain range for production and all of that kind of thing. And until you establish that you're better than the others and therefore worth more, you up your prices, your demand goes up. So that's the old business concept of proof of concept. I'll interject and interrupt myself for a moment and say that you can't be the only one that loves your work.

Dave Asprey:

That's a very important point.

Jeff Madoff:

Yeah. Because you got to put it out there and see is there anybody that's actually worth or willing to pay for what you are selling? Because if they aren't, it doesn't make any difference what you do. You don't have a proof of concept. So anyhow, with Zaria, I said, "So do you remember the first piece of art that you sold?" And she smiled and said, "Yes." And I said, "So how did you determine what to charge?" And she said, "Honestly, I had no idea." I knew that this was like a five foot by three foot painting, something like that.

Jeff Madoff:

And so I went around to see what were people charging for that kind of painting that size. And so she said, "So I asked for \$5,000." And I said, "How did you feel about charging that for?" And she said, "Well, I felt great. My biggest fear was that they weren't going to buy it because it was too expensive." And I said, "So what happened?" She said, "They bought it." And she smiled. And I said, "Now how long ago was this?" And she said, "12 years ago." And I said, "And what is that painting going for now?" And she smiled and said, "150,000."

Dave Asprey:

Wow.

Jeff Madoff:

So everybody starts someplace. She established proof of concept. There was a market for her work. It's a finite quantity that she can put out. So as her work sold, she upped and upped and upped the prices. Now she's a very collectible painter. It takes a while to get there but she did that in these incremental steps as she was offering more. So you determine value as you go. And that value is always a shifting playing field. But I would assume there is a finite range for instance and in selling a pound of coffee,

ground coffee. You know the arena you're playing in and whether you're at the higher end or lower end, you know the arena.

Dave Asprey:

It's really funny that you mentioned coffee. I was just thinking in my own life, coming up with a mold free coffee had never been done. It was a brand new thing. And now it's a whole category. Functional coffee is \$100 million dollar plus category. Bulletproof's a leader in it. It's created an ecosystem of players. But when I first sat down, there was zero market size for mold free coffee designed to not make you crash and be jittery. And so I thought, man, maybe a 100 people are going to buy this. I need to amortize the cost of all this lab testing that I did just so I would not fall asleep after doing my coffee. It was a selfish creative act. And so when I put it out there, I said, all right. Based on what it actually costs to do this, most of the time people are buying coffee at wholesale for a dollar a pound. And then they're roasting it for a dollar a pound, putting it in a bag and it costs them three bucks and they sell it to you for 1299 or something.

Dave Asprey:

I'm like, yeah, but I got lab testing and shipping and I'm doing stuff better. So it was 20 bucks a pound, sorry, 20 bucks for 12 ounces. And turns out it was worth it. The market wanted it. And to this day, those people say, "Dave, I feel like crap when I drink other coffee." I'm like, "Okay." So this was a thing. But over time I did manage to get the cost down because I realized I could make it at scale. And we had to install infrastructure in Central America and all this stuff. And now it's like 15 bucks. It's right in the middle of coffee but it's better. And that question though, the market size for that kind of coffee was zero and it was very premium priced because I thought it was worth it. And if the market didn't agree that it was worth it, I would have stopped selling it and been okay with that. And I guess that's what your friend could have done with her painting. You put it out at \$5,000. No one buys it. Drop the price. It's okay. Someone will buy it, right?

Jeff Madoff:

Right. And then of course you have to think about when you drop the price, is this a sustainable business? Because the marketplace will tell you whether it's sustainable or not like they did with you, they're going to either continue to buy it or not.

Dave Asprey:

The mistake that I see entrepreneurs make, and we really talking about is taking creatives and turning them into entrepreneurs.

Jeff Madoff:

And I would say by the way that they are entrepreneurs. That's the thing is an entrepreneur takes an idea and makes it into something. And I think that one of the things that is overlooked is that the protocols for almost all businesses are the same.

Dave Asprey:

That is true. Tell me more about that. I hadn't quite ever heard it put that way but it immediately resonates. So talk to me about why they are the same.

Jeff Madoff:

So my first adult career, I had a number of jobs before my adult career. I set tombstones, I was a door-to-door salesman, I did all this kind of stuff. But when I started in the fashion business, which was a result of a phone call from a kid I grew up with who had saved up some money, he said, "Can you think of a gig that would earn more than bank interest?" And I said, "I'll start at a clothing company." And I was working in a boutique, a little boutique. And I told them, I'll start a clothing company. I could always draw. I see what we sold. And I started it with \$1,500, which was at that time of my life, the most money I ever had at one time. And it was growing very, very quickly.

Jeff Madoff:

And what I learned from the clothing business when I transitioned into the film business was in the clothing business, I had an idea, I sketched the idea. I went over the cost of the materials, the cost of the labor when it had to be delivered by and could put together what I had to sell it at in order to make it into a business. Well, when I'm making films, I have an idea, storyboard the idea, what are the materials? What's the labor? How long is it going to take to do it? And is there a market for it because here's how much it's going to have to cost in order to do it. And that is true if you're making coffee, whatever it is.

Jeff Madoff:

And that's what I mean by the protocols being the same. The things you have to think about are the same in any business. And although people think that businesses are so distinctive and there's all these different silos, I believe that there is the opportunity for much more fruitful collaborations if you realize that those are perceptual differences. But in terms of implementing and executing ideas, they're the same for all businesses.

Dave Asprey:

My 13 year old daughter, I just did her first company as a project through this little thing I'm going to do an episode about the act of doing that and how people can do that with her. Because it's a put together program. And she carved these woodblock prints and she made greeting cards. I think some actually really good greeting cards to be perfectly honest. But going through that, there's the power of story. And it's funny because part four of your book is called the Power of Story. And so I had to teach her, "Hey, here's how to do your video. Here's to talk about the why and just to let people know that." And she says, "Well, why do they care? They just want a greeting card." And so it was really cute. It's like, "Well, they care because that's what stories are about, we're based on story." How do you teach creatives to tell their own story in a way that resonates with people who want to consume whatever they create?

Jeff Madoff:

Yeah. That's a great question. And because that story, if you are in a business, becomes your brand. And if you are a solo artist doing something in a sense, it becomes yourself brand for what you are. So you have to ask yourself questions first of all. And it requires a lot of self-examination and to do it well, which means why am I doing this? What is the motivation for me to do it? Why do I think there's a market for it? And you start looking at all these things because the story, the important part of it is that emotional hook that gets the consumer engaged in what you're doing. So the result of that is I'll make a quick gesture and you can tell me what brand this is. Could you see that? I don't know what my [crosstalk 00:34:23].

Dave Asprey:

So for people who aren't watching on the YouTube channel it was the Nike Swoosh.

Jeff Madoff:

Right? That's right. So whether I'm speaking in front of my class of 60 people or if I'm in front of 2,500 people, they all say it at the same time. So Nike's story, which is the just do it slogan. And you know how that relates to athletic excellence. And I think that's by the way one of the best slogans ever is just do it. Think about for a moment, how long and how much money Nike spent embedding that notion into the heads of consumers. So what they did is they created a story. They put a logo on that story. They have the people who recognize the logo and the symbols. And I suggest that this all started in the best template for understanding what a good story is and a good brand is, is religion.

Jeff Madoff:

You've got the crucifix. You've got the how the stories start, once upon a time. How does the Bible start? In the beginning. It's an iteration of the same thing. And there is some challenge to overcome. And that challenge is a major challenge to overcome. And what's the end of most fairytales? And they lived happily ever after. And a religious story, the end of the Bible, now I'm unfortunately blanking on the last line of the Bible but it is something about living happily ever after. It's an iteration on that. So you have a symbol that's recognized by everybody, a shared belief system about that. And so wherever you see that, you understand what you're going to get, which is by the way also how franchises work. That's why the Golden Arches of McDonald's, wherever you are in the world or Starbucks, when you see that symbol, you know what you're going to get.

Jeff Madoff:

So the story as it is the foundation of all of that and good storytelling engages on an emotional level but it does fill these tenants like what I'm talking about, where there's a beginning, middle and end. And that when you're selling a product that's often ending with something of how it makes your life better. That's the and they live happily ever after. So you're selling a proposition and a promise.

Dave Asprey:

This might be an advanced question that you'd hear in your class. But I want your input just for my own learning here. I have told the story of how I used to weigh 300 pounds, how I lost 100 pounds, how I went to Tibet and had yak butter tea that inspired me to make Bulletproof coffee. All of those things are 100% true. And they actually happened. I hit a point about three or four years in where I'm thinking hasn't the entire world heard this before and I go on stage and like, I just don't want to say this too. I'm like, "I'm the Bulletproof coffee guy." Come on.

Dave Asprey:

But then every time I wouldn't tell the story as a part of whatever I'm sharing, whether I'm on Tony Robbins big stage at Unleash the Power Within or whether I'm in front of 100 people at some business conference. If I didn't tell the story again and again, and again and again, they wouldn't connect. And even now on this podcast, I'm like, "How many times to have long time listeners heard me say this? Don't they get tired of it?" And sometimes they say, "Dave, stop talking about yourself." But then all the new people come in and they say, "What are you talking about?" How do you teach creatives to tell their story until they want to puke? Because it seems like that's what it takes.

Jeff Madoff:

Well, it's interesting. I mean, you think of your favorite rock band that you'd go hear live. And as much as you may like their new music, you always [crosstalk 00:38:22].

Dave Asprey:

You want to hear the classics.

Jeff Madoff:

Right. That's your classic, overweight Dave and the yak butter coffee is your classic. They want to hear it. There's something reassuring about that. There's something comforting about that. And there's something relatable about that. And so you just have to look at... I talked to Tony Bennett. I was interviewing him and I said, "So you ever got sick of singing I Left My Heart in San Francisco. He's probably sung that 800,000 times at least. And he goes, "No. I always find something new and I always have another nuance. And I look at it as a chance to perform that again but maybe perform it a little better or a little different." And he said, "And that's what made my career. So I never get sick of it. I'm thankful for it."

Jeff Madoff:

And I think that it's that, it's think of seeing one of your favorite rock bands or even the comedian who tells this joke every time that always gets you to laugh and you're waiting for it, even though you know it. So I think that familiarity is a big thing. And I think that the value of that familiarity, especially with entrepreneurs because they think they've got to revolutionize everything but it's evolutionized everything. The revolution you lose too many people. The evolution is what takes people along with you. So I think that it's a really interesting question but I think that that's how you don't get sick of it. You always use your own creativity to nuance it differently and to realize that's what helped you get to where you are.

Dave Asprey:

If you could go back in time and tell yourself what you know now when you were 20 about building a career as a creative, what would you tell yourself first?

Jeff Madoff:

Kind of what I did, which is when I left the clothing business, started into the film business when I was doing the film business and started teaching and then with the teaching, which led to the book and with the play that I'm doing, all of these things. One of my many character flaws is that I'm seduced by ideas. So I'm not afraid of something new, if anything, I might commit too much. But it's the excitement. I mean, I think you and I share that because I know in the discovery process, that's how you are.

Dave Asprey:

I have four companies right now, not counting Bulletproof. And they're all doing well, they're all meaningful. They matter. And no one else was doing it. But yeah, it's kind of a burden. I'll go with you there.

Jeff Madoff:

And so I think that it's that, it's just being seduced by ideas and putting your time and energy behind the things that you... I think the key word is engagement. If you are engaged, that doesn't mean it's not hard. It doesn't mean there isn't struggle. But you're willing to put up with it. Because again, it's like the mission and persistence. You're willing to put up with those obstacles and keep moving with it. So I can't say that I've ever been presented with an opportunity that fear kept me from doing it or doubt kept me from doing it. I've always found a way to do it. And my principal goal wasn't to make money. It's nice when you do.

Dave Asprey:

I'm with you there. It's not about the money, it's about making something that needs to exist. And the money is a side effect.

Jeff Madoff:

Yes. And it's great when it is. My grandmother who was a very wise woman said, it's better to be rich and healthy than poor and sick. And she was a tremendously insightful person. But it was always, I couldn't bring myself to do it if I wasn't interested in it. If I didn't find it somehow exciting.

Dave Asprey:

We're in a different world though, maybe not for your grandmother when they went through The Great Depression and all. But okay. If you're sitting at home saying, all right, I really know how to cook. I've developed some amazing recipes. I want to make a career as a creative and I want to do it in a kitchen but I have to eat and I have to have ingredients to do this. Right? And it is about the money up to a certain point. Right? So how do you get that very first, okay. I'm going to go cook a meal for someone wearing a mask or something like that. Is that part of the creative process where you just say, "All right, I'm going to do enough for money. Even if I'm not cooking a meal I wanted to cook." I mean, it seems like you did that early in your career. Like I just did a job because I needed doing as I built my creativity. Or is your book going to help people actually say, here's what to do right now to make enough to make ends meet basically.

Jeff Madoff:

Well, my hope is that the book will educate and entertain and inspire people. And I'm not a big believer in recipes for success.

Dave Asprey:

They don't work. That's probably why.

Jeff Madoff:

That's right. Yeah. They're one shortcoming, they don't work. Other than that, they're great. So here's the 11 steps you need to take and then you'll get nowhere but I sold a book. So a lot of it is again, that discovery process, which is both exciting and frustrating and innovating and invigorating and all of those things. So when I say that money isn't my first priority. I've always been able to make a living doing those things. I've never written a play before but I knew that this was an astounding story. And I knew when I was compelled that I had to tell that story. And I was talking to a friend of mine who was an actor and he said, "So where are you at with your script?" And I said, "Well, I finished it." And now I got to get it out there.

Jeff Madoff:

And he said, "So do you have a good general manager?" And then says well, since I don't have anybody, the answer's no but what is a general manager? So he told me. And through a series of small world events that ended up at one of these general managers was his daughter's godmother and his wife's best friend. So the next day, truly the next morning, I'm in an office with this woman who's giving me an education in theater. And although she was over committed and couldn't help me, she gave me six other doors to knock on. And that started this journey where I met people and anyhow I've ended up now putting together an A list group of people who are Tony Award winners, Olivier Award winners because they're attracted to the script, which is the script that I wrote, which is incredibly gratifying and exciting to me.

Jeff Madoff:

And it was funny because I was thinking, wow, I was at this place 40 years ago. Where I'm starting again into something I knew nothing about. And that's part of the fun of it is I know nothing about it. But because I'm on a mission to tell this story, I just assume I'm going to figure it out. Well, now we have a theater deal.

Dave Asprey:

Wow. Congratulations.

Jeff Madoff:

Thank you. Thank you. Opening in May of 21. And my hope is that you will come in and see it. It's cool as hell. And I hope that the world is in a better place so we can go to theater.

Dave Asprey:

Yeah. I Hope there is still some theater companies open [crosstalk 00:46:20].

Jeff Madoff:

That's right. But the point of all of this is that you don't know what's going to pay off and what isn't going to pay off but the sure way to make sure nothing happens is to do nothing. So you've got to go at risk, you've got to do things. And it's fine to have doubt, most of us do. It's fine to take a risk because if you don't take a risk, you're never going to do anything interesting. And that's the critical part to me. So I'm doing other things to make a living, my film company and so on and teaching while I was going to play is not a quick process. And you aren't making money right off the bat.

Jeff Madoff:

But the thing about it is you do have to finance things along the way. And I remember when you and I spoke and I interviewed you for my book, one of the things that you talked about, and I love that you talked about it because again, most people don't. You said, "Look, if I was single, I could go off to Tahiti and start my own company." But I got a wife and kids and you got to be real. So you have to assess what is your living overhead? How long can you survive with making nothing? What do you have to make to be able to do something? And you give yourself X number of months or a year to have a runway.

Jeff Madoff:

So I am by no means saying, "Just go with your passion and forget about making money." You've got to figure out how to live. I have a wife and two kids. I can't shirk that responsibility. So you have to realize also your actions affect other people in your life. So you have to be aware of that too.

Dave Asprey:

It's actually refreshing to hear, okay, you're 35 plus years into your career now and you've been successful but you have multiple irons in the fire. You're still being a little scrappy and you're balancing your risk. And I think that that goes really doubly for people who are working on building a creative career in the middle of an economic downturn and a pandemic and all of that. You don't have to do just one thing. For me, I was a VP at a publicly traded company when I started Bulletproof and it started as a blog and a creative outlet. And then I really wanted this coffee and eventually it turned into a thing. And even as Bulletproof is growing, I'm like, "You know what? I have this itch to do this neuroscience company because this is something that I can't buy." So I started that and the company that TrueDark that makes the glasses for sleep because you couldn't buy those.

Dave Asprey:

And now, Bulletproof is growing and I've hired a CEO for it. And now these things that were little seeds I planted and really didn't tend to for a while, now it's time for me to put a little bit of attention into those and manage the whole portfolio and continue to be the chairman of Bulletproof but not the day to day operator the way I have been. And so if I wasn't following that same advice as you, I'd be sitting here right now, kind of going, I guess I could go for a walk. But as a creative person, I would be not so happy with that. And of course, I've got this show which is a big creative outlet for me. So I like it that you're saying, "Look, it doesn't stop. You're always going to be doing more than one thing at a time. And some of them are going to be financial successful and some won't be." And that's a part of having a creative career is that painting is never going to sell, but I liked it. And so I better paint one that's going to sell next time.

Jeff Madoff:

Well so to your point, what you said, it reminded me of a story Ralph Lauren told me. So his business started with, he wanted to have a wide tie. And all the ties out there, he found uninteresting. So his muse was movies and Cary Grant and Fred Astaire and Gary Cooper and these people. And he looks at the images and he sees the ties and he goes and has the made. And that's how his company started like you with that itch for neuroscience. He started thinking, I love the suits that they're wearing in these classic films but I don't see anything like that in the stores. I want it. And if I want it, somebody else is going to want it. So he got into menswear and then his wife would borrow his sport jackets. He thought, "This looks really great on a woman." And his wife said, well, we should be making these for women, got them into womenswear.

Jeff Madoff:

And on and on with home furnishings, with all those things, it was always thinking about what he liked, that itch that he wanted to scratch. And at one point when I was doing his Lifetime Achievement Award, I said to him, "How for..." He's now been in business for 50 years? "How do you keep your pulse? How do you get that pulse of the consumer? How do you do that?" And he said, "Well, I know the consumer because I am the consumer. Not unlike you, you're getting paid yourself for everything you do." So it's that spirit that keeps you going and whether you're fantastically successful or as you said, not

everything's going to work. Ralph has had divisions that have shut down. Even at his height, he had divisions that didn't work. And you have to be prepared for that too.

Jeff Madoff:

But I think these are things that often aren't talked about in entrepreneurship, which is you're going to have to deal with these things. And that's just part of it. But knowing I love that. I know what the consumer wants because I am the consumer. You have to have a barometer. Your barometer is yourself and your interests. My barometer is me and my interests. If I want to see this, I think somebody else is going to want to see it. And that's again, part of the things that I think are essential to understand when you start into a business.

Dave Asprey:

That's fantastic. And Jeff, thanks for taking some time to share your path. And you've done some things at a very big level in multiple industries. And I believe that people who hear this will have been inspired by this. And I just have to tell you, if you're listening to this right now. If you're saying I've been called to do something creative and I have a job and it's not creative, I don't like it. Start doing something creative. And if you're already someone who says, I'm really creative and I don't have a job right now, there's actually a really good time to do something because you're not doing anything else right now. So you can do the creative things. You can have your thinking time and you can try stuff. And if it doesn't work, the downside is pretty limited.

Jeff Madoff:

I wanted to mention one other thing about that relating to these times, with COVID with people being in lockdown with that kind of thing. If you look back historically, great art, I'm talking about books, paintings, films, plays, dance, architecture on and on and on, most often they're the result of either a societal or personal trauma. And that's the compelling need to get it out there. And I think that if you can channel the angst that you're feeling, the uncertainty, the insecurity and really go raw and go into it, you can do something magnificent if you aren't afraid of your own feelings. And it's times like this, this is a historic time we're living at. And you can take advantage of that to do something amazing but you have to believe in yourself and you have to apply the effort.

Dave Asprey:

That is beautiful advice, Jeff, thanks. Your new book is at acreativecareer.com. Your information's all there. Your life story is amazing. Having spent many hours just hearing stories of the things you've done, I know that you had enough information yourself to put together a really good book but to be able to then do that and then layer in some of the people that you've had a chance to work with and interview. I think it's really worth reading for entrepreneurs. So if you are an entrepreneur, you want to be one, the creative part of being an entrepreneur is important and you've nailed it. And it's based on a class you've taught for 15 years. And then if you are thinking, all right, maybe I'm not an entrepreneur but I want a creative career. It turns out you really are an entrepreneur and you call that out very nicely in the book. So thank you for contributing at a time when more people need to be thinking about this maybe than ever before. I appreciate you. And thanks for being on this show.

Jeff Madoff:

Thank you. Loved it. Great conversation. I forgot that we're on a Zoom call. I thought we were just sitting and talking. Thank you so much.

Dave Asprey:

If you liked today's episode, you know what to do. Pick out a copy and go to acreativecareer.com, go to Amazon and pick it up. And you'll find that Jeff's book is readable and it's worth your time if this is something that is on your sites for this week, this month, this social isolation period, wherever the heck it is, worth your time. And as always, if you read a book, do the equivalent of leaving a tip which is you go to Amazon and you leave a review, a truthful review that says what you thought about the book. Because creative people like authors like Jeff, like me, we like to know how we did and that you cared enough to leave a review even if it's mediocre. But really, I would never have someone who writes mediocre books on the show, come on. Have a great day.