

HOW TO DEAL WITH TOXIC PEOPLE (INCLUDING YOURSELF) – ROBERT GREENE – #878

Dave Asprey:

Today is something I've been looking forward to for a long time because it is an interview with one of my favorite living authors and a guy who has had a huge, huge effect on my career without even knowing it, although I've mentioned it to him before.

Dave:

I'm talking about none other than Robert Greene, who is the author of a very famous book called *The 48 Laws of Power*, something that I've heard has been banned from some prisons because people who read it were actually using it to get influence in ways that they wouldn't.

Dave:

He's had a series of books, books like *Mastery*, *The Art of Seduction*, all of which are just masterfully written and contain keys to how humans work. All of his books are those things that should be on everyone's reading list.

Dave:

If I'd had all this knowledge when I was 25, oh man, the things I would've done. So, hard-earned knowledge from a master. Today, we're going to talk about his new book called *The Daily Laws*. Robert, my friend, it is always an honor to get a chance to spend time with you and to interview you. Thanks for being here.

Robert Greene:

I feel the same, David, [inaudible 00:02:38] an honor to be here. So thank you for inviting me.

Dave:

Well, last time you were on the show, we talked about the fact that you'd had a stroke. How are you doing?

Robert:

Yes.

Dave:

You look like you're stronger. Are you moving around better? Are you recovering?

Robert:

I am definitely better than when I last spoke with you. I don't remember exactly when that was. I think it was a couple of years ago. So yeah, but I'm not as far as I'd like to be. I'm having to deal with the fact that my walking is still a bit wonky. I can't go outside my house and take a nice walk up the hills. On the one hand, it's getting better. On the other hand, I'm kind of frustrated that it's not going faster.

Dave:

All right. We can talk after the show. I have some ideas for you that would probably accelerate that. [crosstalk 00:03:27].

Robert:

I'm always open to your ideas.

Dave:

All right. Yeah. I bet there's a couple of people in my network who can accelerate this in a couple of technologies. All right. We'll take a couple of minutes at the end [inaudible 00:03:39].

Robert:

All right. All right.

Dave:

In the meantime, you're kind of a big deal on TikTok now, right?

Robert:

I kind of fell into that. There probably should be an age limit on who can be on TikTok and I'm well past that age limit. But I have people who are much younger than me who are managing it because they understand the medium. I don't really totally understand it. But yeah, I've got, I don't know, 400,000 followers now on TikTok. Who knew? But I love it.

Dave:

Did you have to get TikTok pants or anything like that or you're okay?

Robert:

What are TikTok pants?

Dave:

Inappropriately tight pants that look like you're not wearing pants at all.

Robert:

No.

Dave:

Or so I hear. I'm not into TikTok either.

Robert:

That wouldn't look good on me.

Dave:

I've heard about TikTok pants from various others, so I'm just going to say I don't have a pair either.

Robert:

That's how out of the loop I am. I didn't even know that TikTok pants existed.

Dave:

Apparently, they do. And they're probably something you can't unsee. So there you go.

Robert:

Okay.

Dave:

Congratulations on reaching a great audience there as well.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

You do something better than actually any other author that I've come across. I'm trying to think. Maybe there's the Napoleon Hill stuff going way back.

Dave:

But you take stupendous amounts of information and you distill them down into something that's readable and actionable in a way that's pretty magic. So lots of research and all that stuff.

Dave:

When I look at a book, I say, how many hours of the author's time did you compress into how many hours? And there's a ratio. And you could listen to this show where, yes, there's whatever, eight hours of prep work on my side. You already have your lifetime of prep work. But it's not as structured as writing your book.

Dave:

So the ROI on your book is always going to be higher than a conversation unless the nugget we need just happens to come out in the conversation.

Robert:

Right.

Dave:

How do you compress them that way? How do you do this?

Robert:

Well, I'll be violating one of The 48 Laws of Power, which is to never reveal your own tricks or your own method. But basically, it's kind of like a hack that I've created over the years, beginning with The 48 Laws of Power. I read lots of books, I take copious notes, I have a note card system. And then when it comes to writing the story or the ideas or the philosophy behind it, I try and compact things to get to the

essence of it. Right? To get to what I think is the actual kernel of truth and cutting away all of the extraneous material.

Robert:

So when I read other people's books, I'm going, "I don't need to know that. What's the point of that? It's not adding anything. It's detracting as it's distracting.

Robert:

For instance, when I tell a story like in *The Laws of Human Nature* about the original Rockefeller who created Standard Oil and his empire. I'm dealing with four or five different books, but I'm always searching for those little kernels that reveal something essential about the person's character.

Robert:

It takes a lot of leg work, much more than you'd ever imagine. And then I find that and I have to put it together. And so that is one element of the compression that we're talking about. Just honing in on the exact details that are necessary to tell the story, or the exact ideas that I need to communicate.

Robert:

Then the second form of the compression comes from my neurotic compulsion to edit, to rewrite, to rewrite, to rewrite, to rewrite until I feel like I've arrived at the truth. So if you saw my first draft, you'd go, "Whoa, this isn't very interesting at all."

Robert:

I'm compressing it down further and further until I get to what I think is the core, what I need to express. I don't know if I've explained it exactly correctly, but that's my process.

Dave:

So you have this very large top of the funnel where you're gathering all sorts of information by reading a lot.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

You're taking notes along the way. And it seems like you've downloaded your note card system to Ryan Holiday, who I know was one of your lead researchers for *48 Laws of Power*.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

And you look at Ryan's books, I love his books because they're also information-dense and there aren't a lot of wasted words. So it seems like that technique for doing that, that's a precious thing and that's

something that I want to see you write a book about. The laws of saying shit that matters. Can you write that book?

Robert:

I'll try. I'll try. But one thing I left out, just to go back for one second, the note card system itself is the major form of compression I have to say.

Dave:

Okay.

Robert:

So when I read a book, usually, I find most books are not organized very well and it irritates me. So when I read something on page 10 and I wrote it down on a note card, and then I find the same idea, similar idea expressed differently on page 265, I'm able to take all of the ideas that are spread out in a book in this dispersed manner and give it an edge or a concentrated form through the note cards that I take.

Dave:

That makes so much sense. And I accredited you in the book Game Changers that I wrote. But the structure of 48 Laws of Power is what led me to structure my book that way.

Dave:

My information gathering was through interviews and surveys and statistically analyzing results and then writing laws. A different... Not your note card system. But just wanted to acknowledge that here as well that not only-

Robert:

It's a great book. I've enjoyed it.

Dave:

Oh, the fact that you read it, hey, thank you. But the notion there that, okay, you gathered all the info, but then you somehow... "48 laws and I'm going to organize it this way," was really cool.

Dave:

And then that structure seemed to stick with you for your other books. Was that structure something that you just figured out on your own when you wrote the book there?

Robert:

Dave, we're going back 25 years now to when I first started the book. So I can't completely remember exactly what was going on in my mind at the time, but there were some other kinds of books that influenced it, things like the [inaudible 00:10:34] that I used to do a lot back in the day that had the 48 hexagrams. Right?

Dave:

Of course.

Robert:

And were broken up into sections. I think unconsciously, I was thinking of something like that. But it's more how my brain works. It's kind of a reflection of my brain for better or for worse. I don't generally think of things in this seamless fashion. I like breaking things up into different kind of categories. Right?

Robert:

So I naturally hit upon this idea of telling a story and then interpreting it afterwards as opposed to putting it inside the story. I like things that are neat and self-contained. Right?

Dave:

Yeah.

Robert:

I don't know. There are books from the 19th century etc., where they would have things on the margin. So I remember reading this French writer that I really love. He wrote an essay about Leonardo da Vinci. And on the margins, he had notes that went into another direction about what he...

Robert:

He was almost commenting on the essay that he had written. I thought that was very brilliant and very complex and interesting.

Robert:

So I'm someone who's obsessed with structure and form almost to a schizophrenic level. I just obsess with how things are structured. Right? And I sometimes get lost in that. But it fascinates me how to construct something that is new and different that reflects my peculiar way of looking at the world. And so the 48 Laws initiated the whole thing.

Dave:

Well, if you think about it, Robert, you've probably sold more than 10 million books, I would just guess.

Robert:

Worldwide or in the United States?

Dave:

Worldwide.

Robert:

Oh, much more than that.

Dave:

There you go. Okay. So much more.

Robert:

Sorry. I don't mean to brag.

Dave:

No, no, it's all right. Hey, I'm almost up to a million books, so I'm in awe of 10 million. But give me time, I'll learn some more from you and others.

Dave:

It's not about exceeding a certain number. Let's say it's 25 million. Each of those books takes what? At least 12 hours to read, 10 hours to read. The number of hours of human lives that you've consumed with your writing is like 100,000 lifetimes of just reading. Right?

Dave:

So your structure damn well better be good, otherwise, you've just wasted a huge number of lives. Right?

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

Just kudos for the way you do it. The reason I'm obsessed about this is that your new book doesn't follow the structure of all your other books.

Robert:

I know.

Dave:

Right? But it's actually, I think, better. What you did is you went through and you distilled your other books, which are already distilled. So you went from high-grade tequila in the other books and said, "Let me just make them into Everclear. And let me make it a daily shot of Everclear." Is that a good analogy?

Robert:

Yeah. Yeah. It is. Because I understand that I can be a little bit long-winded. Somehow, The Laws of Human Nature expanded to 565 pages.

Dave:

But it's so worth it. That's such a great book. I love that book. [inaudible 00:13:45].

Robert:

Oh, thank you.

Dave:

Don't feel bad about the length. It was worth every page.

Robert:

Oh, okay. Well, that's good to hear. I noticed that my shortest book, which was 50th Law that I did with 50 Cent and Mastery, which is relatively short, a lot of readers really gravitated to that. Right?

Robert:

So I wanted to create something that was a little simpler to handle and that took all of the most salient hard-hitting ideas scattered through six books and put them in one book. And your idea of a very distilled shot of tequila or Everclear. What is it called?

Dave:

Yeah. Everclear is the 95% ethanol is as distilled as you can get it.

Robert:

Oh. Okay.

Dave:

Moonshine basically. Twice as strong as tequila, which is already pretty strong, which is going to be 40% alcohol.

Robert:

Oh, okay. I see. So yeah, I wanted to get to that 90% alcohol. But also, I did want to structure it. So it's not like a Greatest Hits, it's not like The Grateful Dead Greatest Hits from all the Live concerts or anything.

Robert:

Basically, I gave it an order. And the order is starting with your career and your life, how to look at yourself and where you're going for the first three months. In the next three months, now, how do you deal with people in a political setting? Like you're in an office and you've got toxic people around you.

Robert:

And then how you become better at influence and persuasion and getting people interested in your ideas. And finally, how to sum all of that up with the superior knowledge of human nature, etc. So there is kind of a logic and an order to it, but it's not too tight where it gets irritating. It's a loose structure.

Dave:

Okay. That makes a ton of sense. I really like that. And you mentioned toxic people. It seems like we have more of a problem with that. And just to set context for everyone listening, there's 12 things here that you can talk about. Each month centers around a major theme, things like self-control, human nature, toxic people, power and seduction and persuasion.

Dave:

It feels like though that this toxic people thing has become a bigger issue lately. We have all sorts of divisions in society. And we have people who are shaming other people for all sorts of things that probably aren't worthy of shame.

Dave:

What is your number one strategy for dealing with toxic people? I know you've written chapters and books on it all, but if we were to offer some real value to people, what would it be?

Robert:

Well, it's very simple, is learn how to avoid dealing with them or learn how to avoid... Recognize them before they get enmeshed in your life.

Dave:

Yeah.

Robert:

Because as I point out in The Laws of Human Nature, people who are truly toxic, and we're talking about narcissists, people who are very passive-aggressive, envious, they don't come with a billboard announcing that they're toxic. Right?

Robert:

They've learned through their whole life strategies on how to appear the opposite. So they wear a mask of being very charming, being very pleasing, of being interested in your ideas, being very charismatic. You hire them, you partner with them, you marry them.

Robert:

And then lo and behold, six months down the road, you start seeing other signs of that character leaking through the toxic part. Now, it could be sooner than that, but sometimes it takes a while.

Robert:

And then now you're emotionally invested in them, you have a relationship, they're working for you, they're your business partner. And they're playing all kinds of mind games with you. They're doing push and pull. They're making you feel like you're the problem, that they're the victim. They're very good at turning things around.

Robert:

And then to disengage from them becomes really traumatic. It's like trying to pull out all the weeds in your garden. It takes massive amounts of work because they're everywhere, right? They're in all aspects of your... Inside of you, they inhabit you.

Robert:

And so it can take months and years for you to recover from a relationship with a very powerful, toxic individual. And so the best strategy of all, it's like Sun Tzu's strategy, the best way to win a war is to win it without any bloodshed. Your strategy is so perfect that the enemy collapses before a single arrow is shot.

Robert:

So the best strategy is not to get involved with these people, to recognize them. And to recognize them is not easy. I'm never saying it's easy because they are masters at disguise. Right? And they play on your emotions, and we're very weak that way. But there are always signs for recognizing them.

Robert:

And I give you lessons in the book. So I tell you, for instance, to pay attention to the patterns in their life, to look at what went on before. So if you're going to hire somebody, look at their past and go into that deeply and see the patterns in them. Pay deep attention to their nonverbal things.

Robert:

So I tell people, for instance, a toxic narcissist, they seem very interested in you. They're talking to you. "Oh, this person isn't a narcissist." But their eyes, their eyes are dead. They're not really engaging and connecting with you on a deep human level.

Robert:

They're just simply trying to get information from you that they can use later on. It's fake empathy. You can recognize it if you tune yourself to nonverbal behavior. And we humans have a hard time doing that because we've become so verbal that we are just hypnotized by people's words that we fail to look at their actual body language.

Robert:

But you can't fake things with your voice, for instance. You can fake your eyes and some of your facial expressions, but your voice will reveal that you're nervous, that you're not being genuine, that something else is going on. So I talk a lot in The Laws of Human Nature about how to master the art of deciphering people's nonverbal behavior.

Dave:

If only I would have known these things. I have done all of the things you listed at the beginning of that, about partnering with, marrying, taking investment from, hiring, all the above. Right?

Dave:

And by the time you figure it out, unwinding it is tens to hundreds of times more work. And so it's developing kind of a spider-sense. And the funny thing is in every one of those situations, I had the little spider-sense that said, "Something's not right."

Dave:

I'm thinking of an example where someone came to the first biohacking conference when I was just creating the field. And [inaudible 00:21:02], but there was that deadness in his eyes and all that stuff.

Dave:

So since that time, that person has copied almost every episode that I've ever had. Probably as soon as this goes Live, you'll probably get a phone call the next day asking if you'll be on that show. And this is eight years later. And literally, [crosstalk 00:21:22].

Robert:

You have to tell me who this is.

Dave:

No. It's not about revenge or anything like that.

Robert:

All right.

Dave:

It's one of those things where five times the person's called and said, "Why is it you won't go to a conference where I am?" I'm like, "Because you stab me in the back every time, man. I have [inaudible 00:21:37]."

Dave:

And then there's the, "How do I make it right?" And, "Here's a list of things you can do to make it right." Every single time he tells himself he did the list, but he didn't actually do the list. And then I call him on it and he gets all... And then runs away. What is it in people that makes them believe that they did things that they didn't do?

Robert:

God, if I had the perfect answer to that, I would be a multi-billionaire. You're asking me to solve the riddle of human misery.

Dave:

Yeah. But you're as close as anyone I know. So I want to hear what you think, man.

Robert:

Well, we're very good at cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias. It's how I look at it in a way. So we're invested in believing what we already want to believe in, right?

Dave:

Yeah.

Robert:

So if information comes in that's discordant with that, that maybe we're not listening to Dave's list or whatever, that we're not actually enacting it, our first human reaction is not, "I've got to reassess myself and my own consciousness and how I respond to people."

Robert:

No. Our first reaction is to get defensive. "Well, Dave has a problem. Dave isn't really listening. Dave is a narcissist himself." Right?

Dave:

Oh, yeah. Lots of people think that. They only think that because I'm so good, just to be really clear. [inaudible 00:23:02]

Robert:

Oh. Yeah. Well, people think that about me as well, so don't worry about that.

Dave:

Exactly.

Robert:

We want to believe what we already believe, so we're going to go down that path. We're going to tell ourselves... Because the hardest thing for a human being to do, or one of the hardest things, is to be self-aware, to actually look inside one's self and say, "This is what's really going on. I'm fooling myself." And we are masters at self-deception.

Robert:

So in *The 48 Laws of Power*, I talk about deception and con artists. But in *The Laws of Human Nature*, it's almost about self-deception, how we're con artists with ourselves, how we create an image of ourselves as being morally right, being a good person, being intelligent, being rational, being empathetic. Whereas in fact, we're usually quite far below that ideal.

Robert:

And so for someone like this imitator or whatever, however I would call them, to actually step back and analyze himself and say, "Am I really doing what Dave is asking?" Is a step that's very difficult for people to take. It has to become a habit in your life. Right? Because your default position is to always look externally and blame other people.

Dave:

Wow. That is a lot of knowledge there. And it highlighted something that I've noticed over the arc of your books. You started out very external with the laws of power. How do you gain power in the world around you?

Dave:

And as you evolved all the books, they got more and more, how do you gain power and control over what's going on inside of you? Maybe in service of power outside of you. But it became more and more focused on the self.

Dave:

Have you reached that or is there another even deeper book where you go spiritual transcendent, omega, alpha, quantum, kiss a leprechaun kind of thing? I don't know. Is there another step forming in there?

Robert:

Yeah. It's coming out. It's going to be my eighth book. It's what I'm working on right now. It's a book that's temporarily titled *The Law of The Sublime*.

Dave:

Wow.

Robert:

It's going into ideas that I talked about in the last chapter of human nature about confronting our mortality and looking at our death, the death that we face, straight in the eyes. And somehow distilling some kind of wisdom and beauty from that, which I call the sublime.

Robert:

So I'm deeply, deeply working on that book right now. And it's going to be a very different book from anything I've ever created. So the answer to your question is yes, I am doing that leprechaun book.

Robert:

And we can talk about it more whenever you want to. And in fact, in *The Daily Laws*, I have some excerpts from the book that I'm working on now, from the first two chapters of it.

Dave:

Excellent. I love that we're getting a little bit more organic just in our ability to publish and write and share and things like that. So it's possible do that now.

Dave:

If you go back to when even my first book came out, which was many years after your first book came out, the publishing process was so clunky. There's no way you could have done that.

Robert:

Right.

Dave:

So people can get a taste of it. The notion that you're going more and more inward to get self-aware, what does someone do if they say, "All right, we're doing a meditation or some neurofeedback or plant medicine," whatever the heck their breathwork...

Dave:

Whatever made them go, "Aha. I deceived myself." Right? And they become aware of it. How do you recommend someone go about making it right when you realize that you basically told yourself something that wasn't true and then acted on it?

Robert:

Well, the awareness is almost a value in and of itself. So having the knowledge in your mind, that's now rooted in some way, that I have this pattern of self-deception.

Robert:

So the first thing you have to realize that when you come to terms with the fact that in this one instance, you did deceive yourself, you were blaming the other person, but that you were at fault, understand the basic principle of human nature. Nobody ever does something once, right? Just once. There's going to be a pattern.

Robert:

So you have deceived yourself on that front several times. Maybe it's a pattern in your life. Maybe you've done it many times. Who knows? So first of all, realize that it probably has roots in you. And human behavior in our own lives tend to follow these patterns. And I discuss that in The Laws of Human Nature and explain why that happens and why we're prisoners of fate in some ways.

Robert:

So awareness of your own patterns now gives you the power in the moment that you catch yourself doing it to say, "Aha, Robert, you're deceiving yourself again. You're focusing on the other person when actually you were the one to blame." And I recently caught myself in that.

Robert:

So I practiced these things on myself, kind of like Tim Ferriss does those things on himself. I do it on myself.

Dave:

Yeah.

Robert:

So the other day I had an interview with somebody and they were... I'm not going to name names and please don't look this up. The interview was a little bit sharp. I felt like this person was kind of attacking me, although they were smiling and everything was pleasant. But I felt like they were trying to trip me up and reveal that I contradict myself.

Robert:

And I'm going, "Damn. Why is that? I thought I was friends with this person." And then I started thinking, "No, Robert, maybe you did something that caused it." So I'm aware of my pattern of always externalizing and finding the other person to be wrong.

Robert:

And then I realized that maybe some of my own behavior, some of my own communication with this person was triggering certain emotions that would lead them to now want to upset me in some way, that I had perhaps created some envy inadvertently, and that I could have controlled some of my communications better, etc.

Robert:

So simply being aware of your own patterns gives you the power to now change them. Right? It's just like the toxic person thing. The key is to recognize them before they happen. The key here is to recognize in the moment that that process is going on. That is almost enough in and of itself, I think.

Robert:

It's also like your reaction is to get emotional when somebody says something. Right? To get angry, for instance. To get triggered.

Robert:

If you develop the habit in the moment of understanding that you have that propensity, you can now give yourself a little lapse of 10 seconds where you calm down, where you don't react, and then that will allow you to not react. And the next time it'll be 20 seconds. So developing the pattern of being aware of your own patterns is, to me, almost enough.

Dave:

Very, very well said. And you mentioned envy in there. And in *The Laws of Human Nature*, you described envy and both how to spot it in others and in yourself in the best way I've seen in any book, including a bunch of books on narcissism and all, because I've been studying this, just trying to understand why have I made some of the hiring decisions I've made in the past and how is it these people can-

Robert:

Oh. Wow, interesting.

Dave:

How can these people come in and just trash things and just pollute a culture and all?

Robert:

I'm feeling a book here, Dave. I'm getting you could write a very interesting book on this.

Dave:

I've already got a title.

Robert:

Okay. Okay. Just wanted to make sure.

Dave:

My publisher says no, no. So my next book will be not quite that one, but I might write this one at the same time because it's ready, it's already all in my head.

Robert:

Okay.

Dave:

So you read my mind there, Robert. Yeah.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

There is one. But I do have to just say, what you wrote about envy there, to spot it in yourself was really cool. And I've even taken a few of those ideas in a couple of the lectures when people are stuck on envy at *40 Years of Zen*, my neuroscience thing. And I'll actually say, "According to Robert, here's what's going on with you with envy."

Robert:

Right.

Dave:

So I love it that you mentioned it there. And you're also, as I recall, a fan of Abraham Maslow, right?

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

And you went out and you figured out that early in life, he was in a bed or something, if my memory serves. Am I getting this right from one of your early books? That he was-

Robert:

I think you might be thinking of Milton Erickson. [crosstalk 00:31:41].

Dave:

Oh. I'm confusing him with Erickson. You're totally right. They're both old psychologists. You're right. It's Erickson, but you're a fan of both. Okay. Sorry.

Robert:

I like Abraham Maslow, but I adore Milton Erickson. He is like a god to me. He's amazing.

Dave:

And these are people who were cracking the code of what's going on in our heads before you or I were where we are now. Your new book that's coming out next after The Daily Laws about The Law of The Sublime, Scott Barry Kaufman was on the show recently and he said, "I've read everything that Maslow didn't publish."

Robert:

[inaudible 00:32:26].

Dave:

And his final phase was transcendence. That's something that's necessary for humans. And here you are getting to the same place with The Law of The Sublime, very similar territory there. Do you think that's a necessary part of being a human? Is that part of our hierarchy of needs?

Dave:

And here you are getting to the same place with The Law of The Sublime, very similar territory there. Do you think that's a necessary part of being a human? Is that part of our hierarchy of needs?

Robert:

I think so. And I very much delve into it. I want to find out the origin. And my sense of it is the way I write about it, and of course, I could be wrong, is that it has roots that go back hundreds of thousands of years to the point where humans first became conscious of their world. Right?

Robert:

So other animals are obviously aware of space and space around their environment. We're the only animals that are conscious of time. Right? We're aware of the passage of time in a way, because we're aware of our own mortality.

Robert:

And whenever that moment happened, I don't know how many thousands of years ago, was a turning point in our evolution. And so we looked up in the sky and we began to imagine something like eternity, like endless space and endless time. And we were awestruck by it.

Robert:

And we felt very small in relationship to everything around us. And so we had to find a way to deal with our insignificance in some way. And that's in some sense, the origins of religion, although I am truncating things horrifically right now.

Robert:

But anyway, so embedded in us is the knowledge of our essential insignificance, right? In a sense of, yes, spatially, but also time-wise that our meager little 80 years of existence if we live that long, compared to 13 billion years of the existence of our universe as far as we know, the proportions are just impossible for us to even begin to measure, to gauge. It's beyond our comprehension.

Robert:

And so that sense of awe and insignificance at the same time is, to me, the essence of the sublime. And the idea that we want to somehow transcend the limits of our own life, the banality of our own life, that we only have this short time to live, that our childhood and our youth passes and that we're continually just taking one step closer to death is deeply, deeply embedded in human nature.

Robert:

And so where I take this a step further is I talk about the fault sublime. It's so embedded in our nature to want to transcend our circumstances that if you can't find your way to do that in some, I hate to use the word healthy, but I will go ahead and use that word, healthy way, you'll find it in other ways inevitably, because you can't avoid this need.

Robert:

You will take drugs, in a bad way, because there's take drugs in a good way. You will become an alcoholic. You will become addicted to online porn. You will join some political cause where you'll be able to vent all your spleen and anger and hatred about people without ever having to look at yourself.

Robert:

You will find your way to transcend yourself in a false way, like through the group in a fascist way or whatever. So you can't avoid this dynamic, this desire for transcendence. It will find you in some way.

Dave:

So well said. Are you feeling hopeful for the state of the world right now?

Robert:

I wish I was. I wish I was feeling hopeful. I remember 20 years ago, somewhere like that, I had a dream, and I mean literally a dream, not in a Martin Luther King [inaudible 00:36:43]. So I had a dream in which it was the year 2070-something. And I can remember [inaudible 00:36:48].

Robert:

And I was walking as if I were still at my age at that time, in this world that was 2077 or something. And people were smiling and happy. And I had this thought in my dream, "Wow. We humans have finally figured it out. We've gotten our act together. The future isn't bad."

Robert:

And it was a wonderful dream and it made me happy for several months. Maybe in some way I was anticipating what was going on. But it's hard to feel that way. The dream is faded in a sense.

Robert:

It's mostly how insanely irrational we are. It's hard to explain in words, but whenever I read about North Korea and what a miserable, insanely miserable life people live there, how controlled it is, how they have no food to eat, how the levels of pollution are insane...

Robert:

We've got problems, but I'm talking about this particular country. I'm going, "How did we humans ever come to create something like that in which 98% of the population is living the most miserable life?" And they're maybe not even completely aware of their own misery. What is in us that creates these kind of hells that periodically pop up in history like mushrooms? What are we doing?

Robert:

And so if we can get our act together about global warming and certain other issues that are really pressing in on us, maybe through science, we'll solve a lot of these problems. There's an aspect of science that I completely adore, which is the ability to look at things realistically and solve problems. If that aspect of science, as opposed to the blind part of science, takes over.

Robert:

So when I had that dream, I was 70% hopeful. Now it's flipping more towards 40% hopeful. I don't know. Maybe you can help me. I don't know, Dave.

Dave:

The meter has changed for you. It's moved a little bit. I am still hopeful. I'm a futurist. And we're at a fork in the road for sure. But there's a reason it's called hacking.

Dave:

Because you go back, oh, geez, 25 years ago, hackers got pissed that we couldn't tell what Microsoft was doing, on our own computers, much less in the cloud.

Dave:

So they said, "Well, we'll just run our own operating system." And today, you and I, most of what we're doing is running on Linux or a variant of that.

Robert:

Right.

Dave:

I am a computer hacker by training. So there's no reason that we cannot assert knowledge and control over our own biology. And when we have that, we have the right and ability to pursue enlightenment and transcendence and things like that.

Dave:

What has me most concerned right now is that there are a bunch of people who have had their prefrontal cortex turned off by fear, which routes thoughts through the amygdala. And they're saying, "Oh, I will gladly trade my biological autonomy and freedom to evolve for the perception of safety."

Dave:

These are the same people who are willing to trade all privacy for a free email account. And that might not have been a good trade-off, guys. Do you see it now, 15, 20 years later?

Dave:

So either people will stand there and say, "I'm sorry, this is my body. You don't get to tell me what to eat. You don't get to tell me when to sleep. You don't get to tell me things that you might think are good for me that my automated systems don't feel are good."

Dave:

What I believe is that humanity is one organism and that each of us plays a role just like each cell in your body plays a role. Each cell is its own organism. You take it out, put it in a Petri dish and feed it, it'll live. But it's stressed because it doesn't have its community.

Dave:

So I'm hopeful that right now, enough people will just say, "You know what? I've got to be free to try different foods and whatever." Because if I did what everyone told me to do in the '70s, I'd be obese and have diabetes like most people do now. Gee, that's so weird. And some of us don't. Right?

Dave:

And so I don't want conformity and I don't want everyone to be the same because we're not meat robots. And as long as everyone or at least enough people realize that they're not meat robots, I think there's a great chance for a new golden age.

Dave:

And there's also a great chance for, "Yes, I for one welcome our new AI overlords," which may very well happen. But if it does, it'll happen with a great deal of violence in the world that I really hope doesn't come to pass. I'm with you. I'm maybe at 50/50, but that's right.

Robert:

Oh, all right. Well, maybe you raised me up towards 50. One thing that happens... Because I meditate every morning. I've been doing it now for 11 years and I highly recommend it to everyone.

Robert:

But one process that you go through when you're meditating is you become very aware of certain things going on in your brain. You become more and more self-aware. What I become aware of is how deeply programmed I am.

Robert:

Certain thoughts pop up and I go, "Where is that coming from? That's not really coming from me. That's coming from the culture." Things about fear, things about anxiety.

Robert:

And so it's eye-opening to realize that we are these creatures that are deeply, deeply programmed by the culture that we're living in. And it's very hard to get out of it. It's very hard to be aware of it.

Dave:

One of the things I'm teaching my kids is to look at anything, whether they agree with it or not. What are the techniques of manipulation that were used in that to make you think something? How is it trying to program you?

Robert:

Right.

Dave:

And to do the same with their teachers. And the teachers must hate me. But what is the school trying to tell you that they aren't telling you they're trying to tell you?

Robert:

Right.

Dave:

Unfortunately, it creates a great sense of outrage in teenagers when they see, "Oh my God, they're trying to do that to me." I'm like, "Yep. Welcome to the world." How do you deal with that sense of outrage? Like, "You dumbass. Did you really just say that on a national news network and expect anyone to believe it?"

Dave:

So there's that outrage. And then, "Oh my God, they believed it!" The other outrage. How do you deal with that in your meditation?

Robert:

So I've got to figure out what's productive outrage and what's not productive outrage. There are things that you cannot control. It's just part of human stupidity.

Robert:

I think there was some scientist who had a great quote. He goes, "I now believe in eternity or infinity because I've witnessed the infinity of human stupidity." Right? I'm doing a terrible job [inaudible 00:43:30] but that's the gist of it.

Dave:

I love that.

Robert:

And you can't change that. Right? That's just built into humans, for whatever reason. My third book was initially going to be about the history of human stupidity. Instead, I wrote about warfare. So it's still a book that I want to go back to at some point.

Robert:

So you can't really control that. You have to suffer fools gladly as it says in the Bible sometimes. You do need to be outraged. When I was a teenager, I had a lot of anger because there was this incredible split. And I'm older than you, Dave. So I'm growing up in the '60s and '70s. Those are my formative years.

Robert:

And I'm seeing my parents' generation in the world that I'm living in and there's this insane disconnect going on between the two realms. Much like people now, young people now are experiencing, Generation Z and millennials with the boomers. Like, "Your world isn't my world, and what's going on here?"

Robert:

And I was really angry and outraged continually, much more than I am now when I look back on my old journals, at the world. And I think being angry as a teenager is a good thing, I think. I wish there were more angry teenagers. Right?

Dave:

Yes.

Robert:

We don't do things unless we're motivated, unless we're emotionally invested in it. Right? So if people are half-assedly saying, "Yeah, there's some problems in the world. Maybe we should work on it. Yeah, there's a party going on next door. I'm going to go to the party," kind of thing.

Robert:

You have to have enough emotional engagement in the issue to actually want to change it. So I'm all in favor of your teenagers seeing through these games. I think that's fantastic. I'd like to hear some examples of that like, "Here's how advertisers, here's how Facebook is manipulating you." And they go, "You're right." I think that's a great thing and I'm all in favor of it.

Dave:

Wow. The idea that we need more teenage anger, it's about time that someone said that, and I appreciate that you just did. I did a post recently and I followed through on it. I said, "Guys..."

Dave:

I was going to wait till my kids were 16, but there's three movies that kids need to see right now, even if they're 12/ and yeah, it's uncomfortable to watch them with a 12-year-old, but I did. One is Braveheart. This is what one angry person can do when you wrong them the wrong way.

Robert:

Exactly. Exactly.

Dave:

And I wish everyone in every government putting illegal things in place right now, all of them need to watch that movie and know the power of a pitchfork.

Robert:

That's a great idea. I never thought of it that way.

Dave:

So yeah, kids need to see that [inaudible 00:46:17] one person, what they did do and what they still can do. And this is why we treat others with respect.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

The next one was Gattaca.

Robert:

I've not seen Gattaca. I'm sorry.

Dave:

Oh, it's probably 15-20 years old. It's a book about a world where everyone's DNA is swept all the time. And if your parents manipulated your DNA, you were guaranteed to be an astronaut and to do all these things.

Robert:

Oh, wow.

Dave:

And if you were a natural-born, you were second class. So it's very much around medical tyranny and how one person basically cheats the entire system and wins.

Robert:

Wow. I'm going to rent that tonight. [crosstalk 00:46:56]

Dave:

It's a fantastic thing about just even in the face of overwhelming surveillance, someone does it. And the final one, V for Vendetta. Right?

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

And again, one man. And some of these women, I suppose. In each of these, it is a man. Men tend to do war more than women. Sorry, women. That's just how it is. Women tend to stop war more than men. Thank you for doing that. I appreciate it.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

So those are there for my kids to see, specifically to create anger instead of fear.

Robert:

Right.

Dave:

And the problem is you might not be popular if you're that angry kid. But the other thing, and I want your advice, not just for my kids but for the world. You can be angry and... Okay, I'm going to piss off everybody right now. Greta [Grundelberg 00:47:40], I forget her name, the one who complains a lot and skips school to change the world.

Robert:

Right.

Dave:

You guys know who I'm talking about?

Robert:

Yes. I know who you're talking about. [Thunderberg 00:47:47] or something like that.

Dave:

Yeah. I think she's Swedish, which is funny because my wife is Swedish. People on The Upgrade Collective Live audience are going, "I can't believe you just said that."

Dave:

Here's the deal, be like the guy who's the same age as her who said, "I'm going to figure out a flotation system to pull plastic out of the ocean." And he did something. But standing up and saying, "Something should be done." Dude, fuck you. Okay. I'm tired of that. You go do it. Right?

Robert:

Right. Right. Right.

Dave:

I am doing everything I can do [inaudible 00:48:20]. How do we teach people to go do stuff instead of complain about stuff? You know so much. You're the master. Tell me, Robert.

Robert:

It brings tears to my eyes to think about that because so much of what I wrote about, particularly in my book on strategy and warfare, is that if you really are interested in change, you have to become strategic. Right? You enter the realm of strategy.

Robert:

So we humans have millions of ideas. Every single human being ever born has some idea. But to make that idea reality is a bridge that you have to cross, and that bridge is strategy. You have to slowly cross it to figure out how can I get to that point of changing the world?

Robert:

What you're really interested in is not venting your emotions, but actually creating the change that you want. That's the difference between bullshitters and people who just want to vent. Right?

Robert:

And now we have a world and social media where it's so easy to show your moral outrage. It's so easy to say, "I'm taking an ecological vacation in the Caribbean." Is it really that ecological? I doubt that.

Robert:

So you're invested in the appearance of virtue, of virtue-signaling [inaudible 00:49:35] we now call it, as opposed to the reality. If I were to contribute like Jeff Bezos or someone, so many billions of dollars to the environment, why put my name out there? That just shows that I wanted everyone to recognize. I just want attention. Do things quietly and get things done.

Robert:

I read an article recently about the future of fusion as a new form of energy. I'm going to mess up the science of it. I go, "Wow." Here was science I remember them talking about it 30 years ago. Right? And I don't know if you believe in it, but it could be an incredible game-changer if it does happen.

Robert:

It's the ability to create massive amounts of energy from something very small and easy, and it's not going to have a lot of waste with it. People 30, 40 years ago were talking about it and everyone thought they were quacks, this will never happen. But in the meantime, lots of people invested money in it.

Robert:

And they've created these million-dollar facilities in England and here in the United States, and they're going to eventually crack it. Well, that's brilliant in my mind. That is going to change the history of humanity if it actually gets done, more than anybody ranting at the UN. You're not a believer in it?

Dave:

No, I'm laughing at the "more than everyone ranting at the UN." That complaining something should be done. Meanwhile, there's someone in a lab somewhere that's like, "I just did it."

Dave:

Unfortunately, I was laughing earlier in our conversation, you talked about something along the lines of rational science or capital S... Religious science versus real science. The science of inquiry and discovery versus the science of how many people quoted me.

Dave:

Right now, when people put medical science papers with real science and statistical values and real stuff from institutions, if you post those onto LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, pretty much anywhere but Telegram... By the way, guys, Asprey Official is my Telegram handle. Anywhere but Telegram, they get flagged and deleted.

Dave:

I've had videos with a million views deleted with no notification by Instagram. And you're like, "Whoa, those were real things. There was nothing wrong with them."

Dave:

So I'm actually of the opinion, not only that the things you're talking about with cold fusion and other alternative energy things, not only will they happen, they have happened and you didn't hear about them through that same kind of network.

Robert:

Right. Right. Very true.

Dave:

And now do you think I'm crazy?

Robert:

No, not at all. Not at all. We're not aware of how much our information is filtered through other sources. Why do they call it media? It's because they're mediating something for you. You're not experiencing it directly.

Robert:

The opposite of media is immediate where you're immediately in touch with the facts. You're engaging with it one-on-one. They're mediating all the information for you that's logged into the name.

Dave:

It is something I've never thought about. Yeah. Mediation. They're sitting between you and reality is what's going on there.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

I am now becoming way more conscious, in part from reading your books but just more conscious of what lens do I use to look at reality. And what I'm finding is that there is...

Dave:

Normally, with a Venn diagram, you're looking for overlap, right? And you would see an overlap between even Fox and CNN. There's some sort of reality basis, but it is so different when I look at the mainstream social media and I look at what I see from credible sources elsewhere.

Dave:

The Venn diagrams don't even touch anymore. It's like a schism like schizophrenia for a society. In any of your historical meanderings, I know you like Japan, has that happened before?

Robert:

Exactly what? Just give me a better feel for it.

Dave:

Well, the schism where normally there's enough of a common ground that you can take two sides in a war or two political parties. You can say, "Well, at least we agree on this. And this is a factual thing, so let's start there."

Dave:

But when I look at the story that I hear on any of the eight media-owned companies in the U.S., it is all the same. And then I go to a bunch of other sites that are now essentially banned from being mentioned there, there isn't any overlap.

Dave:

And then I say, "Okay. Well, are these a bunch of bullshitters?" But they're not. These are people with medical degrees and lots of letters after their name and careers for decades saying, "I'm seeing this." But when I look, I can't find a common ground at all between them. Right? Has that happened in the past where the common ground was [crosstalk 00:54:28]?

Robert:

I'm not sure if I'm getting it quite right. The first thing that came to my mind was the Soviet Union. So I'm very interested in Joseph Stalin. Don't ask me why. It's something about me. I devour books about him.

Robert:

And that period when he was accumulating power is fascinating in the most evil sense of the word. But you enter a period where there is such an insane disconnect from reality, where everything has to be filtered through the god which is the Communist Party, and the god that is Joseph Stalin. And that is the only reality people can absorb.

Robert:

And even scientists now have to take their theories and bend them so that they fit into Stalin's narrative. So the reality that is going on in the Soviet Union where millions of people are starving because of a five-year program, a five-year plan. Literally 30 million people died of starvation. One of the great ignored crimes in history. Right?

Robert:

People were living in utter misery in the '30s. He's killing all of the generals. And meanwhile, the Nazis are invading. Half the reason that the war went so badly initially was because [inaudible 00:55:46]. And yet nobody in that entire country is aware of the reality that's going on.

Robert:

Kind of like your V for Vendetta or the Braveheart, a handful of people are aware of it. And they're deeply disturbed. And they're either put in Gulags or they emigrate or they come up with a strategy for disguising themselves. And it's fascinating to read about such people.

Robert:

And I've talked a little bit about North Korea a little bit. You've got this reality and people are in a whole other way. So the two diagrams are so apart, it's appalling. I don't know. And then maybe I think of the French Revolution where you've got the aristocracies living in this one world, it's completely divorced from reality.

Robert:

And they're moving towards disaster and they're not even aware of it. And then it hits them. And then the king is beheaded. One of the most dramatic moments in the history of mankind, I'm afraid to say. Anyway, those are the two things that come to my mind.

Dave:

Yeah. The French Revolution comes to my mind there as well with the "Let them eat cake." Just not knowing.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

And a similar thing here. As we're recording this, yesterday, Elon Musk made \$36 billion in just one day. And that's more than most people make in a month.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

Okay.

Robert:

I know.

Dave:

Are we reaching those levels? I don't know. I would really rather not the world go through that. But there just becomes a point where you have that much money like, "Hey, everybody. I'm doing something really good and expensive on your behalf." And not the charitable thing like Bill Gates where it feeds back into your own pockets.

Robert:

Right. Right. Right.

Dave:

It's an anti-monopoly strategy from Rockefeller. But it's just more like, "Hey, I have so much here. I'm going to do something that really makes a difference for the world." Because you have the power to do what we talked about earlier. Don't just get pissed. Right? Use the anger as a spark to do something that works instead of to complain louder.

Dave:

So I feel like if I was in that class, and I'm not... Some people think I'm some billionaire or whatever. I'm doing pretty well, thank you, but I'm nowhere near there. But if I ever get there, I can tell you, some very good things are going to happen in the world because what do you do with \$100 billion?

Robert:

It's insane. I completely agree with you. I sometimes look at that here in Hollywood and Los Angeles and I see, "\$400 million was spent on some Marvel movie." And I go, "Okay, you've entertained people around the world. I guess that's good. I don't know. But could you imagine what you could do just here in Los Angeles with that \$400 million? What we could do about the insane homeless situation going on here?"

Dave:

I was thinking with \$400 million, the government could probably fund another set of regulations about the height of speed bumps in California [inaudible 00:58:49].

Robert:

Yeah. You're not a fan of speed bumps I can tell.

Dave:

The amount of crazies that I've dealt with as an entrepreneur in California has been absurd.

Robert:

Okay. Yeah.

Dave:

I'm with you there. You take \$400 million and you could fix school lunch for every child for an entire year, which would change the trajectory of their entire lives just at that age. You get them when they're six or seven and you're like, "Hey, look, your brain's forming. Why don't we give it some good fat?"

Robert:

Exactly.

Dave:

Those sorts of things are just out there. And you're in a position in your life where you've lived long enough to see the patterns. And you study them more than most people alive, which is really cool.

Dave:

The other people say who have achieved great financial success, maybe some of them were lucky, my experience, and I know a great number of those people, they've actually worked their asses off. Right? They've sacrificed huge amounts maybe of personal development in order to focus on working 16 hours a day. I know that was the story of me in my 20s. Right?

Dave:

So instead of evolving, so that now they have the power to do good, but they haven't accumulated the wisdom to do good. In maybe 48 Laws of Power, Laws of Human Nature, what is the pipeline to help people who are in a position to change the world right now? What is the pipeline to tap into their reality and help them see what to do that's useful? I know it's a hard question.

Robert:

It is hard. You mean in the books that I've written?

Dave:

In order to write your books, you've accumulated a huge amount of knowledge that isn't in the books that was in your creation process, and you've got what's in the books. And you've already just distilled all of them into your Daily Laws book.

Dave:

So your brain has got to be primed of any human alive to say, "Oh." If you were to talk to someone with an absurd amount of resources who could do something to make the world better, how would you turn the light bulb on for them so that they go, "Oh. Yeah, of course, I should do that."

Robert:

Boy, that's a thorny question. If I were to go to Elon Musk and to get him to try and donate \$80 billion to just ending global warming or something like that?

Dave:

Oh, he did. So Elon has-

Robert:

Oh, that's right. Recently.

Dave:

Yeah. I know because the first \$50,000 for that prize and the speech that got it to be in XPRIZE, that was my \$50,000.

Robert:

Oh, really?

Dave:

He funded it three years later. Yeah.

Robert:

Oh, wow.

Dave:

But the first step of a prize is raising half a million dollars and convincing a room full of successful people to donate enough money to fund the creation of the prize. But yeah, that first donation was mine, for the Carbon Capture XPRIZE. Yeah.

Robert:

[inaudible 01:01:34] Congratulations.

Dave:

You're welcome.

Robert:

Good job.

Dave:

So, Elon [inaudible 01:01:37] example because he put his money where his mouth is. And thank you, Peter Diamandis, if you ever hear this.

Robert:

Okay. I'm sorry.

Dave:

So I'm going to give him a pass. He could do more than a hundred million. But all right. Of all the multi-billionaires to pick on, I think there's a couple more.

Robert:

Others.

Dave:

Well, just anyone who's phenomenally, absurdly wealthy looking at hundreds of billions of dollars. Most of them don't have that mindset because they haven't done the work you've done to understand their minds and their brains, because you can't do that and build a multi-billion dollar empire. I know because I've built \$100+ million companies.

Dave:

It's very hard to carve out time and have the self-awareness and the reflection. You go for a walk in the forest with a board of directors breathing down your neck. So how do we switch those guys into "you better do something now" mode?

Robert:

Well, it's hard because as you know, I've devoted several of my books to the problems of persuasion and influence. And human beings have natural resistance and defensiveness. So if you come to them in a whiny, complaining, you're a bad person. Come on, get on with the program here and do something positive.

Robert:

Their reactions would be, "Okay. Sure. You're right." But then they're going to inwardly rebel against you. Right?

Dave:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robert:

So there's The 48 Laws of Power manipulative way to get them to sign off to the good things, which is to appeal to their grandiosity and to say, "Look, your name is going to be behind this incredible thing. This is going to be your legacy." Right?

Robert:

I'm not going to sit here and go... I'm not going to begin my pitch by, "You're a bad person. You need to change." Or make them feel guilty.

Dave:

Thank you.

Robert:

I'm going to begin, "You're a great person. You've accomplished amazing things. Now you're in your 40s, your 50s, you're not going to live forever. Can you imagine if your greatness that already exists was associated with this incredible project that ends up funding something? It changes the course of human history and civilization. Your name is going to be associated with it."

Robert:

Feed their ego a little bit. Don't worry about that. But then the non-manipulative, less 48 Laws of Power approach is doing the same thing, but not quite so manipulative, which is, you do have a legacy in life, right? You don't live forever. You want your name associated with something greater than your short little life, right?

Robert:

And the feeling that you're 70 years old and you've only thought about yourself and your family and your money and your own things, that could be kind of depressing. But think in a higher sense, if you can appeal to someone's more spiritual side, if that exists, and say, "This is your chance to actually contribute something really important and meaningful. This will be your legacy. This is how people will remember you." Right?

Robert:

So it comes down to the same thing, but depending on people's own proclivities. So when you approach people to fund your idea, whatever that may be, you have to tailor your pitch to who they are. It's not a cookie-cutter thing.

Robert:

Some people you have to feed their ego a little bit. Other people, if you feed their ego, they get their backs up, they're going, "You're feeding my ego, man. I'm not an egomaniac. I'm actually more a saintly person."

Robert:

So you have to be very attuned to the mindset of the people that you're trying to persuade. I don't know if I'm answering your question or not.

Dave:

I think you just gave a masterclass in how to approach a successful person to get something done, so thank you.

Robert:

Yeah. Okay.

Dave:

I've lost track of the number of times I've seen people say, "You have more than I do, therefore, judgy, judgy, judgy." Right? And at that point, I'm like, "Look, ban and delete. I don't need this. It doesn't help me. It doesn't help you. It is classical envy." Right?

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

And the fact is there are many people who are much better off than I am, and I am much better off than most people right now, and I've worked my ass off for it. And I'm doing good in the world and I'm going to keep doing that.

Dave:

And I feel really good about that. And I'm employing hundreds of people across the things I built and I feel good about that, and I'm not going to apologize for it. But I am going to do good.

Robert:

You shouldn't have to apologize for that.

Dave:

I'm not going to. When people approach me that way, I'm entitled because it's like, "No." But if you approach me and say, "Hey, I would love some help. I'm working on doing this because it matters." And I think whether it's financial, or usually, it's advice. I'm not that heavy of an investor right now, until I sell one of my companies.

Dave:

But it's enough to go, "Yes." And I've helped a lot of small entrepreneurs for that reason. But your little monologue there about, "Hey, do it because it matters." And with a little bit of "do it because it matters" to your ego, frankly, because that's how salespeople work, that's how you do it.

Dave:

But to come and say, "I'm entitled. You have to give it to me." You're probably not going to get an ear. You just won't. So your wisdom, thank you for sharing it. That's how we get guys like Elon to say, "Yes, I'll put \$100 million into capturing carbon." I think that was the biggest XPRIZE to date. Right?

Dave:

And we can do this. We have the science. We just have to have the motivation and the freedom to be inquisitive and to see both sides of an argument. Anytime someone tries to delete one side of an argument from your reality, they're probably not working in your best interests.

Robert:

Definitely.

Dave:

Any thoughts on what to do about censorship in your studies of history and human behavior?

Robert:

Well, the moments in history that we applaud the most, that we look at as golden ages, I could name a few. I would think of 5th century BC Athens, the first true... There were other forms of democracy before that, but a very, very alive form of democracy.

Robert:

Or we look at Renaissance Italy in a very particular period. Or we look at early on in the United States when the country was first forming in the late 18th century. Or we look at the 1920s. These are periods in which, ironically enough, the communist Chinese were the opposite of that, called "Let a thousand flowers bloom."

Robert:

It's a period where all kinds of different divergent opinions are coming together. And nobody is censoring it, nobody is mediating it. And there's no single form of authority imposing itself on the zeitgeist, on the mindset of people.

Robert:

And I know I wrote that in *The Laws of Human Nature*. And my editor came back, "Well, I don't think of 5th century BC in Athens as this open creative time." And I go, "I'm sorry to tell you, you're a very smart person, but this was a culture that was incredibly open to influences from India, from ancient Egypt. They were a seafaring culture that was open to all sorts of influences."

Robert:

I know they eventually put Socrates to death, so that was already starting to decay towards the end of the century.

Dave:

Yeah.

Robert:

But it was a period of incredible debate and openness. So these are our golden ages. This is what we look to as if we look back on our own child and we go, "This is the human ideal." It's where people are allowed to have divergent opinions. And it creates [inaudible 01:09:30] healthy environment.

Robert:

In nature, if you study biology and ecosystems, the most vibrant ecosystems are the ones where they have the most diversity of life. It creates the self-fulfilling prophecy where there's diversity, there's more diversity. There's a feedback system and it gets healthier and healthier.

Robert:

It's the same in culture. When we have diversity, when we have divergence, when we have different opinions, there is this healthy landscape. The same thing happens in the human mind. The human mind is a landscape.

Robert:

If you only get your source of information from one source like that and you're very closed, that landscape is like a desert. There's nothing growing. There's not even a cactus anywhere to be seen. But if you open your mind up to all sorts of ideas from all different sources, you're creating the Amazon forest in your own head, and it's incredibly vibrant and new ideas will come to you.

Robert:

So trying to mold people into a single way of looking at the world is to create the most sterile form of culture. And what is the opposite of these periods I just mentioned? Well, there'd be periods like Soviet Union or Communist China, or maybe even to some degree, 1950s in the United States under the McCarthy era.

Dave:

Yeah.

Robert:

Where people are so afraid and anxious and they all have to conform to the same opinions, culture becomes totally stifled. So that's my response to the censorship issue.

Dave:

Got it. So the people doing the censorship think that they're achieving something good with it, but what they're doing is not so good.

Robert:

Did I misinterpret your question somehow?

Dave:

No. I think you got it right.

Robert:

[crosstalk 01:11:17].

Dave:

What do you do about censorship? It's a broad question. But because you're not just a student of history, there are lots of people who are historians, but you're looking at this through a lens of human behavior. Right? Which is not how everyone looks at history, at least not in my experience.

Dave:

So I think your take on when have we seen this before and what's happened every time, that's illuminating for either a person or an entity like a company or a government, which is a group of people.

Dave:

If they're looking to turn on censorship... And let's face it, guys, there is a ton of censorship happening right now, whether we want to call it whatever we want to call it. It is a fact.

Dave:

And the people doing that, they believe it's in their interests or maybe everyone's interests. But all of history and all the things that you've seen are saying it didn't turn out that well for any of those people doing it. And I don't think it's going to turn out well this time, even if we build some automated censorship enforcement engines, which is what's...

Robert:

What's happening now is you have persuasion and you have dissuasion. And we now live in an era of dissuasion where most people are censoring, self-censoring themselves.

Robert:

So you're massively dissuaded from saying something that's going to go against the social codes and the conventions, the woke, whatever word you want to put on it. So you're doing the self-censoring. To me, that's a lot more pernicious in some ways because... Yeah, anyway.

Dave:

I have learned to say it without saying it pretty well on Instagram. At least half my posts don't get flagged with a warning that's irrelevant, even though I'm talking about it and I'm having [inaudible 01:12:58]. It's subversive. [inaudible 01:13:01].

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

And I would encourage everyone listening, instead of self-censoring, which is the first thing that's coming to mind if you're a normal human. You can say, instead of not saying it, I'm going to play a game of saying it without saying it. And, man, that drives people nuts.

Robert:

I'm all for that. I love that. I love that.

Dave:

By the way, [inaudible 01:13:21]-

Robert:

What?

Dave:

Sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off there.

Robert:

No, no, no, no. Go ahead.

Dave:

Okay. Have you seen? In my restaurants, we're accepting the new vitamin D passport. If your vitamin D levels are above 60 and you have proof of that, then we'll gladly give you a cup of coffee for free with whatever you purchase.

Robert:

I got to go check my vitamin D levels. They're probably pretty high because I take it every day, but I don't know.

Dave:

I suspect as much.

Robert:

And I live in LA with the sun shining a lot.

Dave:

You should be all right, but you still need to supplement in LA.

Robert:

I do. I do.

Dave:

It's funny because that's one of those things you can't talk about anymore, even though there's hundreds of studies... And I can't say what the studies are about right here because then we'd be facing censorship as well. But you can talk about it, but only in the absence of talking about any other [inaudible 01:14:08].

Robert:

Really? We can't even talk about the benefits of vitamin D? We've got to that point now?

Dave:

You can talk about it, however, you can't talk about the benefits of it in context to anything that might be catching.

Robert:

You mean like COVID?

Dave:

Oh, no. I'm sorry, that got beeped out. [inaudible 01:14:25] make sure we beep over what you said there. But literally like that. So the transcript of this, if it says that in it, that'll be like, "Oh, you said vitamin D and beep."

Dave:

Then the little engines pick it up. And then they don't fully suppress it. What they do is they take the reach down to 10% of what it was before. And the search engines, at least if you're on Google, won't find it.

Robert:

I'm sorry. Okay. I'll censor myself from now on. I'm sorry.

Dave:

Don't even worry. Literally, we'll put a beep over it. It'll be hilarious.

Robert:

Okay.

Dave:

But this is the kind of self-censorship that you and me and everyone is dealing with right now. But we just said it without saying it in a way that makes it even worse. So that's part of my strategy. That may be the wrong 48 Laws of Power strategy, but I feel like it was influenced by reading your books. So thank you.

Robert:

No, no, it's the totally right 48 Laws of Power strategy. I'm all in favor of that. I even discussed that strategy in particular with one person in the Middle Ages who couldn't say heretical things and found a way to write a book, which he appears to condemn heretical things.

Robert:

But it's written in such a way that the heretical ideas are so much more exciting. So he was able to subvert the church in that very interesting way. And I love it. I love it.

Dave:

Kind of like, "Let's go, Brandon." Do you know about that?

Robert:

No. You got me there. Sorry.

Dave:

Oh. [crosstalk 01:15:44].

Robert:

I'm sorry. I hate it when I have to admit my social ignorance.

Dave:

It's a modern one. So a crowd was shouting F-U to the name of a certain presidential person. And the announcer didn't want to say what they were saying because apparently the crowd is saying, "Let's go,

Brandon." Even though the crowd was basically saying F-U to a president and expressing their discontent. But we don't show crowds expressing discontent on large media anymore.

Dave:

So now on social media, all over the place, people are saying, "Let's go, Brandon."

Robert:

Oh, wow.

Dave:

Which is pretty much saying, "I'm tired of censorship. I'm tired of all sorts of things that they don't like." And I'm apolitical. I think both parties are completely misguided. They're interested in power. They're not interested in helping you and me.

Dave:

So I don't care. Vote for either one, you're effed either way. We have to fix it ourselves. But what I was just thinking there was, "Let's go, Brandon" is exactly what you're saying. "No, no, I wasn't talking about that. I was talking about this." But everyone knows. Maybe that's a bad example.

Robert:

I see. I see. No, that's great. That's a good example. Thank you for educating me here. I've learned something.

Dave:

Yeah. If anyone says, "Let's go, Brandon," now you know.

Robert:

Okay. Now I know.

Dave:

I am fighting the urge to become politicized. Right? Because of what I just said. I know neither party, there's more than two parties in case people have forgotten, neither one has my back.

Dave:

What is your advice for people to stay grounded, centered, and rational when they're getting pulled to be in one direction versus another direction for political parties, for nationalism, for religion, whatever? Our whole desire to be part of a group, even if it works against us.

Robert:

Well, the key is awareness. I'm sounding like a broken record. But if you can be aware of how easily you are sucked into these things. So the first part of the equation is, don't think that you, smart Dave Asprey or smart Robert Greene is immune to these kinds of pushes and pulls that are out there in the media or in politics because you're not.

Robert:

You're a human being. You're just as easily duped, you just as easily have your emotions played on. So the first thing is, don't ever think that you are an exception, that you are immune, that you are so enlightened that you see through everything because you're deceiving yourself.

Robert:

And that form of self-deception is fatal. Right? It's your blind spot. So no matter who you are, no matter where you got your college degree from, no matter how much money you make, you are susceptible to manipulations, to con games, to things that are playing on your emotions. All right.

Robert:

So start from that equation and then develop the muscle to be able to analyze it instead of to be able to get emotionally pulled in to this. So you step back. I often do this when I watch the news on television, which I rarely ever do anymore.

Robert:

What is it that they're playing on? What is the game they're playing? How are they making money off of my outreach? How are they filtering the information? How are they editing it and tailoring it?

Robert:

So you want to develop analytical skills primarily. Right? So you want to be able to learn how to see through the manipulations. So one thing I talk about in The Laws of Human Nature is I talk about biases in the human brain. And I mentioned one before, the confirmation bias, which is very powerful.

Robert:

Another one that I talk about is the conviction bias. And this is a very, very important idea, I think. Where we think that somebody who expresses themselves with so much conviction, with so much righteousness, with so much sense of being on the right side of history, we can't help but get caught up in that because we think that if they're so emotional and they're so full of conviction, it must be true.

Robert:

They must be feeling that, and it must come from someplace real. They wouldn't be deceiving us with that. How can they be deceiving when they appear to be so excited and emotional? Right?

Robert:

So when we see people on television, I know I do this, and I see people with their angry face, so certain of the truth. Because quite frankly, as someone who reads a lot of books, I'm never really certain that I know something. I'm continually thinking of my ignorance, and it's pretty wide my ignorance. The more I know, the less I actually know.

Robert:

So when I see somebody on television or some academic who's so 100% sure of the truth, that's where my bullshit little antenna starts rising up, rising up. They start analyzing it and figuring out where the bullshit is coming from. Why?

Robert:

The conviction thing is actually a form of self-deception. So if you believe in something but you're not quite sure of it, you're going to try and go the extra mile to convince yourself that it's true. And then you're going to be yelling at people, etc., in that dictator-like way to convince yourself as well that you think that it's true. Right?

Dave:

Wow.

Robert:

So you're going through a form of self-deception. And that allows you to appear so animated and excited, etc. So when you see people who display that behavior pattern of they are so convinced of the truth, that's when you know that there's some kind of game going on, some kind of manipulation. These are just a few ideas that I would throw out.

Dave:

That overly convinced person, it's so true when there's no room for questioning. And that's why that very word misinformation... It's possibly likely wrong information, but there's a little bit of smarminess in there. That's kind of a red flag for me, where there can be no discussion there because [inaudible 01:21:47].

Dave:

But what you've done in this whole interview, Robert, and I want to thank you for this, you've convinced me that I'm ignorant, I'm easily duped, I'm susceptible to crowds, and I'm a master of self-deception just like you. So thank you.

Robert:

I forgot that one. You remind me of one thing I didn't add in the last thing, which because I'm getting older, my brain isn't functioning as well, but is the idea that your ideas come from conformity. We never like to think that.

Robert:

We like to think, "I thought of that myself. I'm an independent. I'm a maverick. I'm not conforming. I don't get my ideas because somebody else said it." That's another blind spot.

Dave:

It is.

Robert:

95% of your ideas do come from the culture, come from the atmosphere, from what other people are thinking because humans are primed, we're viral creatures, we get caught up in the ideas and the emotions of other people. You're never as independent a thinker as you imagine, including myself.

Dave:

That is so true. Even the myth of the lone inventor. A friend of mine who runs the IP stuff at Stanford, Mark, says [inaudible 01:22:58] wrote a paper saying, "Here's all the times in the world there's almost always three inventors in three garages at the same time doing the same thing." We don't know why, but the world is complex like that.

Robert:

Yeah.

Dave:

Robert, it's always so much fun to be able to ask you the deep questions. I really greatly appreciate the work you've done over your life. I cannot wait to read *The Law of The Sublime* that's coming out. And I am very happy to be able to spend a year going through *The Daily Laws* that you just published, so thank you.

Robert:

Thank you. Thank you very much, Dave. I always enjoy our conversations. They're the best.

Dave:

Guys, if you want to learn more about Robert Greene, if you've lived under a rock and you don't know who he is, even though 50 Cent knows who he is, you should go to robertgreeneofficial.com and that'll take you to all of his YouTubes, all of his different books, all of his cool stuff.

Dave:

I'll just tell you, if you've never taken the time to read or listen to any of his books, you are missing out. He's one of the living masters of understanding how humans work. And it's always fun to interview him. In fact, Robert, you're always welcome anytime, you have a standing invitation to come on the show.

Robert:

Thank you, Dave.

Dave:

Anytime you have something you want to blast out there, I'm here for you, brother. Thank you.

Robert:

All right. Thank you, Dave. I'll take that offer up. Thank you.